Head Full of Doubt, Road Full of Promise

Landscaping Popular Music Journalism

And there was a kid with a head full of doubt /
So I’ll scream til I die and the last of those bad thoughts are finally out
— The Avett Brothers

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Abstract

Even though popular music is a very present commodity within our society, the profession of music journalism is greatly neglected within the academic field. It is, therefore, more than necessary to pay attention to the subject. This research aims to build a complete image of all that entails the vocation of a popular music journalist by mapping out what characteristics make a good journalist, explaining the music journalist’s place in journalism as a whole, and by discussing what changes the journalists (need to) go through right now. Using Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory, we identify music journalism’s place and find four professional roles, namely that of gatekeeper, promoter, consumer guide and culture intermediary. Furthermore, problematic aspects are identified, such as the tension with the music industry, music journalism as a pseudo-event and the relationship between professional and amateur journalists. After thoroughly historicizing and identifying music journalism’s transition from its beginnings to its current place within the digital age, twelve in-depth interviews with Dutch music journalists were conducted to shine light on different themes of music journalism. Moreover, using ethnographic research and content analysis, two case studies at the outlets of FaceCulture and 3voor12 were performed in order to see how these two media organizations struggle with, and benefit from, their respective models. Also, we argue that studies in music journalism – since it is a rigidly predefined area (of research) – could serve as an example of the wider sphere of journalism, as problems in music journalism – e.g. surviving in the digital age – can be applied to troubles in journalism as well. Finally, since this is such an understudied subject, this thesis aims to perform a study with an inclusive reach in order to lay groundwork for further studies in music journalism.

Keywords: music journalism, digital media, journalistic roles, internet, music industry, social media, future of journalism
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Liselotte Schüren

Last, this thesis could not have been written without the contributions of the music journalists we were able to interview. They all made room in their tight schedules, took time to sit down with us and patiently answered all of our questions. Their insights and opinions proved to be of vital importance for our research.
Do you hear that whistle wail?
I think the end is coming in.
Well, I'm a whole lot worse for wear,
But I'm determined to slip this skin
And I know you're dying for a good time
I'm dying to breath again

- The Gaslight Anthem
The Starting Line:
Introducing the Music Journalist

Wanna see my picture on the cover / Wanna buy five copies for my mother
Wanna see my smilin' face / On the cover the cover of the Rollin' Stone
- Dr. Hook and the Medicine Show

It almost certainly won’t get you laid. (...) It won’t make you rich. (...) So you’ll never be able to make a living off of it. Nobody will come up to you in the street and say, "Hey, I recognize you! You’re Jon Landau! Man, that last review was really far out!" A lot of people, in fact, will hate you and think you’re a pompous asshole just for expressing your opinions, and tell you so to your face.¹

This ‘romantic and uplifting’ notion of a music journalist was sketched in 1974 by late American rock critic Lester Bangs in the article “How to be a Rock Critic.”² Thousands of young music fanatics wondered the same thing back in the 1960s and 1970s while eagerly reading one of the many popular music magazines. Their ultimate dream was to become a music journalist – being able to write about cool bands, receive free records in the mail, get invitations to concerts and maybe even go backstage and meet the rock stars themselves.

But how glamorous and exciting exactly is the profession of popular music journalism? Becoming and being a (good) music journalist, was – and certainly is – not as easy as many youngsters figured. “Writing about music is like dancing about architecture,” a quote attributed to Frank Zappa, Elvis Costello and Laurie Anderson (among others), captures the ambiguity surrounding music journalism: although it ridicules the profession, it also indicates a sense of difficulty.³ A music journalist should be able to translate what he or she hears to words, a rather difficult task. Furthermore, according to Klein, music journalists should be “proficient writers, should have a breadth of knowledge, and should be able to make studied judgments regardless of personal preferences.”⁴ Others, such as Winton Dean, have argued that they also need to understand the technical and theoretical aspects of popular

⁴ Ibid., 5.
music in order to be a good journalist.\(^5\) This uncleanness about the exact definition of music journalism and the characteristics a music journalist should possess indicates the difficulty of the profession and its complex place in the field of journalism and, consequently, popular culture.

**I. A Short Historical Overview**

With the birth of Rock ‘n Roll and the transformation of the news industry in the (late) 1960s, the profession of popular music journalism was born.\(^6\) Those years also saw the arrival of early rock magazines like *Crawdaddy* and *Rolling Stone* in the United States and the Dutch *Muziekkrant OOR*.\(^7\) Furthermore, every newspaper employed at least a few music journalists. As a result, “hundreds of journalists found gainful employment in careers that they would have considered inconceivable when they were teenage rock fanatics.”\(^8\) Politically-loaded music boomed and identity politics formed a welcome subject to write about. Since magazines and newspapers were the only music outlets available, music journalists functioned as consumer guides and, consequently, determined what their readers should buy and listen to. Thus, magazines sought to “legitimate,” in the words of Steve Jones and Kevin Featherly, specific music and musicians – what Bourdieu coined “consecration.”\(^9\)

From the 1970s through much of the 1990s the music and news industry were both booming businesses. They seemed unbeatable. The introduction of the internet in the 1990s posed little threat at first glance – with dial-up connections and minor download capabilities – and it was not taken seriously by the two industries.\(^10\) However, at the start of the 21\(^{st}\) century, the internet made great progress and became the primary source of news, communication, and popular music as well. Consequently, the music industry and journalism as a whole entered hard times for several reasons; as music and news became free to consume, the critic was no longer needed by consumers and musicians, according to many. Whereas before, critics could set the normative margins of what should be bought and listened to – call it the gatekeeper position – software such as iTunes and Spotify lets consumers try their own music.

In addition, traditional print outlets were surpassed by online platforms such as MySpace and Bandcamp and online media such as Pitchfork and 3voor12 who present their

\(^8\) Don McLeese, “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 440.
\(^9\) Ibid., 440.
\(^10\) Ibid., 441.
content free of charge for the consumer. The latter two of these also work with a small number of professional journalists, and in the case of 3voor12, with a very large number of volunteers to cover music events all over in The Netherlands. Consequently, weekly music magazines turned into monthly issues and their reading rates dropped greatly. Cook gives a brilliant example of this tension between the established print media and the newcomers: “A decade ago, a review of a Merge [a record label] band in Rolling Stone was a coup; in 2004, no one even noticed when Rolling Stone played catch-up and reviewed [Arcade Fire’s] Funeral (giving it four stars) in December, three months after Pitchfork.”

The days in which music critics needed to encompass all the characteristics described above by Klein and when they had the power to legitimate music seem to be over, as the saying “everybody with a computer and an internet connection can be a journalist” also goes for music criticism according to many academics. Furthermore, the consumer guide role of the music journalist also seems to be fading away, since the new blogosphere is a haven of opinion and anyone can download albums for free. However, there is a downside to all of this. As journalist Ben Myers notes: “Simply expressing an opinion on your blog does not make you a journalist any more than cutting your arm with a blade makes you a surgeon.” So while some argue that music journalists are no longer needed, others state that professionals are desired to write balanced and valuable content to make up for all the speculative, unrefined information that is put online by amateurs. Nonetheless, it will be necessary for music journalists to change their work habits of, for instance, reviewing entire albums after consumers have already downloaded the album. As McLeese argues in his article “traditional media [and, therefore, music journalism] have two options: change or die.”

In this digital age, the relationship between music journalists and musicians changed as well. In the past, musicians and record labels relied very much on music journalists for reviews of their new album, since that is where the real money was. Now, the real money can be found in tours, and bands (only) release albums in order to start a tour and make money. Furthermore, before the internet, it was the record label that created the buzz around certain bands. However, in the era of social networking, “artists might create a bigger buzz for themselves on MySpace [or other forms of social media] than labels could create through the

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14 Ibid., 437.
15 Ibid., 435.
16 Ibid., 443.
As a result, the musician does not (necessarily) need the music journalist anymore to find an audience. The American indie band Vampire Weekend greatly illustrates this with their 2010 single “Cousins,” in which they actually ridicule the music journalist: through their lyrics, they emphasize that music journalists like to hear things in music that are not necessarily there, in order to prove their professionalism.

II. Our Research

After reading all these examples, it is clear that now is a good time to investigate the field of music journalism and the role of the music journalist. Times have changed greatly since the beginning of professional music journalism and its future is uncertain. This study was not only done because the subject is highly interesting in this day and age, but we furthermore researched this field because “popular music criticism itself has largely been neglected as a site for academic study,” as academic Steve Jones notes. While some research has been done on the professional roles of the music journalist, it mainly focused either on classical music or on traditional media outlets and not on both traditional and digital media. Moreover, up until now, no research focused on the future of the profession. Therefore, we argue that this research was much needed, and will lay some necessary groundwork for future studies. This study focuses on The Netherlands and paints a complete picture of the Dutch music journalism landscape. Through literature review, content analysis, ethnographic research and interviews we shed a light on one of the most neglected disciplines of journalism.

Our research focuses on the following: What role do music journalists (and does music journalism) perform within journalism and broader society? As both music and journalism industries transition, is there still a place for (traditional) music journalism and how must music journalism adapt to remain relevant to its public(s)? Thus, we want to find out what the current state of music journalism is in comparison with when the profession just started, taking into account the changes in both the music and news industries. Furthermore, through literature review and by conducting several interviews, we examine the future of the profession – what changes music journalists should make to secure their future or whether or not it is already a lost cause for example. But first and foremost, we have to explore what a music journalist exactly is. As previously stated, there is no exact definition of the profession available and opinions about the needed characteristics vary; it is also unclear where the music journalist stands in the greater field of journalism and popular culture.

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17 Ibid., 443.
We conduct the practical part of our research in two ways: first, through interviews with several music journalists from the most important Dutch media outlets. We decided to conduct interviews because we wanted to find out how these journalists feel about (among others) the current state and the future of their profession. For that reason, it is essential to hear opinions and gain knowledge by the journalists firsthand. Moreover, as Lindlof notes, “interviews are particularly well suited in helping the researcher understand a social actor’s own perspective.” The interviewees are all experts in the field of journalism and it was therefore vital to collect their standpoints in order to gain more knowledge about music journalism. The second part of the research consists of two case studies that examine how the issues raised by our interviewees play out in practice. The first case study, performed at 3voor12, uses interviews and content analysis to shed light on the far-going relationship between professional and amateur music journalists, also called participatory journalism. The second case study, on FaceCulture, employs ethnographic research to investigate the company’s function of a music press bureau.

III. This Thesis
In chapter 1, the role of the popular music journalist is theorized. Furthermore, in this chapter we explain how music journalism is different from ‘regular’ journalism, although some problems facing ‘regular’ journalism are no different in the sub-field of music journalism. Different values and characteristics that academics assign to music journalists are discussed and the different professional roles that music journalist can take on are explored. Lastly, the image of the popular music journalist in popular culture is reviewed. Chapter 2 then provides a historical overview of Dutch and American music journalism. The Dutch environment lays the groundwork for our interviews and study of Dutch music journalism while the American context puts our own media landscape in perspective. The US is crucial as this is where the roots of both popular music and music journalism lay. This chapter discusses the various stages in history that impacted on music journalism. Moving on to chapter 3, this chapter centres on changes that impacted on modern day music journalism, most notably the decline of the music industry in relation to the rise of the internet. After these three chapters, all groundwork is laid out for the empirical portion of this thesis.

In chapter 4 our methods are explained from the use of interviews – we will introduce our interviewees and the media outlets they work for – and the combination of content

analysis and ethnographic research for the case studies we have conducted. Chapter 5 and 6 present our findings and discussion. In these chapters, we will present the results of our interviews and connect them to our theoretical framework, discuss the subject, and its future as a whole. In chapter 7, we present the case studies conducted at 3voor12 and FaceCulture. These case studies relate to issues raised as highlighted in the interviews. Using content analysis and ethnography, we paint a picture of these both outlets, their advantages and shortcomings. Finally, in our conclusion will recapitulate the most important findings of this thesis, discuss the future of this journalistic field, and review its potential shortcomings. In the end, this research will hopefully contribute to the greater debate on the future of music journalism. But first, we theorize the music journalist.
CHAPTER 1

The Man at the Top:
Theorizing the Popular Music Journalist

Here comes a kid with a guitar in his hand / Dreamin' of his record in number one spot /
Everybody wants to be the man at the top.
-Bruce Springsteen

“You don’t get rich off of music journalism. Music is a subculture to which little attention is paid. Good music programs are hard to find and music documentaries are rarely made.”

These words, uttered by journalist Jean-Paul Heck, indicate the role of music and music journalism in both journalism and wider society. Music is fun listening to, but not a top priority like politics and economics. That makes the job of a popular music journalist – who sometimes has to fight for the priority of her pieces – very interesting to examine.

Who exactly are these people and what is it they do? This chapter will answer that question. First, we define the journalist, after which we narrow this down to popular music journalism and examine what sets this sub-profession of journalism apart. Second, with the help of French cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu, we determine the position of the music journalist, using field theory. Third, we will move on to describing the different professional roles that are assigned to music journalists by academics. Fourth, and finally, we construct the popular image of music journalists by taking a look at the myth surrounding the profession in popular culture.

The first aim of this thesis is to define the music journalist and its role within journalism and broader society. Only then, are we able to analyze the field in-depth and look toward the future. In this chapter we will start off with the most difficult question – what exactly is a journalist and, moreover, what characteristics define a music journalist? We will furthermore discuss different professional roles of music journalists. At any given time, academics and others have assigned several professional roles to the profession. We discuss these and at the end of our thesis – after the interviews and case studies are presented – examine if these roles are still applicable in this day and age or whether they need to be polished or even completely transformed. The changes in the field might also require new

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21 The gendered words him/her and he/she are used interchangeable in this thesis.
directions for music journalism, and we will explore what substance and shape these new roles might take. Last, we will study the position of the music journalist in relation to the internet and whether or not the journalists are still of value for the people. Through the review of literature of, among others, Mark Deuze and Jane B. Singer, and the theoretical frameworks of French cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu, we aim to find out what exactly defines this profession and where it stands in the digital age.

1.1. What is a Music Journalist?

The critic is, in all probability, a well-educated male in his 30s with about 10 years’ experience covering music. He has at least a bachelor’s degree with perhaps even some graduate work … his tastes do not change dramatically whether he works for a small daily in a rural area, a prestigious metropolitan newspaper or a slick national magazine.22

The second word of this quote is an interesting one, as the word “critic” is used instead of popular music journalist, the term we mainly used throughout the introduction and the first section of this chapter. The job of the critic – the quality assessment of music, but also the study, discussion, evaluation, and interpretation of music and its performance – is often named synonymously with that of a music journalist while of course there are some differences, because music journalism is much broader than only this. According to Dave Laing, “the principal texts or forms of music journalism are the review and the interview,” capturing the importance of critique on music.23 But just like ‘regular’ journalists, music journalists write features, conduct interviews, are on the look out for new bands (stories), and so on. However, we will use the word critic synonymous with ‘music journalist’, because firstly, we feel that the same core issues surround both, and secondly, we found that in The Netherlands most music journalists perform both functions – that of criticizing and that of writing about popular music in general.

The quote above describes a typical music journalist according to Robert Wyatt and Geoffrey Hull. Although the statement dates more than twenty years back (1988) it is still applicable today. From the birth of the profession, the field of music journalism has been male-dominated – white male-dominated to be exact. One is hard pressed to come up with a handful of black or female music journalists. In fact, a study performed in 2004 by the US

music publication Billboard found that after profiling all music journalists of the leading twenty U.S. newspapers – “whose combined circulation was almost 16 million copies” – only three of them were women.\(^{24}\) The description of the male journalists by Wyatt and Hull leaves much to desire; it describes taste and physical appearance of most music journalists, but it remains unclear what exactly defines the profession. In order to research the field of popular music journalism and its future, which is what this thesis is aiming for, we need to know what we are researching exactly. Since music journalism cannot be read separately from the trends that prevail in the greater field of which it is part, journalism, it is necessary to first focus on the profession of the journalist in general.

The profession of journalism has existed in several forms over the centuries. During the second half of the twentieth century – with the professionalization of the vocation and the transformation of the news industry – journalism became an acknowledged field of research. Over the years, the subject has been theorized, researched and criticized; schools of journalism have been founded worldwide, and (inter)national journals open up continuous discussion and investigation into the field.\(^{25}\) As Mark Deuze argues, this all suggests that “journalism [is] a discipline and an object of study based on a consensual body of knowledge, [and] a widely shared understanding of key theories and methods.”\(^{26}\) Yet despite all the academic attention the field of journalism received the past couple of decades, there is still disagreement about one of the core questions of the profession: (who and) what is a journalist? Naturally, journalism is a field that is constantly subject to the innovations of technology and pressures of the market, and with that, characteristics and maybe even certain values change over time. Because journalism is a liberal profession and there are so many different forms of journalism, it is not always easy to constitute what exactly are key elements of the profession and the core characteristics a journalist should carry and the importance of these. After discussing several studies, Deuze concludes in his research that “journalists in elective democracies share similar characteristics and speak of similar values in the context of their daily work, but apply these in a variety of ways to give meaning to what they do.”\(^{27}\) This means that even though journalists apply their values in several ways, they more or less share the same set of ethics. Thus, all journalists are imbricated in a certain ideology and therefore carry an interpretative world outlook on which they base their working habit. This ideology,

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 494.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 442.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 445.
as Deuze notes, is a collection of “values, strategies and formal codes” that characterize a journalist and is shared by most.\textsuperscript{28}

After combining the values that a journalist should possess according to several researchers, such as Kovach, Rosenstiel and Merrit, Deuze proposes a scheme that contains the five “ideal-typical” values that define the ideology of the journalist:

- Public service: journalists provide a public service (as watchdogs or ’newshounds’, active collectors and disseminators of information);
- Objectivity: journalists are impartial, neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible;
- Autonomy: journalists must be autonomous, free and independent in their work;
- Immediacy: journalists have a sense of immediacy, actuality and speed (inherent in the concept of ‘news’);
- Ethics: journalists have a sense of ethics, validity and legitimacy.\textsuperscript{29}

These are the ideal elements a journalist should carry. However, not every journalist is able to live up, nor desires to carry all of these values. This is strongly the case with music journalists – which will be discussed in the next paragraphs. It must be mentioned that journalism is a dynamic and contentious field, as it is constantly subjected to change; it continuously has to adapt to outside forces, such as technological and economic change, in order to stay relevant. Especially in this day and age, with the presence of the internet, values and working habits of journalists are changing and enormous pressure is felt because of the free flow of online news, of citizen journalists, of bloggers – whom, according to some, are just as valuable as traditional journalists – and of the ever-growing cutbacks. Therefore, the field of journalism can be compared to a liquid substance. It persistently has to adapt to outside forces and has to change its shape when finding obstacles on its way. Simply put, the field of journalism has to reinvent itself constantly in order to stay valuable, in many ways: keeping its authority versus numerous bloggers roaming the internet, in serving the reader as a fourth estate and of course, in finding new ways of being profitable, a challenge which will be dealt with in-depth in chapter 3.\textsuperscript{30}

The same goes for popular music journalism. As we already mentioned in the introduction, music journalism finds itself at crossroads these days. Because of the profound presence of the internet, impacting on both the news and the music industry, music media have to decide whether to stick to their old professional roles or to adapt new ones in order to

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 445.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 447.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 447.
remain valuable for their audience. In essence, music journalism is highly related to every other field of journalism. As is noted in the book *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, this means that there are certain constraints that all journalists experience, namely “the expectations of owners, editors and readers that articles match a magazine’s profile; fairly standardized styles of writing and formats; fierce competition and time pressure.” However, in some ways music journalism is quite distinctive from every other field of journalism. For example, Klein argues that although different types of journalists often work for the same organizations, “their roles and sense of authority” are experienced differently.

According to Ruud Stokvis, who examined the sports journalism, also an odd one out in the journalism landscape, “the press … has importance for the rational acting of people,” clearly tapping into the idea of the media as the main contributor to a public sphere where citizens can exchange ideas and form an opinion freely, all to benefit democracy. Not surprising, Stokvis goes on to establish the (normative) importance journalists have, clearly sharing the idea that journalism is important for a functioning democracy. However, he states that “this vision is not easy to utilize on sport journalism,” because “most people do not need knowledge of sports for rational acting – except for having conversations about sports.” However, this does not mean that sports journalism has no further worth. Stokvis concludes that “[s]ports are a form of amusement for the public. [For instance] sports journalism makes it possible that more people than those who actually go to events can be informed.” He adds to this that media also have a recreational function, which should not be overlooked. However, because the importance of leisure such as sports or music is not entirely clear as for example the importance of politics, Stokvis argues that sports journalists have trouble being taken seriously. We argue that this works the same for music journalists, and that this has consequences for the authority of music journalists, making them fundamentally different from journalists operating in other fields of the profession.

Returning to Deuze, in popular music journalism, the five values manifest themselves in different ways than in other forms of journalism. We argue that the second and third value, objectivity and autonomy, work the most differently in music journalism. As Deuze argues,

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34 Ibid., 191.
35 Ibid., 201.
36 Ibid., 201.
the term objectivity is a controversial one in the world of journalism since it is practically
impossible to be neutral and to not hold any values. Therefore, journalists and academics
interpret objectivity through concepts like “professional distance” or “impartiality.”37 The
same tension goes for music journalists. Even though they strive for fairness and neutrality,
Klein points out that “objectivity is not an applicable value,” and we would like to add, nor
desirable, since an important part of music journalism encompasses the writing of reviews –
where journalists write down their opinion and critique artists from their point of view.38 As
Lindberg et al. make clear:

> Because (s)he [the music journalist] takes part in a public discussion,
> the critic, in contradistinction to the layman, is obliged to express
> his/her subjective experience in words, address an absent audience and
> observe the rules of the genre chosen. (...) [I]t is expected to describe,
> classify and interpret the object, and it should substantiate its
> judgment with reasonable arguments.39

Thus, whereas music journalists try to keep their distance and defend their opinions with
reasonable arguments, complete objectivity is not compatible with the demands of the
profession. As a music critic in the work of Harries and Wahl-Jorgenson states, “[Y]ou’ve got
to have opinions and tastes, otherwise it’s just not worth listening to or reading [your work],
you can’t be objective… nobody is.”40

The third value – autonomy – is perhaps the most controversial value in the field of
music journalism. As Deuze argues, it is expected of journalists to “be autonomous, free and
independent in their work.”41 Unfortunately, this is easier said than done, for three main
reasons. First, because of the unclear notion of professionalism; second, because of the
influence of the internet, and third – specifically for music journalism – because of the
influence of the music industry. We will explain these three reasons in great detail in the next
paragraphs. Right now, it is important to point out that music journalism is not the only kind
of journalism that has to deal with pressures from the outside. Of course, all journalism faces
declines and cutbacks in every aspect, something we will explore in-depth in chapter 3.
However, all what encompasses music journalism falls together with the activities of the

37 Mark Deuze, “What is Journalism?” 448.
39 Ulf Lindberg et al., Rock Criticism from the Beginning, 13. [emphasis in original]
41 Mark Deuze, “What is Journalism?” 447.
music industry. Since this industry is also heavily in motion, the question arises where this leaves the music journalism.

To start out with a problem that is present for several kinds of journalism, Jane B. Singer states that a sense of autonomy is one of the most essential elements of a profession.\(^{42}\) However, one of the greatest problems (music) journalism encounters is its notion of professionalism. The profession of music journalism and journalism as a whole is claimed to be an oxymoron according to several academics, since they do not consider it to be an actual profession. For example, media law specialist Klaus Pohle states that “[j]ournalism is not a profession because it cannot be precisely defined.”\(^{43}\) This brings us to the definition of a vocation. According to Goldstein, there are four qualities that classifies a profession:

1. a body of esoteric knowledge mastery of which is the indispensable qualification for practice of the profession;
2. monopoly – that is, recognition of the exclusive competence of the profession in the domain to which its body of knowledge refers;
3. autonomy, or control by the profession over its work, including who can legitimately do that work and how the work should be done; and
4. a service ideal – that is a commitment or ethical imperative to place the welfare of the public or of the individual client above the self-interest of the practitioner.\(^{44}\)

Whereas the fourth quality is deemed commonsense by virtually all journalists, the others are not as simple as Goldstein makes them appear. Goldstein explains that a certain profession can only be exercised by someone who has an exclusive set of skills (that is recognized by others), and can perform the profession autonomously. All three of these qualities are controversial within the profession of music journalism.

Furthermore – and Goldstein already hints toward this by arguing someone has to have “exclusive competence” – as Singer notes, in a profession it is crucial that “the distinction between practitioner and layperson be clearly recognized by all parties.”\(^{45}\) This is clear when one is, for example, a doctor or a pilot – since they both possess very specific skills and have a legal status that someone without training does not have – but the situation is


\(^{45}\) Jane B. Singer, “Who are these Guys?” 139.
a bit different with journalism and in particular music journalism. In the case of journalism, even though most journalists are either (academically) schooled or trained on the job, in the age of digital media, civilians have the ability to write/publish whatever they want online and many of them proclaim to be journalists – so-called citizen journalism. No longer do journalists have “exclusive competence” according to many. In music journalism the situation is even more controversial. Whereas classical music journalists often have followed formal training – in playing an instrument and/or in the subject – the majority of the popular music journalists did not follow a specific training. For example, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, many (teenage) rock fanatics found lucrative employment at the music sections of newspapers and music magazines and never received formal education. Therefore, many music journalists are “forced to establish their authority without the aid of paper credentials.” Lindberg et al. explain that “rock journalists are often self-taught,” but, the authors argue that their “know-how compensates for their common lack of university education, formal musical training and diplomas from journalism schools.” Even though Lindberg et al. claim that the extensive knowledge of music journalists makes up for their lack of education, they still do not experience the same level of autonomy as a doctor, for instance. Furthermore, with the rise of the internet, their sense of autonomy declined even further according to several academics. We will discuss this in detail in chapter 3 in which we will elaborate on how the Internet has influenced music journalism.

Next to professionalism, a large issue in music journalism is the dependence on the music industry. It must be mentioned that a field of tension is not something that exists only with regard to music journalism; other branches of journalism struggle with the same problems. However, it is in music journalism that the two fields of diverging interests seem the most interconnected: almost all work music journalists do falls together with activities of the music industry. The extent of this interconnection becomes clear in even the most basic facet: without the products of the music industry, music journalism as a profession would not exist. Journalists are taken to be fully dependent on music labels for their information and access to musicians, labels which often only have a commercial interest and ‘use’ journalists to their own benefit. Or as Garofalo argues, “like any culture industry in a market economy, the role of the music business is fundamentally to transform its cultural products into financial

48 Ulf Lindberg et al., Rock Criticism from the Beginning, 18.
Therefore, the industry needs music publications for publicity in order to sell their music to the consumer. Put in this way, the dependency between the two partners appears mutual and in balance. However, research done by academics on music journalism indicates something else. According to Klein, music journalism and the music industry are not in sync, “because so many publications cover popular music, popular music critics have a lot of competition for access,” which gives the music industry a great advantage. In this day and age, this is true: looking at The Netherlands and the United States, aside from paid publications such as OOR and Rolling Stone, every newspaper has one or two staffers with a beat in popular music journalism; there are free magazines (such as LiveXS); and more importantly, there are music blogs such as Pitchfork that give the music industry high levels of exposure while being free of charge to the consumers. Klein argues that because of this competition, music journalists write positively about musicians and releases in order to retain access to them, “making the music critic appear to be more of a cheerleader than a gatekeeper.”

Other academics seem to agree with Klein. As early as 1972, Paul M. Hirsch noted “media gatekeepers can become co-opted by the music industry and that critics can act as an appendage of the promotional vehicle for the music industry.” Furthermore, according to Chris Atton, “music journalists are implicated in the activities of the music industry,” suggesting a negative kind of power of the industry over journalism. Also in the same vein as Klein, Alex van Venrooij states “journalists of pop magazines and, to a lesser extent, quality newspapers rely on the record industry for information and access to artists.” This means that the music industry has leverage over the press: because they have so many opportunities i.e. publications to gain publicity, they can grant access to whomever they want, and even more importantly, deny access. Following from this, one can conclude that music journalists may compromise to please publicists and to ensure continued access to artists. These concessions can take on many forms, from reviewing an album positively, to putting a band on the front page. However, as will become clear in both chapter 3 and in the research

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51 Ibid., 13.
54 Alex van Venrooij, “Classifying Popular Music in the United States and the Netherlands,” 612.
we have conducted, the music industry is increasingly changing in this digital age, perhaps leaving chances for music journalists.

These discussions of autonomy bring us to French cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu. In his book *On Television*, he discusses what influence “market demands” have on journalists and whether or not they still experience a sense of autonomy. Although Bourdieu focuses on journalists in general, his theory is also applicable to music journalists, since they operate in the same field. We will start off with the subject of autonomy before we move on to the so-called market demands. Bourdieu argues that there are several ways to measure the degree of autonomy of an individual journalist. First of all, “it depends (...) on the degree to which press ownership is concentrated. (Concentration of the press augments job insecurity by reducing the number of potential employers).”\(^{55}\) Since the rise of the internet, many music magazines and newspapers had to cut down costs and either downsized or simply disappeared. Fewer-and-fewer music journalists are able to find a paid job in the field and the demands are higher than ever. The working conditions of music journalists are tough: “[l]ow pay and unsociable hours, solitary trips to gigs, severe limitations imposed by deadlines on the amount of research a journalist can do on a particular artist” is the harsh reality.\(^{56}\) Second, Bourdieu claims that the “individual journalist’s autonomy depends on the position occupied by his newspaper within the larger space of newspapers, that is, its specific location between the "intellectual" and the "market" poles.”\(^{57}\) Thus, according to Bourdieu, the sense of autonomy of a journalist also depends on whether he or she works at the *New York Times* or *The National Enquirer* for example. For a music journalist, the distinctions are less pronounced. Even though magazines like the *Rolling Stone* and Dutch *OOR* still experience more autonomy than let’s say a random fanzine or blog, online media have begun to generate authority since, for example, Pitchfork is considered at least as important as *Rolling Stone*. Or in the words of Alexandra Molotkow: “Pitchfork, the music Web site that is our era’s Rolling Stone.”\(^{58}\) Adding to that, according to Richard Beck,

> In the last decade, no organ of music criticism has wielded as much influence as Pitchfork. It is the only publication, online or print, that can have a decisive effect on a musician or band’s career. This has

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\(^{56}\) Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 18.


something to do with the site’s diligently cultivated readership: no genre’s fans are more vulnerable to music criticism than the educated, culturally anxious young people who pay close attention to indie rock.\(^{59}\)

However, while Pitchfork is a professional blog that employs professional music journalists, there are numerous blogs working with or started by amateur journalists. In The Netherlands, these blogs are for example Jimmy Alter, FileUnder and KindaMuzik. These blogs are also eligible for interviews with musicians, since they do attract a significant readership. This means that people visit the blogs in order to read the content they want – which is free to read – and, consequently, may discontinue their membership of the magazine. This results in more cutbacks and firing of employees and as such a vicious circle starts to be discernable. Thus, the sense of autonomy of traditional music journalists is further declined by quality of online media which work with amateurs – a trend we will discuss in greater detail in the next section.

Third, Bourdieu states that “the journalist’s own position within that newspaper or news medium (as reporter, freelancer, and so forth) determines statutory guarantees (…) as well as salary.”\(^{60}\) The position of a music journalist is not considered very authoritative within and outside the field of journalism. As a music journalist stated in an interview:

> Arts journalists are always at the bottom of the pecking order. (…) Sport gets pages and pages of football story after football story. The arts journalist gets next to nothing. If I am travelling somewhere, the paper won’t pay (…) but if a sports reporter wants to go and cover yet another football story, it’s ‘OK, here’s £1000!’ It’s disgusting how the arts are treated by the press.\(^{61}\)

This is the result of the entertainment value of music – it is often argued that music journalists are not doing anything serious, just writing about popular music – and the claim that it is not a real profession as most music journalists are self-taught. Moreover, music journalists do not hold dominant positions in newspapers, and many write on a freelance basis which does not exactly lend them a stable negotiation position either. And last, as stated before, the salaries of most – there are always a few exceptions – are relatively low. In the 1970s, Lester Bangs already stated that “it won’t make you rich” and chances of a good pay only reduced in the digital age.\(^{62}\) The final degree of autonomy is measured by the “journalist’s own capacity for


\(^{60}\) Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television*, 69.


\(^{62}\) Lester Bangs, “How to be a Rock Critic,” 1.
autonomous production of news [since] certain writers (...) are in a state of particular dependence.”63 This last measurement does not add any authority to the position of the music journalist either. According to many academics, music journalists are in a state of “particular dependence” as Bourdieu calls it.64 For the larger part, as we argued before, music journalists are dependent on the music industry. According to an American research, the music industry “exerts a structural influence on popular music magazines” and, consequently, on the music journalists, since they are part of the promotional cycle of the music industry and dependent on the industry in a number of ways. (...) Major companies have always been ready to supply important writers and magazines with records, tickets to specific concerts and famous resorts, “in-passes” to diverse events and other perks. The press people counter by offering publicity.65

Technically, the music journalist decides whether to pay attention to certain bands and what kind of review he or she writes, either positive or negative. However, in reality this dependence results in journalists writing far more positive than negative reviews. This is mainly caused by the constant pressure of the music industry, as already explained above.66

Thus, the demands of the market – in this case the music industry – on music journalists are great. Bourdieu explains this process by discussing the so-called “journalistic field.”67 Whereas the journalistic field already came into existence during the nineteenth century, writing on popular music was only transformed into a “respected field of cultural production” in the 1970s. With that, it reached a certain level of autonomy.68 There are several characteristics of a journalistic field according to Bourdieu, but only two are pertinent to a discussion of music journalism. In line with Goldstein, Lindberg et al. point out that the field is “first characterized by the agents’ monopoly on the production and spread of information.”69 This means that journalists have to have a specific set of skills that distinguishes them from civilians and gives them a certain amount of autonomy. Journalists, therefore, experience a “level of specialization with distinct positions, rules and authorities.”70

63 Pierre Bourdieu, On Television, 69.
64 Ibid., 69.
65 Ulf Lindberg et al., Rock Criticism from the Beginning, 20.
67 Pierre Bourdieu, On Television, 71.
68 Ulf Lindberg et al., Rock Criticism from the Beginning, 4.
69 Ibid., 31-32.
70 Ibid., 4.
This is called the “code of ethics” by Bourdieu.\textsuperscript{71} However, as is shown in the previous paragraphs, in the case of music journalism, the sense of autonomy is minimal. The second characteristic of a journalistic field is one of commercial interests. As Bourdieu argues, “the journalistic field is permanently subject to trial by market, whether directly, through advertisers, or indirectly, through audience ratings.”\textsuperscript{72} As stated before, the music industry has the power to grant journalists access to musicians or withhold them from entering. Therefore, journalists constantly have to walk a thin line between their professional morality and the demands of the music industry.

In his book, Bourdieu takes a critical stance on the present state of the field. He argues that “in an era under the sway of television (…) there are imminent risks that the principle of ‘pure’ professionalism, which once gave rise to the field as such, will be overthrown.”\textsuperscript{73} Thus, the characteristics that largely make up the journalistic field are under attack by the era of television. However, Bourdieu published his book in 1996 and could never have foreseen the enormous impact of the internet (the free availability of music and the rise of amateur blogging) on journalism and, therefore, music journalism. Due to the profession’s weak autonomy, it becomes necessary for the music journalists to utilize techniques that “create an image of critical distance and separation from promotional schemes, either through good reporting or through wit and sarcasm. (…) Among these techniques belong the common staging of the critic as an enlightened (white, male) fan, whose love is passionate but not unconditional.”\textsuperscript{74} This immediately distinguishes a music journalist from a fan as well. Simply put, a fan determines which music/artist he or she likes or does not like while the journalist decides whether the music he or she listens to is good or bad and then grounds its opinion with reasonable arguments. Thus, music journalists possess skills that set them apart from the music fan. According to (interviewed) music journalists, these qualifications ultimately determine the authority of the music journalist.

\section*{1.2. Professional Roles of the Music Journalist}

Even though research on the subject is highly limited, academics and others have ascribed several professional roles to music journalism over the years. For our thesis, we chose to examine the four roles that are most commonly used in academic researches and that suit the music journalist – in our humble opinion – best. Naturally, there are more professional roles,

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{On Television}, 71.
\item Ibid., 71.
\item Ulf Lindberg et al., \textit{Rock Criticism from the Beginning}, 32.
\item Ibid., 20-21.
\end{thebibliography}
but most of them are greatly related to the roles that we discuss here. By explaining these roles we are able to highlight important issues in music journalism that will serve as a referential point in our interviews. Furthermore, these professional roles form the centre points in the landscape of music journalism. By examining them we are able to portray the functions of the music journalist best. Here, we will analyze different academic angles of the professional roles. However, when conducting the interviews, we also questioned the journalists about these professional roles and whether or not they changed in the digital age. By combining the academic and journalistic viewpoints we will be able to portray a clear image of the profession. Even though the roles are discussed here separately – mainly for the sake of explanation – most overlap and are greatly intertwined.

1.2.1. The Gatekeeper

The term gatekeeping is well-known in the academic world; it is one of the oldest “social science theories” as it has been used since the 1950s for the study of journalism and news. Everyday, journalists are flooded with information from all sorts of media outlets, such as the internet, television, radio and own sources, but not every bit of information is able to make the news broadcasts or the papers due space and time constraints. Therefore, it is necessary to select and, consequently, shape only a small amount of information that is suitable and interesting – at least in the journalists’ opinions – for the consumer. This process is called gatekeeping. It is the process of “selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news.”

Journalists are constantly performing the role of gatekeepers and ultimately decide what information reaches the audience and in what form. Most cultural theorists focus on journalism in general, but the process is also applicable to music journalism according to many. As stated by Dave Laing, “the music journalist as reviewer or interviewer is a ‘relay’ between producer (musician and/or music industry) and consumer (the audience for popular music).” This basically means that the music journalist determines what information, which musicians and what albums reach the audience and what not. This was at least the case until the 1990s and early 2000s, before the internet turned this process completely upside down. For the sake of continuance, however, it is first necessary to focus on the era prior to the internet.

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76 Ibid., 73.
At the beginning of (the professionalization of) the profession, music journalists held a quite powerful position. As quoted above, consumers relied on music journalists for (news about) albums and concert reviews and these journalists also granted the music industry access to the (consuming) public via magazines and newspapers. From the moment music labels realized that music journalism was an important tool through which they could promote their artists, they “began advertising in rock publications and servicing the journalists with albums and concert tickets.”

Chris Charlesworth – a British music journalist who wrote for, among others, *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express (NME)* – pointed out that rock journalists used to hold a significant degree of power: “We could stick an unknown artist on the front page, and their album would go into the charts the following week if we said it was good. We had a lot of power. We did that certainly with Roxy Music. We did that, to a certain extent, with David Bowie as well.”

Thus, as Charlesworth suggests, the journalists determined which artists they covered and, consequently, which artists reached the audience. Naturally, for a music journalist, it is hard not to make selections. Between the large number of albums that art desks receive each week (today replaced with audio streams), the number of interviews they are offered (not always with the most interesting bands), and the concert invitations, making selections is inevitable due to time constraints. However, at the same time, music journalists depended on the music industry for tickets to venues and interviews with musicians. Consequently, journalists have to find a sense of balance between satisfying the music industry and the audience.

As for gatekeeping, academics disagree about the importance of the process. Some argue that there is not any significance to gatekeeping and others state that other roles fit music journalists better. For example, Klein states that “the positive tilt of music criticism (…) makes the music critic appear to be more of a cheerleader than a gatekeeper.” Thus, due to the fact that music journalists overwhelmingly write optimistic articles and review albums and concerts positively, they are rather granted promoters than gatekeepers according to Klein. Even though Laing agrees with Klein that the concept of gatekeeping is not suitable for music journalism, his argument is a completely different one. Laing states that the metaphor of the gatekeeper is not appropriate because “the critical function of such writing demands the recognition of ‘bad’ music as well as ‘good’ music.”

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79 Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 19.


argument on the fact that taste is something personal, this remains an odd statement. One of the main tasks of a critic – it is even called the “fundamental” task by Jones – is to determine whether a new album is good or bad and substantiate that choice with reasonable arguments. Laing instead suggests that the role of “cultural intermediary” is much more appropriate for music journalists – a role we will explain later on.

Naturally, there are certain downsides to the application of the process of gatekeeping within the field of music journalism. As Silvio Waisbord argues, gatekeeping holds the notion that “professional journalism [is] guided by the ideals of objectivity and public service.” However, as is seen before, the term ‘objectivity’ is quite controversial here. Simply put, the value of objectivity is not applicable to music journalists. Even though music journalists ground their decisions (of stating that an album is good or bad, for example) with rational arguments, it remains a matter of taste: something which is of course highly subjective. Furthermore, many argue that the process of gatekeeping is indeed a public service – since people would otherwise drown in the amount of available information. However, the number of memberships is extremely important these days, since the circulation of numerous magazines dropped greatly. Therefore, as Bourdieu argues, news has to be “catchy” in order to attract a vast audience. In music journalism this means that magazines – especially those who have a hype-oriented policy like NME – are constantly hungry for “what’s new, but not necessarily what’s good.” Henderson believed that “pandering to ‘what’s cool’ versus ‘what’s good’ was a deliberate ploy on the part of the magazines to maintain a hold on or increase their readership.” Consequently, as gatekeepers, music journalists have the power – at least in the era prior to the internet – to withhold certain artists from the public. Moreover, the music industry puts great pressure on music journalists. It is often a game of negotiation. Most artists have press days, on which journalists can interview them at a specific day on a specific time. A lot of these interviews seem alike. Therefore, often music journalists are granted specific treats (such as, interviewing the lead singer instead of the drummer that everyone else gets) in exchange for, for example, a cover story. As a result, these

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85 Don McLeese, “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 444.
86 Pierre Bourdieu, On Television, 72.
88 Ibid., 230.
circumstances make sure that music journalists are not free to decide what information reaches the audience and all these factors more or less influence the content of music magazines.

The digital age presents an entirely different problematic. With the rise of the internet the music journalist no longer has to work as a relay between the music industry and the consumer as Laing’s previous mode held. For example, musicians are able to reach their fans through social media channels like Twitter and Facebook. At their turn, fans are able to download albums and listen to free music through streaming initiatives such as Spotify, or find music on sharing blogs, in order to determine whether or not they like a certain band. Consequently, people no longer need music journalists as consumer guides; they have the means to sort things out for themselves. Thus, both consumers and artists are able to work around the music journalist. This could mean that the role of the music journalist as a gatekeeper is gradually disappearing. As early as 1994, researchers feared that the so-called “newsgathering expert systems” – i.e. the internet – would diminish “the gate-keeping function of newspeople [sic].” 89 Numerous news outlets on the internet bombard people with enormous amounts of information every day. Most information is already out on the internet (through, among others, news agencies) before traditional journalists even have the chance to verify and place it in their newspapers or broadcasts. Speed is becoming increasingly important in this day and age. Therefore, there is a constant tension between speed and accuracy. This “warp speed,” as Kovach and Rosenstiel call it, “results in stories appearing as piecemeal bits of evidence, accusation or speculation.” 90 For example, in the months of August and September of 2011, there were many rumours about a potential new album of Bruce Springsteen. When a message – appearing like a press release – was posted on fan website, many online media copied the message without verifying it. The ‘news’ became a top story on the website of and was titled “Bruce Springsteen to release new album ’Arcade At Night’ in November.” 91 It turned out to be a hoax. A nineteen year old student made up the entire story and received a bit more attention than he originally had in mind: “Listen, I fooled all of you with making up that press release. It was a joke, now I am being contacted by

90 Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, quoted in Jane B. Singer, “Who are these Guys?” 152.
media outlets on how I got the track listing etc… Look, it’s your own dumb faults whomever believed it.” 92

In sum, the model of gatekeeping knows two stories. On the one hand, the process is no longer necessarily since consumers and musicians can work their way around the media in this digital age. On the other hand, however, people are being bombarded with information and music these days and often can no longer determine what valuable information is. Therefore, they might need journalists who check and verify news before they put it out. As music critic Ringo P. Stacey notes: “there aren’t enough good editors working on the web. Even the best writers need coaxing and cutting sometimes,” something that is hardly done online. 93 This is, as Singer states, the strength of the internet – there is more information than ever available online; music journalists no longer determine what bands people are introduced to – as well as its weakness since “the quantity of the news product increases but its quality is likely to be diluted.” 94 Whether or not the function of gatekeeping will completely disappear or maybe already has in a certain way is not clear, but its future is highly uncertain.

1.2.2. The Promoter

Reading the previous paragraphs, it is clear that the field of music journalism and the music industry are closely related. However, the exact role journalists perform within the music industry – either oppositional or supportive – is interpreted in several ways. 95 Whereas music journalists see themselves as “performing quality control in their attempt to help guide consumers, existing as the last stand against tasteless record labels,” others state that music journalists perform a supportive role since the work they deliver is predominantly positive. 96 There are multiple reasons for this proliferation of the positive. One of them is the constraint of space. In newspapers and the more general music magazines, there is often little space for, for instance, reviews. According to Klein, in the field of music journalism “there was general agreement that, when one only has a limited amount of space, it is preferable to share with the reader good albums rather than bad ones, except perhaps to warn readers of an awful, high-profile release.” 97 In principal, this is not problematic – meaning that certain artists and albums deserve to be reviewed positively. Nonetheless, in some cases the relationship

94 Jane B. Singer, “Who are these Guys?” 153.
96 Ibid., 13.
97 Ibid., 12.
between the music journalist and the artist and/or music industry is so tight that the journalist is not able to review work from a critical distance and, consequently, opinions may become manipulated.98

At the beginning of the profession, music journalists mainly published in small and alternative magazines without the interference of the music industry. However, when both fields began to develop, their relationship became more intense.99 Music labels began to advertise in music magazines and newspapers, and gave journalists albums and access to their artists because they knew that the field of music journalism was an “important publicity mechanism from the industry itself.”100 Consequently, Powers notes that journalism became “an object of promotional discourse,” and Klein even compares the music journalist to a “cheerleader.”101 102 On top of this, as one of the employees at the media organization of FaceCulture reasoned, “we see the people working at the record company as our friends. We interview their artists so they get attention and we can make money of these interviews.”

This brings us back to the subject of autonomy discussed earlier by Bourdieu. One way of measuring the degree of autonomy of an individual journalist, according to Bourdieu, is to what degree they are able to produce their work independently. According to many academics this is incredibly difficult since music journalists constantly feel the pressure of the music industry. This is especially hard when starting a career in music journalism, since young artists have to “establish relationships with publicists to get on mailing lists, which may lead a critic to go out of his way to cover artists on a certain label or to avoid writing negative reviews to maintain a good relationship.”103 Naturally, at the same time, the music industry needs the music journalist to cover their artists. However, according to Klein, “because so many publications cover popular music, popular music critics have a lot of competition for access” which gives the music industry a great advantage.104

Even though the music industry puts great pressure on the journalists, this is not the only reason why they receive the tag of promoter. It is also the insecurity of music journalists themselves, according to several academics: they are terrified to underestimate the importance of some upcoming artists or bands. Therefore, they often apply the so-called “great man”

98 Ibid., 14.
100 Ibid., 208.
101 Ibid., 204.
103 Ibid., 15.
104 Ibid., 15.
theory. To use Denisoff’s term, this “great man” theory suggests that music journalists frequently compare upcoming artists with older music giants like John Lennon or Bob Dylan. This is done because they do not want to miss the boat on new artists and therefore state something along the lines of “this could be the new…” or “her music resembles…” On a side note, music labels participate in this process as well. For example, back in the early 1970s nobody knew who Bruce Springsteen was, but he was coined by his record label as the “new Dylan.” Bob Dylan himself already achieved the status of a rock star by then. Therefore, many people thought that this “new Dylan” had to be good. As a result, sales went up and a hype around the young artist was born. Funny enough, these days, upcoming artists like Brian Fallon and Frank Turner are coined the “new Springsteen.” In our interviews, we further investigated whether this is actually a notion of style, or that it has further implications. In other words, do modern popular music journalists indeed use comparing terms because they do not want to miss the boat, or are there deeper implications?

Bringing this back to music journalism, as Robert B. Ray notes, journalists always “have their eyes turned back on past examples.” No one is able to look into the future: journalists have to judge an artist based on their professional skills but at the same time they have no idea what the future will bring. Consequently, music journalists are frightened to denounce any upcoming artists since he or she could become the next Kurt Cobain or Amy Winehouse. Furthermore, music journalists try by no means to “repeat the mistake of those who denounced Elvis and Little Richard.” As did American journalist Jack Gould. He reviewed the appearance of Elvis Presley in the Milton Berle Show for the New York Times in 1956:

Mr. Presley has no discernible singing ability. His specialty is rhythm songs which he renders in an undistinguished whine; his phrasing, if it can be called that, consists of the stereotyped variations that go with a beginner's aria in a bathtub. For the ear, he is an unutterable bore, not nearly so talented as Frank Sinatra back in the latter's rather hysterical days at the Paramount Theatre.

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106 Ibid., 209.
107 Ibid., 209.
109 Ibid., 76.
110 Robert B. Ray, How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 80.
Therefore, most music journalists are afraid to condemn anything and engage in what Marx Ernst identified as “overcomprehension,” meaning that every new album and artist is received with positive feedback – to say the least.\(^{111}\) As Ray claims, “overcomprehension typically involves the overappreciation of lyrics.”\(^{112}\) As early as 1882, French historian Henry Houssaye already noticed the problem of overcomprehension – which appeared mostly in art and classical music at that time: “[i]f criticism should aim to be so timid that it will never ever run the risk of having had its judgements faulted, then it would be necessary to praise everything to the skies on the ground that everything may one day be consecrated posterity.”\(^{113}\) Not only do the music industry harm to the autonomy and impartiality of the music journalist, they do damage to their own reputation as well. This also has its effect on consumers since they base their consumption behaviour (partly) on the reviews of music journalists. As a result, these developments do harm to the professional role of music journalists as consumer guides.

1.2.3. The Consumer Guide

Robert Christgau – who appointed himself as “the American dean of rock critics” – is probably best known for his “Consumer Guide” column. In these columns he reviewed the latest albums and graded them with letters ranging from A+ to E-. Originally published in the magazine *Village Voice*, the column moved online to MSN Music in 2007. Christgau wrote his column for forty-one years in a row and published his last column in July 2010 wherein he stated: “But though I always enjoyed the work, work it was, and I've long been aware there were other things I could be doing with my ears. So while I have every intention of keeping up with popular music as it evolves, being less encyclopaedic [sic] about it will come as a relief as well as a loss.”\(^{114}\) Thousands of consumers read his column every week, and although it is hard to determine whether he really influenced sales, Christgau’s column held a prominent place in the field of music journalism. However, not everybody could appreciate the work of Christgau. For example, on the 1978 album *Take no Prisoners*, Lou Reed recorded an outburst against Christgau:

\(^{111}\) Marx Ernst, quoted in Robert B. Ray, “Critical Senility vs. Overcomprehension ,” 76.
\(^{112}\) Robert B. Ray, “Critical Senility vs. Overcomprehension ,” 76.
\(^{113}\) Ibid., 76.
Critics: what does Robert Christgau do in bed? You know, is he a toe fucker? Man, anal retentive, "a Consumer's Guide to Rock?!" What a moron. A consumer's guide to rock, man, I object to the fucking liner notes. (…) I don't need you to tell me that I am good (…) Christgau is like an anal retentive. Nice little box and a B+… Can you imaging working for a fucking year, and you get a B+ from an asshole in the Village Voice?115

Robert Christgau responded by ranking the album a C+ and he concluded his review by stating: “I thank Lou for pronouncing my name right.”116 Thus, although not popular with everyone, it comes as no surprise that the most common professional role ascribed to music journalism is that of the consumer guide.

Supposedly, music journalists help consumers to sort out their needs and determine what the consumer will like and what he or she will ultimately buy. The question, however, is to what extent music journalists really perform as consumer guides, and are able to influence the choices of a consumer with their judgments, especially in this day and age.117 There are various answers to this question and they often contradict each other. As Jones argues, it is hard to measure the impact of music journalists on sales. Simon Frith takes it a step further and asserts that “reviews rarely have a direct effect on sales.”118 Roy Shuker concurs with them by stating that “there is general agreement that rock critics don’t exercise as much influence on consumers as, say, literary or drama critics.”119 Even though there is not clear-cut reason for this, according to Shuker it may be because literature and drama require more money and dedication than the easy accessible popular music. Furthermore, since most literary and drama critics undertook a formal study, they are, consequently, often taken more seriously than popular music journalists.120 Moreover, Shuker notes that “hearing music has greater impact than reading about it.”121 This means that the airwaves – and these days the internet – have greater impact on consumers than music journalists. Thus, according to Jones and Shuker music journalists hardly influence the choices of consumers, and with that, sales. However, Matt Brennan argues the opposite. In his research, he concludes that “not only do many musicians perceive a direct impact on sales from positive press coverage or the lack

thereof, but receiving the right kind of music criticism at the right time has become an integral step in the business of selling records and sustaining a musical career.”

This is especially true for upcoming artists who lack financial resources to advertise their music and, therefore, depend on the press to make their music publicly known. For example, the Canadian singer-songwriter Nathan Wiley – who released his debut album *Bottom Dollar* in 2002 on a small label – stated that “[g]ood press can make a really big difference, because it’s one of the only ways to make people sit up and pay attention to what you’re doing.”

Naturally, there are limitations to the role of consumer guide. Due to the internet, many people download or stream music before they (might) buy an album. Thus, they do not blindly follow the music journalist’s advice to buy an album before hearing it. As a result, the influence of the music journalists as a consumer guide might diminish. Furthermore, there are only so many people who read music magazines or online reviews and, probably, only a part of these readers will buy albums recommended by the reviewer. Even in the most positive scenario – where all the readers would buy the albums that are praised by music journalists – this is still a small portion compared to the amount of albums sold. If music journalists do not directly influence sales, they at least provide the reader with necessary knowledge about artists and albums. As Jones and Featherly state: “popular music criticism can therefore be understood as meaning making.”

Aside from all commercial interests this is the ultimate goal of most music journalists and the main reason why they went into the business: get people excited about popular music. By providing consumers with necessary information, they are able to share their passion.

However, at the same time, as Klein argues, music journalists have to “strike a balance between writing for the subset of music criticism consumers and the broader readership.”

This means that music journalists have to serve the fanatic music lovers without pushing the less knowledgeable readers away. As a result, music journalists walk a thin line between the two. A music critic who was interviewed by Klein, “stressed the importance of understanding the reader’s frame of reference, whether they are (...) readers who "have not bought a record in the last 6 months" or young music magazine readers whose knowledge of current music eclipses their knowledge of early rock.”

Even though they reach a broad audience, music journalists try to give meaning to the music they hear and aim to give the reader a greater

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126 Ibid., 11.
understanding about new releases and artists. In conclusion, it is hard to measure the direct influence of music journalists on sales, and opinions about the degree of this impact vary greatly. Maybe music journalists do not function as a consumer guide but rather as an explorative guide that entertains and mostly informs the reader of what great (and not so great) music is out there.\footnote{Ibid., 11.}

1.2.4. The Cultural Intermediary

The roles of consumer guide and that of cultural intermediary lay closely together and are often used interchangeably. The music journalist functions as a mediator between producers and consumers in both roles. However, when examining the professional role of consumer guide, academics mainly lay their focus on the commercial aspects while the role of cultural intermediary centres around cultural elevation. In order to explain the role of cultural intermediary, it is necessary to discuss the so-called public sphere. According to Laing, the role of cultural intermediary was introduced by Bourdieu in the late 1970s “to define a subset of a ‘new petite bourgeoisie’ employed in the industries of ‘presentation and representation.’”\footnote{Dave Laing, “Anglo-American Music Journalism: Texts and Contexts,” 335.}\footnote{Steve Jones, “The Intro: Popular Music, Media, and the Written Word,” 3.} The origins of this “new petite bourgeoisie” lie in the eighteenth century with the concept of the public sphere, originally introduced by the German culturist Jürgen Habermas.\footnote{Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere. An Encyclopaedia Article,” in \textit{Critical Theory and Society: a Reader}, ed. S.E. Bronner and D.M. Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), 136.}\footnote{Ulf Lindberg et al., \textit{Rock Criticism from the Beginning}, 15.}\footnote{Karl Bücher, quoted in Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere. An Encyclopaedia Article,” 136.} Habermas states that the public sphere is the “realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens.”\footnote{Karl Bücher, quoted in Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere. An Encyclopaedia Article,” 136.} Thus, people came together in coffee houses, salons and the like, and through conversations between equals – ideally, differences in social statuses were left at home – they were able to discuss societal problems and eventually form a joined public opinion.\footnote{Ulf Lindberg et al., \textit{Rock Criticism from the Beginning}, 15.} However, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the profession of journalism developed and, as Karl Bücher explains, “[n]ewspapers changed from mere institutions for the publication of news into bearers and leaders of public opinion.” Consequently, a new era filled with commerce and openness of news was introduced. Journalists were elevated to fulfil the role of opinion leaders. Overall, they were experts in gathering and spreading information, functioning as a mediator of public discussion. Even though the concept of cultural intermediary has been
greatly used within journalism and media researches, it is also relevant for the field of music journalism.

As Laing argues, cultural intermediary “remains a useful term for the journalistic interpretation of cultural products to their potential audience. It is particularly apt for those mediating practices that collude with the culture industries’ definition of listeners as consumers.” Naturally, the professional role of the consumer guide functions as an excellent example, since music journalists often award albums and concerts with stars, letters or grades to indicate the quality of the reviewed commodity. For example, as is shown before, Robert Christgau always ranked albums with letters ranging from A+ to E-. Not only do music journalists act as a go-between for producers and consumers, as cultural intermediaries, they furthermore have the power to historicize, legitimize and canonize popular music as Fenster notes. This only became possible when the field of music journalism required a sense of autonomy, and, consequently, authority. After the construction of this journalistic field, music journalists came to be “the new petite bourgeoisie” and were consequently able to elevate popular music. As Fenster argues, music journalists “perform an external evaluation of the music industry’s products based upon certain core assumptions about what makes good, important music, and what makes disposable crap (as well as what makes bad important music and good disposable crap).” Thus, due to their semi-autonomous position, they have the power to canonize or condemn music.

Music journalists often praise or denounce music as a group, meaning that when one writes a positive review about an album, others are likely to follow. As a result, “popular music critics can be considered an interpretive community, constructing their authority, like journalists, through shared interpretations rather than traditional credentials of professionalism, such as training or licensing.” This consensus is not surprising since many music journalists share the same tastes and backgrounds, and they see each other often at press days, concerts and the like. Furthermore, as Klein explains, “[b]ecause of the fuzzy standards of popular music criticism and because authority is not formally conferred, critics can use the opinion of other critics as a predictor or barometer of their own opinion.” As a result, through their group behaviour – but also knowledge, judgements and decisions to

136 Mark Fenster, “Consumers’ Guides,” 86.
critique an artist or not – music journalists basically control the “written history of popular music.”

Not only are music journalists able to canonize certain artists and music, music magazines try to set themselves apart from the rest as well. Take for example the magazine *Rolling Stone*, which is perhaps the best known popular music publication in the world. As Jones and Featherly argue, the magazine has had the power to – to use Bourdieu’s terms – “consecrate” popular music. However, not only does *Rolling Stone* have the power to canonize artists, they also were able to consecrate themselves as Lindberg et al. note. “Its status as the American music magazine has been buttressed by the magazine itself through its unique gift for marketing and canonizing itself through countless anniversary books of interview and review outtakes, histories, and encyclopedias [sic], ‘controlling’ the history and canon of rock.’” Whereas the focus of the magazine has turned to general interest from the early 1970s – paying less and less attention to popular music – its presence in the field of music journalism is still very much there. “Even though *Rolling Stone* lost its cutting edge with regard to music early on, no one has been able to challenge its central position in the field,” Lindberg et al. state.

In sum, the characteristics of the profession of music journalism are not as straightforward as in many other professional fields. The standards are unclear, the autonomy of the profession is constantly challenged, and different professional roles are assigned to the journalists. Here, we mainly focused on the definition of the profession and the different roles that music journalists carry. However, since the rise of the internet, the position of the professional (music) journalist has changed greatly – professional roles have altered, great pressure is exerted on their autonomy and so on. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3. Nonetheless, this makes the field of music journalism one of the most interesting fields to study. No one knows what the future might bring, but it is clear that popular music is a trending topic these days, not only among music journalists but also with the people since “[m]ore people are writing about music than ever before … [and] [m]ore people are reading about music than every before.” In order to complete the theorizing of the music journalist, we now turn to the image of the popular music journalist.

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139 Ibid., 11.
141 Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 302. [emphasis in original]
142 Ibid., 302. [emphasis in original]
143 Ibid., 444.
1.3. Music Journalism and Popular Culture

As popular culture is the creation and expression of popular taste and concerns translated into cultural productions, it is worth investigating popular films and music to see what the common conception of (music) journalism is. The conceptions and misconceptions of the music journalist, as portrayed in popular culture, are always grounded in real life concerns and perspectives, even if these may be less extreme than those projected onto the big or small screen. Therefore, investigating these depictions can offer ways into (i) the profession of the music journalist as it exists in the popular imagination and (ii) by extension how the profession can use this societal feedback to develop in new and demanded-for directions.

A large project that focuses on this field of research is “The Image of the Journalism in Popular Culture” (IJPC) at the USC Annenberg and its goal is “to investigate and analyze, through research and publication, the conflicting images of the journalist in film, television, radio, fiction, commercials, cartoons, comic books, music, art, demonstrating their impact on the American public's perception of news gatherers.”144 According to Joe Saltzman (a researcher of the IJPC project), many movies feature “a dominant and damaging image of the journalist,” in which the viewer can see anonymous journalists travel in packs, armed with equipment where they cover news in large crowds, “yelling, shouting, bullying and forcing their way into breaking news events.”145 Peter Dahlgren argues that aside from the annoying journalist, another, personalized conception can be discerned. According to Dahlgren, in popular culture, we often find a “heroic image of the journalist defending the truth against the many dragons of darkness in the modern world.”146 This conception of journalism can be found in films such as Blood Diamond (2006), All the Presidents Men (1976) and State of Play (2009). Consequently, some journalists that are now well-known by the public, have turned into heroes as well, such as Tom Wolfe, Clark Kent, and Babe Bennett. Others, however, such as James Gordon Bennett and Charles Foster Kane, are portrayed as villains. As Saltzman states, “the journalist seems to be depicted in much the same way – either as a hero righting a wrong or the last one standing up for freedom of speech and press, or a villain in cohorts with the government in power.”147 Aside of the unrealistic image – of either the anonymous journalist or the journalist as a hero/villain – portrayed in fiction, Dahlgren argues

147 Henry Jenkins, “The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture.”
that these films centre on a very narrow conception, as they focus on “hard news, often of a political character.”

“The growing gap between the realities of journalism and its official presentation of self means that the status of these multiple and large ‘remainder’ categories is left somewhat in-determinant,” Dahlgren argues. Such a remainder category is music journalism. The binary opposition hero-villain does not work within music journalism, as – to reinforce Dahlgren’s argument – this binary usually focuses on hard, political news where there is something at stake. Therefore, it is interesting to see what kind of image various works of fiction put forward. One could argue that the image of the music journalist being a glamorous and highly interesting profession is re-enforced by various works. For example, the novel Cool for Cats (2003) by Jessica Adams, describes the life of Linda Tyler, who is working at a Chinese restaurant and is engaged to Dave, a bank clerk. When she sees an advertisement looking for a music journalist, she immediately quits her job and breaks off her engagement to live a cool, new life, so that “she is living the life she didn’t dare to dream could be hers.”

The book portrays the profession as one that every music lover dreams of. On the screen, something similar is portrayed in the film Velvet Goldmine (1998), in which Christian Bale plays Arthur Stuart, a British music journalist. In the movie, Stuart investigates the disappearance of Brian Slade (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), a glam rock artist (of course, modelled after David Bowie). This leads him on a journey of mystery, where he has to solve Slade’s puzzle. The movie provides an interesting view on the profession, since music journalists only rarely deal with investigative cases (relentless, the nature of this is a whole other discussion, but a quick guess could be money) as their job mostly leans on conducting interviews and writing reviews, aside from the occasional regular (music) news articles.

A movie which centres completely on the profession of music journalism is Almost Famous (2001), which tells the story of 15-year-old aspiring rock journalist William Miller. The story follows his first assignment as a music journalist and traces him on the road with a rock band struggling for mass popularity. As Marc Brennan argues, the storyline of Almost Famous is “overtly nostalgic and refers to an ideal of music journalism that was autonomous and artistic, and one that was free from the demands of the publishing and music

148 Ibid., 7.
149 Ibid., 7.
industries.”151 Brennan’s argument is an interesting one, because it seems that he would argue that the film presents a narrative that is outdated, but nonetheless correct. The movie, set in the early 1970s, “provide[s] a narrative that st[ands] in contrast to the contemporary practice of music journalism.”152 Interesting about this line of reasoning is that the idea that the image of music journalist’s provoked and represented in popular culture was once not only an idea, but an existing form. The following chapters set out to answer the questions that are raised by both Velvet Goldmine and Almost Famous. Velvet Goldmine leads us to ask whether investigative reporting is possible within music journalism while Almost Famous emphasizes the history of popular music journalism, to which we now turn our attention at

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152 Ibid., 1.
CHAPTER 2

Little List Makers:

Historicizing Popular Music Journalism

You greatest hits 2006 / Little list-maker / Heard codes in the melodies / You heeded the call / You were born with ten fingers and you're gonna use them all
- Vampire Weekend

Historicizing journalism is a daunting task. Not only are narratives of past events always colored by the ideological lens of the person writing them, but a broad topic like journalism has the additional tendency to lead to inevitable and sometimes even unnoticed gaps, silences and myth-making. As historian Frank Ankersmit argues, knowledge of history does not lie in the past itself, but in the historian’s own mediation of the sources. Or, to put it simply, historic text and historic reality are two separate entities. History is merely a suggestion to view the past in a certain way. This is true for music journalism as well.

The goal of this thesis is not only to focus on the roles music journalists perform within journalism in particular and in broader society as a whole, but also on the crisis position journalists now appear to be in due to the complete turnover of music, the music industry and journalism. It is the aim of this chapter to investigate certain aspects (inevitably dismissing some others) of the history of popular music journalism. According to Dave Laing there are four principal categories in music journalism: “The general press (daily and weekly newspapers and magazines), trade publications aimed at those working the music industry, fanzines (now including weblogs or blogs) and the specialist music press.” The focus of this chapter will mostly be on the specialist music press, but some space will be devoted to the other categories as well. The center of this chapter will furthermore be on two countries: The Netherlands and The United States. The first because we are based in The Netherlands and will be interviewing Dutch journalists, the second because in this way we can compare and contrast Dutch music journalism. Furthermore, the roots of both popular music and music journalism lay within the U.S. With this historical overview we aim to shed light on the changes that have occurred in this particular brand of journalism and explain their causes.

addition, we will theorize how the current media landscape is shaped, and how the profession of music journalism has changed over time.

To understand the history of music journalism and its changes, it is important to investigate the confluence of a number of facets out of which the current situation has crystallized. First and foremost are changes in society – be it technological, economic or social. Second, as we saw in chapter 1, the music industry and music journalism are a mutual influence on each other, for example because the latter is in many ways a point of access for musicians into the former. Over time, the music industry developed as well, and we will map these changes here. Finally, we will highlight several important specific changes in society which have had their impact on music and thus on music journalism.

This analysis will be done by looking at different periods in history. The history of popular music journalism can be roughly divided into three periods. The first period ranges from the 1920s up to roughly 1964. Here, the first music magazines began to exist. Music journalism started to take form, but had many shortcomings and the produced content that was entirely focused on either the journalists’ personal preferences or what was already popular. No meaning making took place. However, this period is very important, for two main reasons. First of all, music journalism as a profession began to develop. Second, the introduction of the jukebox made music accessible for more people which made it appealing to advertisers. Hence, the period marks the start of growing popularity of popular music among people, and income for magazines. Moving on, the next period is 1964-1980. We would argue that this is the most vital period because this is when professional music magazines started to appear, such as Rolling Stone and OOR. Music became an important subculture, due to various societal changes. Moreover, writing became more serious and there was a paradigm shift from writing about music that was already popular to using authenticity as a claim for authority. The third and ‘final’ period – before we move on to chapter 3 and see how the internet changed music journalism – is 1980-1995. In this period, the music industry professionalized and laid out marketing strategies. Furthermore, the television channel of MTV became important in shaping taste; leaving music journalists less power to make or break records.

2.1. Beginnings and Definitions of Forms
Music journalism (or rather: writing about music) finds its origins in the late 1600s and early 1700s in Britain. The democratization of listening practices and the consequent integration of
music in everyday life in that day and age spawned the profession. According to Edward Lee, there was a shift in the way music was performed and therefore, enjoyed. Before, concerts were often reserved for the upper class, usually even as private performances within the home. Now, entrepreneurs held concerts in public spaces such as taverns that were open to the middle class. As this shift occurred, magazines such as Tattler and Spectator – outlets for public opinion – began to include music criticism. However, while what we know as contemporary music journalism is quite old, the form as we know it today really started to emerge in the 1920s.

As Dave Laing states – aside from news texts – “the principal texts or forms of music journalism are the review and the interview.” Both of these texts adhere to completely different norms, and demand a diverse set of abilities from journalists. The interview, which became a common journalistic practice in the 1860s, nowadays is one of the most central acts in journalism. The kind of interview that we know from music journalism, however, originates in Hollywood’s movie star culture of the 1930s and 1940s. According to Laing, “this star culture operated with a dual notion of the actor as fictional screen character and ‘real personality.’” The same dual notion can be traced in music journalism, albeit in a different way: there is a tension between the musician as a person and the musician as an artist. Where, according to Laing, “many musicians wish to be known for their art rather than their personality, the interview often becomes the site of a power struggle where the journalist strives to uncover some hidden truth of a musician’s ‘personality.’” The journalists’ emphasis on personality and how it, rather than technique, leads to the production of music is fuel for a discussion that flares up every now and then. In a column, Dutch comedian Mike Boddé writes: “While jazz and classical music journalists often know very well what they are talking about, popular music journalists excel in superficiality.” Boddé argues that most popular music journalists know nothing about musical techniques and their interviews and reviews therefore lack depth and a substantive critical engagement with the music. Not everyone agrees with Boddé, though. LA Times critic Ann Powers points out that “limiting the

158 Ibid., 338.
159 Ibid., 338.
conversation to the technical facility of a pop star is a little like thinking about a painting as blue.”

The second important text form in music journalism is the review. The review, that conveys the (thoroughly grounded) opinion of the journalist, is in regard to journalism very much a specific genre. Mainly used by sports and arts journalism, it can be seen as the finished product of criticism. Since its rise in the 1960s, the review is an important genre in music journalism. For example, when Dutch music journalism platform 3voor12 reports from a music festival, their stories mainly consist of performance reviews in which the show is judged and given a grade. In order to trace the establishment of this genre in history, it is necessary to first find out what exactly constitutes the concept of criticism. The word itself is derived from the Greek krinein, which means ‘to discriminate.’ American literary critic Meyer Abrams argues in his work *The Mirror and the Lamp* that from four different literary theories, four divergent sets of criticism can be derived. First of all, there is mimetic criticism which is “the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe.” A review of that variety tries to explain how the work of art reflects and mirrors the time it is produced in. This was used by magazines in the 1960s and 1970s as we will illustrate later on. Second, there is pragmatic criticism that explains what kind of effect the art has on its audience and is, therefore, the most practical of the four. Third, Abrams describes expressive criticism, which looks at the relationship between the work and the artist, and the origins of his or her creativity. Concepts such as authenticity find their place here. Finally, there is objective criticism, which strives to describe rather than to criticize the work.

A more general definition of the review comes from Lindberg: “criticism is commonly understood as a professional, mass-mediated discourse that passes judgment on art works or events.” Both art works and events are criticized by music journalists, i.e., the music itself (in whatever form) as well as performances of music. Adding to that, according to Stjernfelt, quoted in Lindberg, “one might talk of criticism in a broad sense whenever open public judgment is lacking in explicit criteria.” These “lacking criteria” bring a concept of taste

163 Ibid., 8.
164 Ibid., 14.
165 Ibid., 21.
166 Ibid., 28.
167 Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 1.
168 Ibid., 11.
into the mix. Lindberg et al. draw on Immanuel Kant when they explain that “taste is the ability to evaluate an aesthetic experience without resorting to concepts or conscious thinking, which it is the task of reason to supply.”\(^{169}\) Regarding the relative subjectivity of taste, it is interesting to see the consensus of opinion among music journalists when it comes to certain musicians and albums. A recent example is American rock band Wilco, who recently released their fourth studio-album *The Whole Love*. The band received much of the same (enthusiastic) criticism everywhere, except on the website of Pitchfork, which gave the album a meager 6.9. A negative approach to this phenomenon would suggest that all media copy each other (as suggested in chapter 1), but Kant would call it “intersubjectivity”: this is what makes a review useful for other people, namely the assumption that “anybody can appreciate what I find beautiful, though not necessarily on any occasion.”\(^{170}\)

The music review (but not the popular music review) is much older than the interview. According to Henry Haskell, “the art of criticizing music is as old as music itself. One need look no further than Plato or St Augustine for evidence that musicians in antiquity found critics close at hand, ready as ever to dispense censure or praise.”\(^{171}\) However, he argues, “the popular image of the critic as a professional fault finder is comparatively modern.”\(^{172}\) Lindberg et al. agree with him, stating: “[l]ike other genres of criticism, art music criticism slowly emerged, becoming a specific part of the general cultural discourse during the 18th-century Enlightenment and early-19th-century Romanticism.”\(^ {173}\) These were for the most part classical music reviews, and later (from the 1920s onwards), jazz reviews. However, in this period, there were no reviews of studio albums, simply because the mass production and distribution of music had not occurred yet. This also means that in the early period of criticism, the writings were targeted to an educated and well-informed audience, and were in no way pointed to the act of consuming. Before the mass distribution of music happened, music lovers could enjoy music into their own comes by purchasing sheet music.

Peter Tschmuck points out that “at the heart of the music industry during the last third of the nineteenth century were music publishers and promoters, whose market power depended on the technological base of music concerts and the subsequent distribution of music through mass-produced sheet music.”\(^ {174}\) That changed with the gramophone, already invented by Edison in 1877. According to Tschmuck, “[w]e can consider 1902 as the birth of

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{170}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{172}\) Ibid., 1.
\(^{173}\) Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 15.
the phonographic industry as part of the music industry. From this moment on, emphasis was not placed on recording and replaying machines but on phonograms that were first and foremost media for the storage of music.”

The period up to 1920 was important for establishing the record industry. Dean Hudson argues that:

three key factors helped lead to the first big boom in recorded music [are] the adoption of a standard for sound recordings, the expiration of some key phonographic technology patents in 1914, and a 1909 copyright law that established compulsory licensing. During this boom, the number of companies selling recorded music went from three to seventy-three between 1913 and 1916. By 1919, there were 166 record companies in the United States.

As a result, this made the mass-distribution of music possible. This set the stage for writing about music. Since our subject is popular music journalism, we will turn our attention to that now.

2.2. Amateurs and Only Entertainment (1920-1964)

Between 1920 and 1964, the amount of attention paid to popular music in newspapers and in the specialist music press expanded. From its origins, however, Dutch and American popular music journalism was not nearly as professional as it is today. Not only in its presentation, but also in the way journalists perceived their own profession and what public they aimed for. The journalistic values laid out in chapter 1 – public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy and ethics – did certainly not apply to early publications. Ethics and objectivity especially left a lot to be desired. Leaving values aside, however, the music magazines that were popular in this period did establish what music publications today could only wish for, namely high circulations. These magazines offered their readers access to material on music that could be gained in no other way, although the magazines aimed at youngsters were more like the hit magazines we know today, such as the Dutch Hitkrant and American Popstars!.

These early years saw mostly two kinds of magazines that could be called music journalism, namely trade publications (written for the early music industry) and magazines for teenagers. The regained popularity of the jukebox made trade publications valuable for record companies, and thus interesting to advertize in.

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175 Ibid., 31.
Literature covering the starting point of Dutch music journalism is scarce, probably because OOR is seen as the beginning of serious music journalism. However, Hester Carvalho – a Dutch music journalist for NRC Handelsblad – together with writer Henk van Gelder researched Dutch pop media for their work. Their book Gouden Tijden: 50 Jaar Nederlandse Popbladen is assigned by the archive of Dutch pop music history. This is probably the most well documented account of Dutch pop journalism from the 1940s onwards, and, sadly enough, the only one. The authors documented the period up to the introduction of OOR quite well, so it is interesting enough to go over the highlights and see how, firstly, music journalism was conducted in this period (meaning, its genres and its working ways), and secondly, the level of professionalism of the music journalists this period. According to Carvalho and Van Gelder, Tuney Tunes, the first Dutch publication about popular music, is nothing like the glossy magazines we know today – in both form and content. Rather, it could be regarded as the forerunner of websites such as lyrics.com. Nonetheless it was the first Dutch magazine devoted to popular music, targeting an audience that up until then had been largely ignored: teenagers. The first issue – published during the Second World War, on August 6, 1942 – comprised eight gloomy pages and consisted of lyrics of American and British songs. It was an illegal publication, as it was forbidden to listen to these songs. Carvalho and Van Gelder note that this magazine is the only illegal publication from the war that is not recorded in the collection of the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie. Unjustly so, they reason, as the magazine probably appealed to many youngsters that were interested in something else than the German music that was played on the radio. Founder Jan van Haaren, son of a printer, made the magazine himself, listening to the distorted English radio and noting down the lyrics of the songs it played.

While Carvalho and Van Gelder succeeded in conducting extensive research on Dutch magazines before 1960, the U.S. side of the story is unfortunately less well documented. According to Frank Hoffman – in the years before what Don McLeese calls “Big Bang Birth of Rock Criticism” – there were two categories of specialty pop music periodicals that served as antecedents for what came after. On the one hand, just like in the Netherlands, the U.S had teen fan magazines such as Hit Parader, Tiger Beat and Country & Western Roundup. These magazines were largely void of critical approaches to artists or music, not an entirely

177 Hester Carvalho and Henk van Gelder, Gouden Tijden: 50 Jaar Nederlandse Popbladen (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Jan Mets, 1994), 9.
178 Ibid., 9.
179 Ibid., 9.
181 Frank Hoffman, “Question from Dutch student,” Email to Judith Katz, November 18, 2011.
unsurprising feat as the magazines tended to be geared to younger teenagers (e.g. identifying what kind of girls, cars, or desserts a teen idol such as Frankie Avalon or Peter Noone preferred). And just like in *Tuney Tunes*, the articles printed lyrics from popular songs. It is safe to suggest that these magazines would employ the same tactics the Dutch did with regard to falsification of stories. These magazines now receive the same critique as the Dutch weeklies do. According to Simon Frith, these publications “provided no perspective on the music they covered; they had not developed critical positions (except that what was popular must be good); they showed no curiosity about where records came from and where they went.”182 The critique these publications gave on music was more or less similar to that of the Dutch weeklies: it was based on personal preferences, or led by the artist’s popularity. In this early period therefore it can be argued that while there was writing on popular music, music journalism as a profession was not that well established yet.

On the other hand, there were trade weeklies, most notably *Billboard* (1894–), *Cash Bosh* (1942-1996), and *Record World*. Despite a tendency to promote record company releases rather than provide objective criticism, these publications offered considerable factual information and a modicum of aesthetic insights from the artists themselves.183 *Billboard*, which is today entirely devoted to music, started as a magazine that mainly published news on and for the entertainment industry, such as news on fairs. In 1933, the jukebox became increasingly popular in the United States as the Prohibition Act was repealed and Americans could enjoy alcohol out of the house again. This led to “thousands of newly (re)opened bars and cocktail lounges looking for low-cost entertainment and additional sources of revenue.”184 Due to this growing popularity of the jukebox, *Billboard* started to pay more attention to music and to jukebox charts, also because its advertisers were big jukebox companies.185 According to Garofalo, “by 1935, around 150,000 jukeboxes operated in the United States, accounting for 40 percent of the record trade.”186 This made the jukebox an important piece of technology for popular music. These charts were used by radio producers to shape programming according to popular taste. Both the jukebox and the radio provided “a guaranteed market for the record companies and a promotional vehicle for recording artists.”187

This was very important for the music industry: in the beginning of the 1930s, annual

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183 Frank Hoffman, “Question from Dutch student.” Email to Judith Katz, November 18, 2011.
185 Ibid., 55.
186 Ibid., 55.
187 Ibid., 55.
record revenues declined and “plummeted into an all-time low of $6 million in 1933, at the height of the Great Depression. By this time the depression had adversely affected all record-producing nations.”\textsuperscript{188} Compared to 1921, this was a huge fall: “Gross revenues in the United States hit an all-time high of $106 million in 1921, with comparable growth being reported elsewhere in the industrialized world.”\textsuperscript{189} According to Peter Tschmuck, it was not only the depression, but also bad-decision making: “The breakdown of the phonographic industry in the United States in the 1920s mainly resulted from the record industry’s ignorance of the commercial potential of radio broadcasting. Instead of realizing that radio could be used to promote record sales, the record majors attacked radio stations as rivals.”\textsuperscript{190} Re-thinking the radio and the jukebox would turn the tide for the record industry. Also, in the mid-1920s, broadcasting technology had developed electronic recording, which led to better sound and easier recording, and therefore, more desirable records. All these developments made the record and media industry a good target for industry publications such as \textit{Billboard}. Still, “music majors defined themselves mainly as producers of decorative music furniture for which record were supplied as an extra benefit. Therefore, the whole production and support structures of the phonographic industry were oriented towards phonographs.”\textsuperscript{191} This would change in the upcoming years.

Technology set the stage for an easier way to distribute music, providing better records that made the industry realize that they could also make money of selling records. According to Hudson:

In the beginning of the 1940s, the technology of recorded music was fundamentally unchanged from its inception. Records were still made of shellac and played at 78 RPM, providing no more than 4 minutes of music per side. The sound capturing technology was still relatively primitive as well: music was recorded live, and it was a faithful reproduction of a single performance by a musician or set of musicians time-shifted for the home listener.\textsuperscript{192}

This changed over the coming years, introducing the LP in 1948 as we know it today. In the period between 1945 and 1950, the number of home record players doubled to 25 million with over half able to play phonographs of all three speeds.\textsuperscript{193}

\textsuperscript{188} Reebee Garofalo, “Music Publishing to Mp3,” 328.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 328.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 43.
Recordings improved, music became widely available and more popular. After the war, the Dutch magazine *Tuney Tunes* broadened its content with news, photos and (sometimes fake) reports and Van Haaren hired editors to expand the magazine. Other magazines followed, such as *Muziek Express* (1957, modeled after the British *Musical Express*), that focused on “urgent subjects” and news, and *Muziek Parade* (1958), which was somewhat similar to the other two.194 Both magazines employed the same strategy as *Tuney Tunes* and were written for teenagers by adults. Magazines *Teenbeat* and *Popfoto* – with only pictures, this magazine was incredibly low cost to produce – followed.195 At this point, neither of these magazines employed the genres now associated with music journalism, the interview and review. Reasons for this are simple: at that point, now apparent links between music journalism and the music industry were not yet established. There was no easy way these ‘journalists’ could get access to musicians that did not tour as extensively as they do today. And why would they? Publishers were convinced that readers were only interested in gossip and photos.196 There was no room reserved for critical examination of music. Later on, reviews did become more important, but these were not critical. According to the writers themselves, they rather had an educational purpose, to teach readers what music was ‘good’. The magazines were concentrated on popular music, although there were editors here and there that gave some attention to jazz. Around 1965, *Muziek Parade* had a circulation of 125,000; a great number in comparison to the 16,000 readers *OOR* now has. The German edition of the magazine, outsourced by the Dutch, even sold 450,000 copies a week.197

These magazines employed young men who felt the urge to write about music – music they loved themselves. At first, they did this next to their regular day-job. One of these men was Skip Voogd, who is by Carvalho and van Gelder regarded as the first Dutch music journalist.198 He and the others of Van Haaren’s staff writers were concerned – just like music journalists today – with which artists to write about and which to ignore. The decisions mostly followed their own preferences, without really focusing on what was new. Around 1955, rock became a very popular genre in the U.S., much to the discontent of Voogd. In a review, he launched a diatribe against Elvis Presley, who was by then already a rising star in the U.S.199 However, because of the growing popularity of rock ‘n roll in The Netherlands, at

195 Ibid., 35.
196 Ibid., 19.
197 Ibid., 35.
198 Ibid., 17.
199 Ibid., 18.
a certain point, it became necessary for Voogd to stop focusing on his own preferences and he began writing about the stars of the moment.

While this seemed to introduce a sense of immediacy in Dutch music journalism, it went hand in hand with completely making up stories and inventing poll results. According to Carvalho and Van Gelder, “[i]n May 1960, [Voogd] had to come up with a byline for a picture of Fats Domino, standing by a stove, holding a pan. He wrote that in the pan was Fats Domino’s favorite dish: cooked elephant trunk.”200 Regarding this, Voogd said that “[t]he biggest bullshit, that’s what I wrote in that time. But Van Haaren didn’t care; he just wanted to sell the magazine. He always told me: this is a magazine for future housewives that don’t know more than 50 words. So I just wrote what I had to, but sometimes I just liked to spice things up and fool everyone.”201 Also, when Voogd had to write about new, emerging rock ’n roll stars (and thus, leaving behind his own preferences), there was no way he could get access to information about these new stars, as interviews or direct contact were often unavailable, especially to writers for small Dutch magazines. To compensate for this lack of original content, stories and rumors were concocted to lure consumers. As a result, people that called themselves music journalists – writers about music seems to be a better term here – seemed lazy. They made their money writing anything they wanted, which also gave them a twisted sense of autonomy; whatever they would write, the public would eat it all. To conclude this period, while there was writing on music – comparable to today’s teenage magazines, some trade publications left aside – and there were that could make a living writing about it, music journalism was not established as a profession yet, nor did it employ the characteristics that we expect from journalists.

2.3. DIY, Authenticity and Commercialization (1964-1980)

The period in which there was no actual criticism or journalism to be found in popular music magazines lasted for about 20 years. According to Lindberg et al, “only after 1964 – in the wake of the massive success of the Beatles and with a new quest for ‘originality’ – did writers take on a strategy of treating pop and rock music ‘seriously,’” the kind of seriousness that was lacking in the Dutch teen magazines.202 This period is where most history books start and marks the birth of the profession, and it is also much subject to myth-making. New writing paradigms were introduced and connected to the sociopolitical climate of both countries. This

200 Ibid., 19.
201 Ibid., 19.
202 Ulf Lindberg et al., Rock Criticism from the Beginning, 69.
new period saw the birth of rock ‘n roll criticism in the U.S., and the arrival of critical magazines and later the first ‘real’ music magazines in The Netherlands. The outlook on music that these magazines offer is completely different from their predecessors, as their idea of how music should be perceived differs vastly. Music journalists recognized, as Garofalo argues, that “the text is as much a product of its social and political context as any individual’s creativity or talent.” The journalists employed this new mode of writing, and according to Harley and Botsman, “social questions and origins [started] creeping in to commentaries about bands and music ... [and] The Times They Are a Changing [became] an emblem for a generation and the ‘song with a message’ became an established part of popular music culture.” Music critics converted to having a more or less explanatory role. Of course, this was instigated by a changing society. Technology changed as well, making records more desirable and easy to produce.

The lack of “real” music journalism and the sense of immediacy of the first three Dutch magazines described above became remarkably apparent when The Beatles became popular in Great Britain. Van Gelder and Carvalho describe an England that was entirely under the spell of the band in 1963. However, as late as March 1964, Muziek Express published an article about the fab four on its front page. The image of these three magazines as has-beens was then re-enforced by what Co de Kloet, A Dutch television producer, wrote the following in the Radio-TV Gids

*Tuney Tunes, Muziekparade and Muziek Expres* don’t even try to be original or do anything more than publish big pictures with laughing heads, publish charts, or write about the appearance of teenage stars. This is the formula for success: no information about important stuff, nothing to think about and nothing that goes below the surface. This is the image of the three most important magazines for Dutch teenagers. Very disappointing.

This would alter in the beginning of the 1960s, when great changes happened in Dutch society. From 1951 until 1973, the economy grew because of post-war industrialization and re-building. However, due to low wages, purchasing power stayed low, and the growing economy did not immediately benefit the average citizen. At the end of the 1950s, Dutch trade unions already aimed for higher salaries, but the real turning point was 1960: in that

204 Mark Brennan, “Writing To Reach You,” 122.
205 Hester Carvalho and Henk van Gelder, *Gouden Tijden: 50 Jaar Nederlandse Popbladen*, 32.
206 Ibid., 45.
year, about 40,000 workers went on strike. According to historian Hans Righart, this protest has to be seen as “the first openly and unmistakable disrupting of the post-war atmosphere of social harmony.”207 In 1963, salaries rose by 9 percent; in 1964, by 15 percent.208 With this amelioration of buying power, consumption naturally increased. Between 1958 and 1966, consumer products such as televisions and gramophone players saw significant hikes in sales. On top of that, people had more free time and began to spend more money on entertainment, such as music.209 The youth born after the war was a very critical one and had witnessed the lifting of sociopolitical and religious barriers that had been very prominent in Dutch society before. They could enjoy more education than their parents and had more free time. According to Lutgard Mutsears, the Dutch youths had more money than the generation before them, dressed differently and began to listen to their own music.210 The ‘old’ kind of uncritical music journalism was no longer suited to the kind of youth culture that erupted in the beginning of the 1960s. The magazines that followed in that period often dealt with politics and music together, precisely because music journalists believed in the idea pointed out by Harley and Botsman, namely that music is a cultural and political product.

A magazine that played into the concerns and preoccupations of this new youth culture and the political climate was Hitweek, founded by Willem de Ridder and Peter J. Muller, both 18-years old. Van Gelder and Carvalho argue that Hitweek came into existence on a watershed moment, exactly because of that evolution in youth culture.211 The magazine also broke with former ways of music journalism: there were no editors that filled the magazine with gossip, pictures and fake eyewitness reports. More importantly, music journalism here did not only focus on music as an art form, but also became political, meaning that writers examined music in its zeitgeist and that required in-depth pieces. That was exactly what De Ridder and Muller wanted, since up until then, the pop music magazines were written and filled by adults – not by teenagers. Also important was the democratization of the magazine. In the first issue, Muller writes: “this is your and our magazine. Hitweek has no editors, no editor-in-chief.”212 People all over the country could and would send content to Hitweek, ranging from photos to essays. Its circulation quickly rose to 45,000, but it was often read by

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208 Ibid., 55.
209 Ibid., 58.
211 Hester Carvalho and Henk van Gelder, Gouden Tijden: 50 Jaar Nederlandse Popbladen, 46.
212 Ibid., 46.
ten times that amount of people. In the first years, most articles in the magazine concerned music, but over time, articles about politics and liberation began to predominate. Its target audience began to shift from teenagers to university-aged students. Important in this period is the realization that teenagers and students could also be consumers of music (records). *Hitweek*, which later would be described as a “paper dream,” did not share this consumerist viewpoint and would live a short life: four years after its first issue, in 1969, it vanished. A new magazine, *Aloha*, took over its writers and position, but music as a subject to write about faded more and more into the background. Its editors would rather give attention to sex and politics. The first issue contained exactly one essay on pop music.²¹³

Whereas *Hitweek* had a clear connection to youth culture and politics, this societal engagement was much less pronounced in *Muziekkrant OOR* (later renamed to simply *OOR*), which still exists today and for many marks the start of serious music journalism. Founded by political science student Barend Toet in 1971, its self-applied mission was to write about all kinds of music styles, ranging from blues to experimental music. With its emphasis on music and the artists themselves – instead of on popular culture and its relationship to politics and protest – the use of the interview increased. In his book *Keihard & Swingend*, Toet describes how he secures his first interview as a student with Frank Zappa: “After the show, I walked nervously to Zappa and asked him if I could do an interview with him in the upcoming days. He said it was fine and gave me his address and phone number.”²¹⁴ That straightforwardness marked the days when there was almost no influence from record labels and there were no press days where journalists are only able to talk to an artist for a short amount of time. According to Carvalho and Van Gelder, that combination of being a music fan and having easy access to musicians did not at all lead to the interview as a battleground for meaning. Rather, as Carvalho and van Gelder write, it led to the fact that “the *OOR* reporter sometimes identified himself so much with the interviewee, that his article gave the impression of two people being absolutely like-minded and who could as well have spent the afternoon smiling at each other.”²¹⁵ At the same time, they argue that did not matter for the average reader, because he or she could identify with the interview. In the same period, reporters at *OOR* began to bombard their articles with culturally significant names of for example philosophers and critical thinkers to give it an air of importance, thus making pop criticism seem like serious business. However, not everyone agrees with Carvalho and Van Gelder on this. Emma

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²¹³ Hester Carvalho and Henk van Gelder, *Gouden Tijden: 50 Jaar Nederlandse Popbladen*, 53.
Boelhouwer, who researched the first seven years of OOR, states that another self-applied mission of OOR was that “all interviews and features had to be serious and should not only describe gossip. Interviews had to be critical.”\textsuperscript{216} After conducting a content analysis, she states that “interviews and reviews had a prominent role in OOR in these years.”\textsuperscript{217} Of course, as OOR worked with several reporters that worked apart from each other, an interview could be less critical sometimes, depending on who interviewed which artist. But the interesting thing here is that the premise of OOR’s work was that pop music had to be taken seriously.

In the U.S., society was also changing rapidly. Through the 1950s and 1960s, “interstate highways, suburbia, and white flights from inner cities changed the complexion of the country inexorably.”\textsuperscript{218} Just as in The Netherlands, more youngsters than ever before could enjoy education. Festivals such as Woodstock showed what a dominant cultural force rock had become, and at the same time, how music and protest (for example, against the war in Vietnam) could go hand in hand. According to Pedro Nunes, “the importance that popular music had in the 1960s counter-culture movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-Vietnam War protests and the then emerging rock festivals (most notably in Woodstock and the Isle of Wight) has been highlighted [by several researchers],” such as Garofalo and Street.\textsuperscript{219} Artists such as Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger heralded this new folk movement. In the U.S. media, at the same time, popular music was given little attention. For example, in newspapers 88\% of the articles concerning music were about classical music.\textsuperscript{220} According to McLeese, “[w]hen rock was hitting a creative peak in the mid-1960s, almost no newspapers employed a staffer whose beat was this music, and few gave the music much coverage at all.”\textsuperscript{221} However, attention to popular music and (counter)culture was given by the specialist music press.

In the specialist music press, the same DIY attitude that started Hitweek influenced the start of the first American rock magazine Crawdaddy! in 1966. The first issue was entirely written by its founder, then college student Paul Williams. That issue consisted of an editorial (“Get Off My Cloud,” named after a Rolling Stones song) and eight pages of reviews. Those

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{216} Emma Boelhouwer, “‘We waren koning Eénoog in het land der blinden.’ De Succesjaren van Muziekkrant OOR: 1971-1978.” MA thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2010, 39.
\item \textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 40.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Ulf Lindberg et al., Rock Criticism from the Beginning, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Pedro Nunes, “Popular Music and the Public Sphere: The Case of Portuguese Music Journalism,” PhD. Diss., University of Sterling, 2004, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{221} Don McLeese. “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 440.
\end{itemize}
were “mostly of 45s [he] obtained by making a pest of [himself] at various record companies midtown New York offices.” This was an interesting development (acquiring records from record companies) for the serious (almost non-existent) popular music press, which had not before worked together with the music industry – a theme to which we will return later. Already at the end of the 1960s, the DIY attitude from before changed. In 1967, a year after *Crawdaddy, Rolling Stone* was launched. According to Lindberg et al., *Rolling Stone* was launched as a commercial magazine: “The mainstream media and probably a part of the readership viewed *Rolling Stone* as an underground magazine, but in reality it was planned and has always functioned as a commercial venture.” Soon, the magazine would be filled with reviews and even got its own review editor, Greil Marcus. Marcus attracted writers who shared the ambition of interpreting rock music in terms of American culture and politics, using mimetic criticism (“the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe,” see footnote 11). These writers, such as Jon Landau and Lester Bangs, have since been mythologized. In retrospect, their profession is viewed with much more glamour than it probably had. But, as we will explain later on, the music industry did not yet fully exploit the direct link between the music press and promotion. This means that well-selling artists such as the Rolling Stones were at this point in time not yet pre-occupied with selling a certain image of themselves via the music press. Music journalists therefore had more room to determine themselves what to write about a record or an artist. To briefly return to the main subject of these writings, in line with Garofalo, and Harley and Botsman, Marc Brennan argues about these 1960’s titles:

[They] were interested in looking at music as a cultural form, rather than an art form, and were keen to impart a connection between popular music and lifestyle. More specifically, they were advocating a more political lifestyle and, as such, paid great attention to society and political reform as indicated by their attention to politics, the Vietnam War, civil rights for women and people of color and sexual politics (...) Particular musical texts were understood as promoting political, social and cultural change and it was this understanding that would create a new approach in the establishment and maintenance of a relationship between music journalists and their readers.

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223 Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 133.
224 Ibid., 134.
225 Ibid., 134.
Critics felt the need to educate their readers, although not in the way that the Dutch weeklies envisioned, but more like new Dutch magazines such as Hitkrant and later on (detached from politics) OOR.

According to Marc Brennan, in these new rock magazines it is the (constructed) concept of authenticity that has its admittance in American popular music writing. According to Weiethaunet and Lindberg – who draw on Simon Frith – this concept and its “various uses have been imperative to the making of popular music studies, insofar as they relate to the central questions of musical meaning and value.”226 The same authors argue that “problems connected to ‘authenticity’ characterize the twentieth century.”227 They quote Keir Keightley, who “places ‘rock’s search for authenticity’ in the context of the rise of modern mass society, and finds that it ‘underlines a general anxiety about the status of the modern self.’”228 This means that the concept of authenticity (that takes on various forms as we will see) is of importance in the professionalization of popular music journalism. It means a new system of meaning making that connects popular music journalism to modern society, and marks a professionalization point for the profession. This forms a break with the former paradigm that was popular in music writing. Namely, before, music journalists would determine the value of music on the basis of popularity. Stratton says about this early and populist form of music journalism: “There is here also a tendency, it should be noted, to see ‘hit’ records as also being ‘good’.”229 However, the use of authenticity “was often evoked to describe those who were understood to embody an anti-hegemonic stance in, for example, lyrics, musical form, dress and performance.”230 This ‘anti-hegemonic’ stance of music was most visible in the folk and hippie movements in the 1960s and early 1970s. Brennan draws on Harley and Botsman when he argues that “a concept of authenticity had crept into music journalism as artists and texts were deemed critically worthy for demonstrating signs of engaging with a culture that opposed to mass commodification and mainstream lifestyles.”231

Stratton employs a similar argument in his article “Art and Commercialism in the Record Industry,” but detaches authenticity from any kind of political argument. He accentuates the problematic aspect of criticism, namely that it is impossible to come up with objective criteria and concludes that “the solution would appear to be through a taken-for-

227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
230 Marc Brennan, “Writing To Reach You,” 40.
231 Ibid., 41.
granted understanding that ‘real’ emotion is something understood by all people – that at some non-rational level all human beings are alike.”232 He underscores that the role of the music journalist is to sell more copies of their publication and therefore they have to be seen by their readers as being part of a music community rather than being part of the music industry, which stands for the other part of the binary opposition, namely commercialism.233 Authenticity is then merely a theme employed by the press to create a relationship with the public. This is an interesting difference between this argument and that of Harley and Botsman, because they argue it is not a “way” but rather a reflection of popular (folk) music in the 1960s.

Steve Jones and Kevin Featherly also note that authenticity is one of the “three intertwined themes in popular-music criticism.”234 They note that “the job of the music critic is, fundamentally, to convince readers the particular music is good or bad,” and thereby, investigate “the degree to which a musician is able to articulate the thoughts and desires of an audience and not pander to the ‘mainstream’ by diluting their sound or their message.”235 However, the binary opposition authenticity vs. commercialism is essentially a false one. “From the start,” said Michael Lydon in 1970, “rock has been commercial in its very essence … [I]t was never an art form that just happened to make money, nor a commercial undertaking that some-times became art. Its art was synonymous with its business.”236 That was probably not as apparent to everyone, and while this is a discourse ascribed by all authors to the 1960s and early 1970s, the notion of authenticity is still a criterion today. It comes back in reviews and features on indie artists (who, just as Lydon argued, are often signed by major labels and are also essentially ‘commercial’). This happened most recently with Lana Del Rey: some music reviewers and bloggers questioned her authenticity, while some others note that the argument about authenticity is outdated in this postmodern era. As one blogger notes: “There’s no such thing as a “real” band – there’s only the reality of what the music means to the listener.”237

Stratton’s argument that music journalists used the notion authenticity to bond with readers to make them realize that they were independent from the music industry is an

233 Ibid., 272.
235 Ibid., 31-32.
interesting one when examining the music industry in the early 1960s. Because, as Lindberg et al. argue,

it should be kept in mind that the music industry looked very different in the early 1960s than it did in the 1980s and 1990s. Before the Beatles, and even into the 1970s, not only critics but the industry as a whole was more naïve in the sense that promotional campaigns and economic investments in artists were of an altogether different dimension, if they existed at all, than in the MTV age.\(^\text{238}\)

Thus, the idea that record companies could give out records to journalists for promotion began to develop very, very slowly. “Therefore,” Lindberg et al. continue, “the role of the critic was also different, in that the greatest thrill of the job might very well be to discover and inform the public about new and exciting bands.”\(^\text{239}\)

Soon enough, that would change. According to Devon Powers, it was quicker than the early 1970s that Lindberg et al. propose: “In 1967, the music industry enjoyed its first year of billion-dollar profits, with rock catapulting earnings to stratospheric levels. Even as the larger American economy began to weaken during the early part of the 1970s, a rock-fueled music business remained a steady source of revenue.”\(^\text{240}\) Adding to that, Garofalo argues that “the 1960s may have been experienced by artists and audiences as a period of political awakening and cultural development, but for the music industry it was a period of commercial expansion and corporate consolidation.”\(^\text{241}\) However, that would not immediately mean that the critic’s self decided role would change. The relationship between rock criticism and the music business was, according to Lindberg et al., “at best indirect” because “rock critics themselves were more interested in acting as tastemakers, positioned somewhere between informed fans and intellectual pedagogues.”\(^\text{242}\) Those early seventies also marked the start of music journalism in daily newspapers. Some of the bigger papers even had “more than one staffer devoted to the popular music beat, routinely reviewing albums and concerts, profiling artists, and filing trend pieces for a daily readership.”\(^\text{243}\)

\(^{238}\) Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 77.
\(^{239}\) Ibid., 77.
\(^{242}\) Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 75.

From the early 1980s until roughly 1995, the music industry experienced a number of changes that would be crucial for the continuation of the specialist music press. These years saw the professionalization of the music press, which was accompanied by fanzines and magazines devoted to other kinds of music than solely pop or rock appeared. Minority genres, such as hip hop appeared and while music journalists before would try to put music in a sociological perspective, these were the years were identity politics played an important role, giving the journalists a much wider framework to work with. Furthermore, a new kind of musical genre, which researchers called “new pop” emerged in a society characterized by ideologies of consumerism. This means that not all music was counterculture anymore as was much the case in the 1960s and 1970s. Not only the magazines, but also the music industry professionalized and became more aware of marketing strategies. One of these strategies appeared in the form of Music Television (MTV), and television as a whole would become much more important in shaping taste and changing the experience of music. These developments would finally result in less consecrating power for music journalists (see chapter 1) and declining sales for the specialist music press.

The magazines that were started in the 1960s and 1970s would continue to professionalize, partially with the rise of so-called “style bibles, magazines devoted to fashion and how-to-dress-and-behave, and rock magazines used the same glossy color-printing.”\(^{244}\) The use of photos also changed, as for now, photos did not contain sweaty musicians, but were rather “stylized pictures taken at photo sessions, often looking like the photos in adverts.”\(^{245}\) Specialist music press magazines were giving more attention to fashion, and they were joined by fanzines in the 1980s that were a lot more synonymous with how the music magazines were before. A fanzine is a magazine that is primarily devoted to one musical genre, and is from its origins characterized with a DIY attitude. According to Carvalho and Van Gelder, “[w]hen the musical taste of the wider public started to differ and the market disintegrated, the number of hobbyists that didn’t find what they needed in OOR increased.”\(^{246}\) An example of a Dutch fanzine that still exists today is Aardschok, which is devoted to hard rock and metal. Its editors-in-chief Mike van Rijswijk stressed that the writing style he and his editors employ is amateurish for a reason: “We do that on purpose. Of course, we could write rather strict and neutral, but then you don’t use the language of our readers and

\(^{244}\) Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 243.
\(^{245}\) Ibid., 243.
\(^{246}\) Hester Carvalho and Henk van Gelder, *Gouden Tijden: 50 Jaar Nederlandse Popbladen*, 96.
fans.” The advantage of fanzines or magazines that focus on such a specific genre is that its editors are aware of the audience they are writing for. This has obvious benefits for (specialized) record stores and labels as well. In a 2004 interview with 3voor12, Van Rijswijk claimed that “record stores adjust their purchase to the reviews in Aardschok. Per month, around 300 CDs in this genre appear.” Because hard rock and metal are such specific genres, the highly specialist music press is able to survive, just like the few record stores completely devoted to these genres.

This also happened in the U.S.; according to Lindberg et al.: “The market [for magazines] has become more finely segmented, with each magazine seeking out its own small niche, in an almost confusing diversification,” as the U.S. also saw more magazines devoted to genres such rap and hip hop, metal and Latino music. According to Toynbee, “fanzines, unlike the underground press in the late 1960s, became a supplement, rather than an alternative, to the inky.” This diversification was the result of individualization – people began to identify with certain groups according to subcultures, instead of identifying with church and the family – in both American and Dutch society, but also of a specific technological advancement: cheap printers made it easier to print larger numbers of magazines. Also, while in the 1970s the authenticity vs. commercial binary opposition was what both rock critics and youth culture were turned to since “by 1980, the mainstream-subculture opposition already felt dated. … Identity was individual and makeable.”

However, music for protest was still being produced, but now rather by minority groups such as African Americans, some of whom devoted their time to hip hop and rap music. This contributed to the diversification of fanzines produced in the 1980s. One such fanzine was The Source, which still exists today and pays attention to hip hop music, politics and culture. Another, more recent one is Vibe, founded in 1993.

The music industry, which was “taken by surprise” in the 1960s by the sudden popularity of rock music, would grow and develop in the 1980s. According to Lindberg et al., “[t]he music industry has gathered much experience in the 1960s. 1980s marketing strategies became far more developed and based on improved sensitivity towards the

247 Ibid., 98.
249 Ulf Lindberg et al., Rock Criticism from the Beginning, 226.
251 Ulf Lindberg et al., Rock Criticism from the Beginning, 226.
252 Ibid., 226.
market.”253 The start of that era was not a good one for the music industry; from an “all-time high” of $11.5 billion in the 1980s, “the sales figures from IFPI’s [the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry] two dozen or so reporting countries declined some 18 percent to $9.4 billion in 1983.”254 This meant that Columbia Records alone eliminated 7,000 positions worldwide. The way to recovery was found in making millions by signing superstars, a typical phenomenon of the 1980 and 1990s. For example, Michael Jackson’s single *Thriller* (released in 1983) went on to sell 40 million copies. According to Garofalo, the single “Thriller signaled an era of blockbuster LPs featuring a limited number of superstar artists as the solution to the industry’s economic woes.”255 Because, the music industry probably reasoned, “if a single artist can move 40 million units, why shoulder the extra administrative, production, and marketing costs of 80 artists moving half a million units each?”256 Michael Jackson was not the only golden act that provided the industry with large revenues; so did Madonna, Prince, Bruce Springsteen, Wham! and Phil Collins (and in the 1990s, groups such as Take That and The Backstreet Boys). Technology played a key role in this ‘success story’: both Philips and Sony introduced the compact disc in the early 1980s, which was “far superior to the LP” in terms of ease to use and resistance to wear. The CD would enable high revenue sales for a number of reasons. First of all, CDs were priced significantly higher than LPs. Second, the CD opened up another revenue stream for labels, namely that of the back catalog, old LPs reissued on CD. As a result, customers started to buy CDs they already owned on LP. However, the cassette tape remained popular, because of its quality as a recordable medium. As a result, the 1980s also gave the music industry “financial” headaches because of two problems that will be expanded on in the next chapter: piracy and home taping.257

It was also at this point in time that “the transnational music companies began to think of themselves more as exploiters of rights than producers of records.”258 Their new mission was to “develop as many ‘revenue streams’ as possible. Music television and cross-media marketing – particularly movie tie-ins – were crucial to this development.”259 This meant that the music industry found other strategies to market its music than through the music press. An interesting way of marketing is using movies, and some singers became famous in this way,

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253 Ibid., 226.
255 Ibid., 343.
256 Ibid., 343.
257 Ibid., 344.
258 Ibid., 343.
259 Ibid., 343.
as for example Celine Dion (*Titanic*). Lindberg et al. quote Ira Robbins, founder of the American rock magazine *Trouser Press*, who argues that “by 1984, with the onset of MTV and the evident failure of alternative music to penetrate the mainstream, except on a sporadic basis, the record industry lost interest in print advertising. Other media were poaching our turf covering the same bands faster and more colorfully.”\(^{260}\) Especially MTV (which now switched to series instead of music) was a blessing for the music industry, because they could now promote music through television (reaching a wider audience), and generating profit was easy for MTV, as they did not have to create their own content: the music industry paid for the video clips. According to Hudson, “When MTV began broadcasting it quickly became apparent that music videos were extremely effective at driving new artist’s sales. This was particularly true with charismatic, telegenic artists like Michael Jackson and Madonna, who mastered the music video and became multimedia megastars.”\(^{261}\) According to Toynbee, the specialist music press was not that eager to accept MTV as an opportunity to enjoy more music: “Responses to music video in the rock press itself most often took the form of a warning that secondary aspects of music (performer image, visualization of song content) will come to dominate over primary elements (the elusive ‘music itself’).”\(^{262}\) What also emerged from the popularity of MTV was the focus on the release of singles rather than full records, since singles could be promoted perfectly with videoclips.

MTV perfectly corresponded with the new music style that emerged together with the new super stars. Whereas rock music dominated the 1960s and 1970s, the early 1980s saw the emergence of a genre called new pop, “remapping the field, leaving old notions of authenticity behind,” because it was clearer that marketing strategies were behind these musicians.\(^{263}\) The pop music of the 1980s had, according to Lindberg et al., the same “bold and brash” ideology of Thatcherism and Reaganism’s “live and let live ideology” and was “a celebration of image, surface, and new electronically created sounds.”\(^{264}\) Put in a negative way, it was style over substance and celebrity over music. Some – primarily focusing on the U.S. – suggest that people in the West had nothing anymore to protest against (besides the growing inequality in the world) and both the political climate (the election of Ronald Reagan in the U.S.) and the music (the celebration of consumerism instead of protest) reflected that. Together with the arrival of the music video, pop musicians put an emphasis on style and

\(^{260}\) Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 246.


\(^{263}\) Ulf Lindberg et al., *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 223.

\(^{264}\) Ibid., 219.
(visual) image. The artifice of new pop is seen as the direct opposite of notions of authenticity a decade earlier.

Just like the American magazines, OOR professionalized as well, with a new logo and a glossy magazine look. In the mid-1980s, the magazine suffered under the impasse of the music industry described above. Therefore, its editors decided to pay more attention to other forms of popular culture, such as film and literature, and also features about matters related to music, such as groupies or music collectors. And with the growing popularity of dance music, OOR reporters had to figure out new ways of reporting, since dance producers were not stars like pop and rock musicians and definitely not mouthpieces of a generation. Since then, the focus of OOR is all-inclusive, with reporters of all ages that specialized in specific genres.

But the emergence of new genres was not the main difficulty OOR had to deal with. With the professionalizing of the music industry also came the regulation of press attention of artists. According to Venrooij: “By providing press kits and biographies to journalists, the publicity departments of record labels try to construct a particular image of an artist, which can include the framing of an artist in terms of influences, inspirations, and so on.”

Carvalho and Van Gelder quote OOR reporter Bert van der Kamp who states that with this changing of the music industry, the attitude of music journalists changed as well: “In the 1970s, we used to camp in front of someone’s hotel or we infiltrated dressing rooms for an interview. Now, people wait at home until they get a call from labels. The younger generation shows no initiative.” However, there is an upside to this. Tom Engelshoven, who joined the magazine in 1990 and still works for OOR, claims that when he came to write for the magazine he published pieces that were critical, arrogant and sometimes ironic: “I think people view musicians as being sacred. But they’re not, they are just people. Most reporters at OOR can’t be good reporters, because they are fans in the first place.” When music labels began to regulate artists, a need to search for another image than is projected by the label emerged, making the interview more critical.

2.5. Conclusion
The relatively young profession of music journalism knows a stormy history. During the three periods discussed above one could see how the profession of music journalism slowly

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265 Hester Carvalho and Henk van Gelder, Gouden Tijden: 50 Jaar Nederlandse Popbladen, 83.
266 Alex van Venrooij. “Classifying Popular Music in the United States and the Netherlands,” 613.
267 Hester Carvalho and Henk van Gelder, Gouden Tijden: 50 Jaar Nederlandse Popbladen, 88.
268 Ibid., 88.
progressed and, consequently, professionalized. In the beginning, there were only stenciled magazines aimed at teenagers, making up rumors and writing about music that was already popular. That changed in the 1960s with the coming of serious music magazines that employed writers which linked music to the sociopolitical climate and envisioned different roles for themselves, corresponding with the roles we described in chapter 1. At the same time, music recording and distribution developed due to new technologies and ultimately became a commodity from which the music industry discovered that it could sell and make profit. Even though the profession saw great alterations during these first years, nobody could have expected that it would transform completely with the rise of the internet.
CHAPTER 3

21st Century Digital Boys:
The Internet and Popular Music Journalism

‘Cause I’m a 21st century digital boy / I don’t know how to read but I’ve got a lot of toys
- Bad Religion

Music journalism basically depends on two big industries: the music industry, which provides the journalist with material and access and often indirectly funds publication by advertising in music magazines; and the news industry, of which the music journalist is a part. Both these industries – and therefore music journalism as well – have been (and still are) in steady decline due to the rise of the internet.

Don McLeese starts his article “Straddling the Cultural Chasm” by asking his reader the following:

Imagine an industry in free fall, with no bottom in sight. From soaring profits in the 1980s and 1990s, it now finds that a commodity that recently generated billions of dollars has been declared all but worthless in the marketplace, requiring little more investment on the part of consumers than an internet point and click. As the industrial infrastructure collapses, massive layoffs lead not to the promise of a brighter future but to the threat of even greater layoffs.269

Putting this example into practice, McLeese writes: “Now imagine two industries hurtling into that bottomless pit. The description above could apply equally to the music industry and the newspaper industry,” as both industries have suffered great losses.270 Technological revolutions in particular have forced the industries to rethink and reinvent every facet of their respective media, since their former business models – that were targeted towards direct consumer sales – became absolute when both information and music became freely available online.271 Since then, they have been struggling in figuring out viable business models. For example, newspapers still struggle with earning money online, trying out different methods such as a pay wall to move away from direct sales. David J. Teece summarizes the problem nicely and argues the following:

270 Ibid., 433.
As traditional information providers, newspapers have employed a revenue model for decades in which the paper is sold quite inexpensively (usually at a nominal level, insufficient to cover costs), while publishers looked to advertising revenue to cover remaining costs plus provide a profit. In recent years, this business model has been undermined by websites like eBay and Craigslist that have siphoned off advertising revenues from job and real estate listings and classified ads: many newspapers have gone out of business.  

With regard to the news industry, some media have been more successful than others. For example, Dutch newspaper *Het Financieele Dagblad* has been very successful in erecting a pay wall.  

Also the music industry has to come up with a new plan when it – as will be explained further on in this chapter – as it still first struggles with illegal digital downloading. Now, while trying to patch the leaks that illegal downloading has created, it is still figuring out viable ways to earn money. One of these ways is legal streaming via programs such as Spotify, which provide a multitude of possibilities to earn money selling subscriptions. Until today, however, these streaming websites did not get the music industry out of its current crisis.

The problem is complex and it is not only grasped by people working in the industry itself but recently also by researchers. For example, in April 2012, researchers Peter Tschmuck and Dennis Collopy released the first issue of a new journal, the *International Journal of Music Business Research*, which focuses on economic issues in the music industry, because, as the researchers argue, “there is a gap for a publication wholly dedicated to the academic research of music business and industry topics.” The first issue features among others an article on music distribution models and an article on advertising. To examine this crisis in both industries, let us first focus on how the problems started in the music and in the news industry.

According to CNN, in the music industry, sales and licensing revenues fell from $14.6 billion in 1999 to $6.3 billion in 2009, and many blame the declining sales on digital music. It may be almost impossible to grasp how the music industry made such a big fall after being so enormously successful in the 1980s and in the beginning of the 1990s, generating

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272 Ibid., 178.
enormous profits with the introduction of the CD, as already argued in chapter 2. When superstars such as Michael Jackson and Madonna were signed, and the industry discovered the boy band formula with groups such as the Backstreet Boys and ‘N Sync, it seemed that the music industry would be led into a stable future. As McLeese summarizes, “through most of the 1990s, both the newspaper and music industries appeared invincible.”276 It was the internet that spoiled the fun. For the music industry, whiz kid Shawn Fanning’s introduction of Napster in 1999, a program that allowed users to share music encoded in MP3 format with each other, meant that their worst fear had come back. After replacing the recordable cassette with the more copy proof CD, home piracy was once again in full swing.

As for newspapers, when more consumers began to depend on the internet for their (free) news, “both circulation and advertising diminished dramatically, particularly for papers in a secondary position.”277 As an example, McLeese lists Denver, Seattle, and Tucson, three cities that had to shut down their print dailies that “had been local institutions for as long as 150 years.”278 This also meant a dramatic change in ownership. In the 1920s, a newspaper chain would own five newspapers; by the turn of the century, “ten chains had more than 50%.”279 This change in news consumption and, therefore, the well doing of newspapers, also effected and still effects music journalism. According to McLeese newspapers have “traditionally provided a livelihood for so many pop music critics, along with music magazines that have relied so heavily on music industry advertising.”280 The technological developments have “mortally wounded the financial structure of the news business,” and some newspapers have even ceased to exist. Others have found ways or are still finding ways to generate profit on the web and trying out new and viable business models. The music journalist, meanwhile, stands “with one foot on each crumbling ledge of an ever widening abyss.”281 McLeese quotes LA Times journalist Ann Powers, who states that music journalists find themselves “in the perfect storm of careers, the worst combination of covering an industry that’s completely changing within one that’s completely changing.”282 It means that journalist not only have to rethink who they are writing for and what they are writing on, but also if they can still earn a livelihood with their profession

277 Ibid., 438.
278 Ibid., 439.
279 Ibid., 439.
280 Ibid., 435.
281 Ibid., 435.
As the internet has brought those traditionally in charge to their knees, so has it given rise to a DIY workplace for amateurs who now have the same space and opportunities available to them as professionals. Furthermore, just as this affects all of journalism, so does it alter and change music and music journalism. While the internet seems to transform and wound the major industries (in The Netherlands for instance, the most visited website for popular news is NU.nl, which is a news outlet that has no paper version), it does create room for new initiatives and it promises plenty of opportunity to the practice of music criticism: contemporary music journalists have many tools at their disposal to evaluate music.\textsuperscript{283} For example, through social networks they can interact with their readers, who now have a far more active role than they did in the pre-internet era. Furthermore, amateur journalists can even help to strengthen music journalism; this is one of the topics of our case studies we present in chapter 7. Thus, while the Internet challenges traditional media to rethink their strategy, it also gives rise to new ideas and music journalism that is promising for the future. Since looking toward the future is an important part of our thesis, we will examine the positive effects of the Internet as well.

But first, this chapter will focus on how and why both industries have entered hard times, and explore how this has impacted music journalism. Many books and papers have been published that focus upon the problems of the news industry such as the book \textit{The Vanishing Newspaper} by Philip Meyer. This impacts journalism as a whole, and therefore also our subject, music journalism. In this chapter, rather than just focus on the journalism industry issues, we outline the matters the music industry is facing in detail, and relate these to the issues that journalism faces, and music journalism in particular. Furthermore, the chapter will trace the main reasons how the internet has influenced the way people consume music and how this has impacted and changed music journalism, as well as what competition traditional journalism faces from amateur blogs. Lastly, it will look at some positive effects the internet has had on re-inventing – new forms of content, new websites, new ways of working – music journalism. After this chapter, sufficient knowledge will have been given to provide a basis for interesting discussion and the interviews we did with music journalists as part of our research.

\textsuperscript{283}“Resultaten” \textit{STIR}, 2012, \url{http://www.stir.nl/resultaten/} (accessed May 26, 2012).
3.1. The Fall of the Music Industry

Several factors together led to the declining sales and hard times that have faced the music industry in recent years. This section will examine these factors. First, in the 1990s, there was the huge investment in genres such as teen pop that would prove to be temporal. Second, the industry’s reluctance to release singles because they were not profitable enough ultimately led to consumers seeking to satisfy their musical appetite elsewhere than in record stores. Third, building on the previous argument, the invention of Napster in 1999 and other (illegal) peer-to-peer file sharing software brought a new paradigm for consuming mainstream media to which most music labels were unsure how – and therefore too late – to adapt. These file sharing programs also benefitted from other software such as WinAmp, which provided an easy way to play MP3 files on Windows computers. This created an environment where music journalists lost the connection to the consumer and people could access music for free and thus did not need authoritative guidance. More about this will be elaborated in section 3.2.

We ended chapter 2 by explaining the success of Music Television (MTV), and how the CD came to replace the LP and the cassette in the 1980s and 1990s: it gave consumers the opportunity to buy a whole new record collection of CDs by superstars, advertised by flashy music videos. “Profit margins on CDs were higher, promotional costs minimal, recording costs and advances nil: what could be better for the music industry than selling consumers millions of copies of albums that they already owned, at a significantly higher price than previously?”

According to Knopper, this golden combination resulted in a “boom that would last for a long, long time making the scruffiest of grunge musicians and the most profane of rap stars incredibly rich. Record executives would make tens of millions of dollars, buy obscenely expensive homes, and drive around in bulletproof limos,” thereby attracting the attention of Wall Street. Music media profited from this boom as well: “CDs were selling like crazy and the companies had tremendous cash flow – and it gave them the opportunity to spend a lot more money on artists and marketing,” says Koppelman, now chairman of Martha Stewart Omnimedia. “One could spend a couple of million bucks – easy – on a new artist launch.” And on top of that, according to Hudson, “[w]hen MTV began broadcasting it quickly became apparent that music videos were extremely effective at driving new artist’s

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284 Don McLeese, “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 441.
286 Ibid., 45.
Because so much money was spend on marketing, record companies had money to advertise in magazines and could pamper journalists with nice press trips.

It would take only a few more years before the ‘record men’ would get out and the business men got in, people that were in general more concerned with business than with music. These men discovered teen pop, a genre that was “a massive worldwide record industry sales machine.” They produced bands such as the Backstreet Boys, who set an all-time record by selling 1.13 million copies of their 1999 album Millennium in its first week, only being outsold by Britney Spears (Oops! I Did It Again, 1.3 million copies) and later ‘N Sync (2.4 million). In a 1999 piece, *New York Times* journalist Jon Pareles states that “[t]his season belongs to the kiddie-pop brigades. Applause is passé; the reaction most eagerly sought by pop culture right now, from music to television to movies, is a high-pitched squeal from a mob of young girls.” Together, these acts would sell 96 million CDs in the United States alone – more than Michael Jackson and the Rolling Stones combined. Why the bubble of this genre ultimately popped is debatable and researchers argue differently. According to Knopper, teen pop “by its very nature, is destined to crash after a few years,” because fans get old and so do the bands. Joshua Clover, who studies pop music in a societal context, also acknowledges that the genre “ended very suddenly.” He explains that according to some, the story is that 9/11 made the national mood change and people “were more somber and more serious,” and therefore, teen pop did not fit into the zeitgeist anymore. However, he argues differently and puts Knopper’s argument that teen pop ended naturally in much needed context. Clover studied the numbers of the sales and states that “[t]he purchasing public is quite young, the people buying this music are between the ages of 8 to 16, with some exceptions. Most of them are spending their parents’ money.” He goes on to call the teen pop bubble an “economic” period and states that when the tech bubble burst, teen pop did as well. Summarizing, Knopper explains that “[t]een pop was one last squeeze of the sponge to get the world to spend millions and millions of dollars on compact discs. It wouldn’t last.”

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289 Ibid.
292 Ibid.
293 Ibid.
But at least for a couple of years, these boy- and girl groups toured the world, selling millions of dollars’ worth of merchandise. Their members usually had unfair contracts. In a time when most music managers would get 10 percent of their artists’ earned revenue, the Backstreet Boys and ‘N Sync – with the help of a music business attorney – discovered that in their first few years their label had taken 50 percent of the bands’ sales in merchandise and 30 percent of touring revenues. No wonder labels got so rich.\footnote{Ibid., 95.} Apart from the temporal nature of this genre – though it kept labels ‘fat and happy’ and able to continually attract new executives at least for a few years – there was another problem. Promotion through music videos on MTV increasingly made singles more attractive, and therefore more important, than CDs.

But record companies stopped producing the single in the early 1980s, when labels found they were not big money makers, because they could make more money by selling an entire album that included the single; they reasoned that if people wanted to hear that one song, they would buy the album. Some record men believed that singles “cannibalized” album sales.\footnote{Ibid., 105.} As critic Dwight Garner nicely summarizes: “It got young people out of the habit of regularly visiting record stores and forced them to buy an entire CD to get the one song they craved. In the short term this was good business practice. In the long term it built up animosity. It was suicidal.”\footnote{Dwight Garner, “When Labels Fought the Digital, and the Digital Won,” The New York Times, January 6, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/07/books/07garn.html (accessed May 29, 2012).} For consumers, all that was left was the CD, which usually contained twelve to fifteen tracks (with only two or three hits). Without a cheap single format, if a fan wanted to own the Backstreet Boys hit “I Want It That Way,” he or she had to buy the entire $20 album, which consisted of mostly filler material. At that time, bands such as Chumbawamba could get rich by having only one hit that was likable enough for consumers to buy the entire album. According to Terry Hazlett, “in an effort to convince buyers to go with cassette albums or compact discs, the record companies tried to eliminate the entire concept of “singles.”\footnote{Terry Hazlett, “Death of the Single: Record Companies Orchestrate the Demise of the 45,” Observer-Reporter, March 11, 1990.} In an op-ed piece for \textit{Billboard} in 1996, Terry McManus calls the laying off of the single in favor of the CD a decision where “the North American music industry made its greatest mistake of the twentieth century,” since it created a market for ways that could work around buying an album when only one song was popular.\footnote{Steve Knopper, \textit{Appetite for Self-Destruction}, 105.} A 1990 \textit{Observer-Reporter} article states that, describing the ‘death of the single’, “Owners of the area
record stores report increasing irritation among customers who can no longer purchase their favorite songs.” It was therefore no coincidence that Napster was founded around this time and almost immediately became very popular. Just two years after McManus’ op-ed piece, millions of music fans got their singles their own way: from the internet, at no cost at all.

The story of sharing MP3s on the internet starts, according to Knopper, when around 1997 “internet connections evolved from frustrating to tolerable to enjoyable” and the free and easy to use WinAmp became the standard for playing MP3s. For entrepreneurs, getting into the MP3 business could be done in two ways: via the labels, or illegally. Since labels did not want to change their money making model of selling CDs, however, doing business with them would not work, and the second option became the default: enabling people to download MP3s for free. Together with his uncle John Fanning, nineteen year old Shawn Fanning took this opportunity by starting the free file sharing service Napster in 1999. “By July 2000, almost 200 million users were on Napster.” Researcher Frank Bergmann is right when stating that “Napster.com is an example of a disruptive technology that is profoundly changing the music industry.” Reebee Garofalo states in her research that “technologies like MP3 are threatening to the music industry for a number of reasons,” for example, because it “holds out the possibility of a business model that links artists directly with consumers.” Furthermore, Garofalo explains that “MP3 is an unprotected format, which leaves the industry with no way to regulate its use.” Therefore, it is safe to say that the record companies were not too happy with the progression of digital music and the internet. Of course, this also hugely impacted on music journalism, as we will explain in the next section.

Looking back, the question arises why labels did not leap into internet music. According to some, music labels just did not get what the big fuss was about until it was too late. Doug Morris, a chief executive officer of the Universal Music Group, however, argues that the record industry was well aware of the competition they faced from illegal file sharing, but just did not know what to do and how to counter. According to Morris, “[w]e didn’t know who to hire. I wouldn’t be able to recognize a good technology person – anyone with a good bullshit story would have gotten past me.” Geoff Taylor, head of the British Recorded

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300 Terry Hazlett, “Death of the Single: Record Companies Orchestrate the Demise of the 45.”
301 Steve Knopper, Appetite for Self-Destruction, 119.
302 Ibid., 119. Italics in original.
305 Ibid., 350.
Music Industry, an organization that represents about 90% of the companies that sell music in the UK, said that “I, for one, regret that we weren't faster in figuring out how to create a sustainable model for music on the internet.”

Therefore, instead of joining the game, “record companies responded by treating their customers as criminals, refusing to exploit the promotional possibilities of exposure on the web or to devise a business model that would give customers what they wanted,” namely the singles, the one or two good tracks on a CD.

An important aspect was that the music industry still saw their old business model as a good one. Because CDs proved so profitable, the model was worth fighting over; rather than switching to a new mode, labels and bands alike (Metallica for instance) filed expensive lawsuits against file sharing programs and peer-to-peer networks. Expensive, because it was a long battle since “in the late 1990s, issues involving MP3s, file sharing, and digital copyrights were part of a larger, unexplored legal terrain.”

Napster itself figured that it would act as a middleman. According to Knopper, by waiting until 2003 to plunge into a digital record store deal with Apple, the labels lost some critical years:

Had the labels made a deal with Napster, they would have found several immediate advantages: a built-in user base of 26.4 million people; an efficient way of communicating with their customers, discerning their musical tastes, and aiming pitches for new albums and singles and the flexibility to set prices at a number of levels, with models ranging from pay-by-the-song to monthly subscriptions.

Most users would certainly have been willing to pay for the service: all illegal services after Napster, such as Kazaa and Limewire, were never as “clean or easy to use as the original version of Napster.” In 2001, a German publishing house conducted a survey that showed that among 25,000 Napster users “70 percent would be willing to pay for a subscription service.” Spotify – with which users can stream unlimited music when they pay 10 euros a month – has three million subscribers world wide, and the company says that 20 percent of its active user base is now paying. Ultimately, Napster was taken down in court, but not before

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308 Don McLeese, “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 443.
310 Ibid., 142.
311 Ibid., 190.
gaining a lot of publicity, causing its user base to grow enormously. While the music industry had the feeling it had won, it had actually lost even more customers to file sharing. More people now realized that there was a way around buying expensive CDs.

A solution for music labels came in 2003 in the form of iTunes, Apple’s digital music store. In a piece for the *LA Times*, Randy Lewis writes that former CEO Steve Jobs “rescued the music business.”[^314] It began after Apple signed deals with the five major labels at that time: EMI, Universal, Warner, Sony Music Entertainment, and BMG, thereby finally “addres[sing] the seismic shift in the marketplace.”[^315] Consumers could now buy singles for as little as 99 cents. However, according to McLeese

> [n]either the labels nor Apple profited greatly from the 99 cent download that quickly became the marketplace standard: for the labels, this revenue did not begin to offset the profits lost on CDs; for Apple, the real money was in the iPod, as availability of more music at a nominal charge spurred the sales of the player.  

So even though music labels succeeded in selling a lot of songs via the digital store – on Wednesday, February 24th, 2010, the 10 billionth song was sold – their revenue was nowhere near as big as those of CDs.[^317]

However, it seems that the tide is turning – albeit very slowly. On January 4, 2012, *Billboard* published an article entitled “The Numbers Behind The First Positive Album-Sales Since 2004.” Its author Ed Christmas states: “Overall U.S. album sales rose 1.4% to 330.6 million units, up from 2010’s total of 326.2 million units.”[^318] Digital album sales even rose with 19.5 percent. Even more interesting and remarkable are the sales of vinyl in 2011. With regard to 2010, the sale of LPs rose with 42 percent, selling four million units. That means that the sale of vinyl is back to the level it was on in 1991.[^319] According to Dutch singer-songwriter Spinvis, vinyl is back and here to stay. Guitar player Teun Hielhltjes of Dutch rock band Go Back To The Zoo stated the same, arguing that the CD is a worthless object you can throw away after you have imported the songs to your computer. Vinyl on the other hand is


nice and big, and often has beautiful artwork. According to many Dutch musicians and bands – among them prominent independent and popular Dutch artists Spinvis, Awkward I, The Kik and Blaudzun – their main source of revenue these days is performing and touring, preferably solo. This vinyl trend can be an interesting development for both artists and music labels, since it would mean that they can make money again by selling items that are not digitally available. Of course, whether CDs, vinyl, and digital albums keep selling this well remains to be seen in coming years. It seems that the music industry is slowly recovering now it engages in digital downloading and digital streaming and therefore coming towards consumer demands. However, as we will see in the next chapter, music journalism is struggling with meeting these demands.

3.2. Challenges for Popular Music Journalism

Back in the days, people saved up money in order to buy Rolling Stone or OOR magazines at the end of each month. Totally psyched after the purchase, one would curl up by the fireplace and read the magazine from front to back (or, in the case of some people, from back to front), soaking up all the information that it contained – from album reviews to background articles; even the advertisements were worth reading. As singer-songwriter Stuart Braithwaite once mentioned, aside from visiting live performances, there were only two ways of hearing music prior to the internet: “You either bought it or you heard it on the radio.” When buying an album, chances were likely that one had never actually heard it before (except perhaps briefly in the shop), but read about the album or artist in one of the respected music magazines that were out there. Reminiscing on the past, owner of Concerto and Plato stores Dick van Dijk remembers that when Dutch newspaper de Volkskrant gave an album a good review, people would line up to buy it the next day. Music journalists – who advised readers on what albums to buy and what concerts to visit – exerted a certain level of authority over people’s music preferences. Many music listeners based their album choices on the opinions of the critic – as we showed in chapter 1 and 2. However, this completely changed with the rise of the internet, and just like the music industry, the future of music journalism is highly uncertain these days. This section will focus on how the internet changed music journalism. There are four main catalysts for this process where one leads to the next, which will be

elaborated in the next paragraphs. Firstly, the internet has set music free, which means that people can listen freely to music and make their own musical choices without needing journalists for that. This is strengthened by social media. Artists have also found means to reach their public and have found new and interesting business models. Second, music journalists seem to have lost their connection to the consumer. Third, as information is now freely available online, music journalism struggles with its old business model of direct sales. Fourth, leading from the third reason, amateur bloggers offer the public free information on music.

First of all, internet enabled people to download and stream music for free, or for a small monthly fee. A subscription to Spotify, for example, costs 10 euros a month and offers users an unlimited stream of music on their computers or smartphones. Before Spotify and the iTunes music store existed, people had the opportunity to share music with each other for free, as happened (illegally) with Napster. However, since Spotify it is legal, this means that people that do not want to engage in illegal activities can enjoy unlimited music now with Spotify. As a result, these days, it is almost unimaginable that one buys an album without having heard it first; it is easy to first give it a listen on Spotify, and if the album is good enough, it can be bought online or in a record store, or downloaded on Spotify by paying for it. Furthermore, these programs show listeners what new music is out there, often based on the music these people have been listening to. Even when randomly scanning through these streaming programs and surfing the web in general, one will stumble upon new artists and, consequently, new music. Critics are thus often bypassed in the digital age. Academics even state they are no longer needed as consumer guides as people now have the means to discover new music on their own. This means that the gatekeeper and guide function of the music journalist becomes far less interesting, since there is no need to separate the chaff from the wheat. No longer do people depend on music journalists in order to guide them to particular artists and albums that are deemed good. There is, moreover, so much music available now – available for downloading either legally or illegally – that one could wonder whether people actually still need music journalists to lead the way at all.

Also, due to the rise of social media, listeners can now pick up good and new music via friends on social networks. With Spotify, for example, users are able to make playlists and share them through social media, or just email each other the URL to the playlist. There are

322 Ibid.
also websites offering playlist listening so people can find new lists that other people have made. Therefore, ordinary people can become taste-makers when their lists grow popular. Thus, not only other users – friends or unknown people which happen to have the same taste as you have – but also ‘the crowd’ can be music advisers. Many purchasing websites such as amazon.com or Dutch bol.com have a rating system where people can vote on a product. It means that the opinion of one person (the journalist) is not as important anymore as before now everyone can share theirs. Why listen to the wisdom of one person when there is wisdom of the crowd?

To add insult to injury, the artists themselves try to go around music journalists as well. This happens in two different ways. First, through websites like MySpace and Bandcamp musicians are able to share their music with consumers much more easily than their labels could through traditional music outlets, and, as McLeese argues, “at a bare fraction of the cost.” Consequently, “a fan base could be built without any help from major labels or print journalism, a daunting challenge in the recent past.” Of course, this quote by McLeese needs a bit more nuance: labels can still start stardom. However, many artists are now generating there own popularity through sharing websites and of course YouTube, such as Arctic Monkeys, Lily Allen and Dutch Esmée Denters. Second, with the addition of such social media as micro blogging tool Twitter, not only can artists now easily share their music with their fans, but also their daily lives. Whereas before, websites provided mainly one-directional conversation, Twitter provides fans a means to communicate with their favorite artists directly – and ask their own questions, instead of reading interviews conducted by music journalists.

Artists also started to look for a more direct approach to selling their records. As more and more people started to download their albums, and buy individual songs on iTunes, many realized that the game was changing. Some tried to alter their business models accordingly. One example is the English rock band Radiohead. In October 2007, they released their new album In Rainbows on their website – two months before the album appeared in stores. People were able to download the album at any price, as the band left it to “the fans to decide how much they wanted to pay (even nothing).” According to NME, “According to reports most fans chose to pay nothing to download the album. However, it still generated more money before it was physically released (on December 31) than the total money generated by

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324 Don McLeese, “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 443.
325 Ibid., 444.
326 Ibid., 445.
sales of the band's previous album, 2003's 'Hail To The Thief'.

Also, “[t]he band sold 100,000 copies of the 'In Rainbows' box set, which contained extra songs not available on the standard download or CD release.”

After this initiative, other bands followed suit. Another example is the Kaiser Chiefs, who released their album on the internet, asking buyers to pick 12 out of 20 songs to form their own CD, with only songs they liked. They then added a nice gimmick: people could sell ‘their’ album to friends and make a few bucks out of the deal themselves. In addition to these examples, many artists expressed their discontent with the CD in general and their preference for releasing just EPs or even individual songs.

This is the result of the ability to download individual cuts at iTunes for a dollar each: people started to refuse to pay a significant amount of money for an entire album while they could download two or three of their favorite songs for a couple of dollars. Once again, the music industry failed to meet consumer demands, just like when they decided to lay off the single.

The second catalyst for the transformation of music journalism is that music journalists seem to have lost their connection to the consumer. As is shown above, the game changed completely for consumers. Many now prefer downloading individual cuts to buying or downloading an entire album: “The big attraction for consumers was the single track that could be downloaded, initially (and illegally) for free and subsequently very cheaply; the fact that MP3 computer files lacked the sound quality of the compact disc was a small reservation in the face of such huge savings.”

Where some artists have altered their business models in order to remain interesting for their audience, most music journalists lack these skills. They hold on to their old habit of reviewing entire albums while consumers are mainly interested in one or two tracks of a particular album. As a result, the value of music journalists is slowly disappearing. The only way to alter this is by a complete transformation of their business models as McLeese notes. The plan for the future is simple: “change or die.”

Third, people are no longer willing to spend money on music magazines when they have the ability to download music for free (or stream it for a low price) and can read reviews online free of charge – be it from amateurs or from professionals. As we already pointed out the main categories in music journalism are the review and the interview, and these are as much available on free blogs as in music magazines. With the rise of the internet, millions of

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328 Ibid.


330 Ibid., 443.

331 Ibid., 437.
people started blogs with topics ranging from the hiccups to jet skiing and from French fries to popular music. While most blogs stayed at an amateur level – which we will discuss later in this chapter – some, such as the American music blogs Pitchfork and Stereogum, grew to be really influential. Stereogum started as an MP3 blog and grew out to be the “leading online community for independent and alternative music news, downloads, and videos.” On their website – in the section called “Band to Watch” – they feature upcoming artists. Their suggestions often grow out to be popular music sensations, e.g., Vampire Weekend, Arcade Fire, or Fleet Foxes. Readers are furthermore able to comment on articles and other posts, which gives them the ability to participate. As a result tight communities develop on websites like this where people discuss popular music. Stereogum has won many prizes, including Entertainment Weekly’s Best Music Website.

The website of music blog Pitchfork has an even greater success story. Launched in 1995 as a small amateur blog – McLeese maintains that it was actually just an online version of a fanzine – Pitchfork grew out to be one of the leading websites on popular music. According to McLeese it yields even “more influence than Rolling Stone or any daily newspaper critic.” All of the content on the website can be read for free. Next to its lack of costs, a big advantage for readers is that they can read it whenever they want and do not have to wait until the end of the month (the time that most paper magazines are published). The web, moreover, provides unlimited space. In a time when newspaper pages are cut and reviewers have to stick to a measly 200 words, editors at Pitchfork can spend as many words on a review as they like. In 2006, the website had gained so much popularity that they were able to start an annual summer music festival – the aptly named “Pitchfork Music Festival” – the initial edition of which attracted 36,000 visitors.

Whereas all music magazines and newspapers are struggling to keep their heads above water, “Pitchfork’s revenue leaped 70% each year from 2004, to an estimated $5 million annually (...) at a time when print publications such as Punk Planet and No Depression were going out of business, and Rolling Stone and Blender were experiencing double-digit declines in advertising.” This trend was observed in 2009 and since then, Blender has closed and Rolling Stone is still facing a declining circulation. Moreover, magazines like Rolling Stone that depend on music labels for revenue are in “particularly perilous positions” as McLeese

335 Don McLeese, “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 444.
notes since the music industry is still facing cutbacks these days.\textsuperscript{337} One of the greatest advantages of the internet is that websites generally do not have to deal with any of this. As Nineham states, “[t]he internet can bypass the filters that are instilled in traditional media, whether that’s being forced to tone down a negative review because you need to keep the PR guys sweet or write carefully for fear of losing advertising.”\textsuperscript{338} This is certainly true for Pitchfork. Since the organization is independent and does not rely on publishers like magazines do, “the traditional corporate publicity machinery is completely short-circuited.”\textsuperscript{339} Over the last few years, the website has become one of the most prominent on popular music.\textsuperscript{340} It even gained so much influence that established music magazines like \textit{OOR} and \textit{Rolling Stone} often quote Pitchfork as a source.

One of the advantages of websites like Stereogum and Pitchfork is that they also pay great attention to independent music and not only follow the lead of the big major record companies. Without them, indie bands like Arcade Fire and Vampire Weekend might never have been discovered. This means that these websites can contribute to a wider palette of music that maybe escapes the gaze of major record companies that are mostly interested in commercial success. That does not mean that independent bands cannot be commercial successful, but they have a different start than highly promoted bands. Since traditional music journalism follows the lead of record companies, as we have shown in chapter 1, the music that is reported in this kind of journalism is very much the same. Furthermore, as shown in the quote at the beginning of chapter 1, most music journalists are white middle-aged males with an overlapping taste in music.\textsuperscript{341} Consequently, without the internet, a lot of artists would never have received the attention they do now since they do not fit the specific popular music box within many critics at music magazines think. With the rise of the internet, however, there is no longer a limit of space. Websites like Pitchfork and Stereogum are not held back by a maximum number of pages or by too high costs; they can write and upload any article at any given time.

Thus, the field of popular music expanded greatly with the rise of such blogs. Moreover, without the space limit, the number of blogs exploded. Anybody with access to the internet was (and is) able to blog and post reviews of albums and concerts. Many who started blogging about popular music deemed themselves just as important as traditional music

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{} Don McLeese, “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 444.
\bibitem{} Laura Nineham, “Music Criticism in Web 2.0.”
\bibitem{} Don McLeese, “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 444.
\end{thebibliography}
journalists – why would anyone need a professional music journalist when all the content can be read online for free? This is “the beauty and the curse of the internet – uncensored self-publication.”³⁴² While this is the case for most journalism, its impact on music journalism is even greater. It is difficult for a blogger to claim to be a political expert – they do not have as much access as traditional journalists, politics is quite complicated and foreign to most people’s experience. But these qualifications do not go for music writing. It is easy to visit a concert and to be a fan. Also, since the music industry has recognized the ability to reach an audience through blogs, bloggers get access to interviews as well. Even though the field of popular music journalism expanded greatly, at the same time most blogs lacked any quality articles. “While some blogs offer an alternative insight into the world of music,” as Nineham strikingly notes, “thousands upon thousands read like the ill-informed rants of people who are so unfamiliar with the music they’re judging it’s like asking your Nan what she thinks about Rage Against the Machine.”³⁴³

This brings us to the fourth and greatest threat music journalists experience: the great number of (amateur) bloggers that roam the web these days. As Singer argues, “[a]ll professions in today’s society are being dramatically affected by the pace and the extent of technological, especially computer-based, change – and journalism is certainly no exception.”³⁴⁴ Even though there are certain characteristics, such as autonomy, specific skills, and prestige, that separate the professional music journalist from the amateur, anyone is free to post reviews, videos and the like on a blog and call themselves a music journalist.³⁴⁵ Furthermore, as Bourdieu states in his book On Television “marketing and media visibility, become the – seemingly more democratic – substitute for the internal standards by which specialized fields once judged cultural and even political products and their producers.”³⁴⁶ Thus, to use Bourdieu’s term, (music) journalists are losing their “cachet” as many argue that, since the foundation of the internet, anyone can be a journalist. Levenson concurs: why would anyone pay for content one can get for free online? He poses that “if anyone can make pop music, and anyone can be a pop-music critic, do we really need professional critics to tell us what it all means?”³⁴⁷

³⁴² Laura Nineham, “Music Criticism in Web 2.0.”
³⁴³ Ibid.
³⁴⁴ Jane B. Singer, “Who are these Guys?” 143.
³⁴⁵ Ibid., 142.
³⁴⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, On Television, 73.
There are, however, also voices that dispute the redundancy of paid critics. Journalist Laura Nineham reasons that many bloggers do not have the same skills most professional music journalists possess:

> It’s like letting a karaoke singer headline your local venue – they’re actually quite good when compared to the 10 other tone-deaf who’ve got on stage to howl through a song, but they’re no Beyoncé. They’ve never practiced their singing much, they have no technical ability and they haven’t found their own sound.\(^{348}\)

This might be a bit of an overstatement, but as a music critic stated in Klein’s article, practicing music journalism seems “like an easy thing to do, which it is. Easy to do poorly.”\(^{349}\) The internet greatly lacks good editors.\(^{350}\) Some blogs grew out to be large media organizations like Pitchfork but most lack the means to edit and fact check articles before publishing them. As Andrew Keen, who is greatly against the participation of citizens on the web, argues “[b]logs have become so dizzyingly infinite that they’ve undermined our sense of what is true and what is false, what is real and what is imaginary.”\(^{351}\) Most blogs report what is being heard on the web, without checking any facts. Furthermore, they often contain articles that are simply copy-pasted from other websites, since “[t]he number of people who produce original online news content is small.”\(^{352}\)

Despite the amount of information and music that can be found online, critics are needed says Nineham:

> I think music critics are more important than ever. We can bypass the critics if we want to aimlessly wade our way through the sewage that seeps across the internet as we search for our next fix of new music. Or we can seek out those we trust to guide us, like a musical Sat Nav, straight to the good stuff.

Music journalists do however have to find ways to remain valuable for their audience, serving them information amateur bloggers lack to provide. They need to rebuild their authority by finding new ways to be unique and trustworthy, and get an edge over their non-professional competition. Or as Keen claims: “we [journalists] need to fight back, to retain the structures

\(^{348}\) Laura Nineham, “Music Criticism in Web 2.0.”


\(^{350}\) Ringo P Stacey, “The Death of the Critic? That’s the Least of Your Problems.”


\(^{352}\) Jane B. Singer, “Who are these Guys?” 149.
and profession that are in danger of dying out.”

One solution might be to focus on so-called “deep reporting” and/or explanatory journalism. Levenson sees an example of the latter in journalist Sasha Frere-Jones. He “has brought a musician’s expertise to his writing at *The New Yorker*. His 2007 essay on Mariah Carey’s vocal range is an impressive example of (...) explanatory journalism.” Few music journalists, however, are familiar with the technical aspects of music and probably even less people would be interested in reading about them. Therefore, it is more likely that the answer lies in deep reporting. Deep reporting, as Levenson explains it, goes beyond simply reviewing an album or a concert. Here, music journalists interview “the band, the producers, marketers, fellow critics, (...) social historians” and the like in order to create an in-depth report.” Where music journalists are able to interview them, “online journalists continue to have difficulty obtaining the press passes that give them access to news events.” Thus, through deep reporting, music journalists are able to distinguish themselves from amateur blogs.

In the end, McLeese argues, “[m]usic journalists will no longer derive their authority and influence from the platform in which they publish – be it Pitchfork or the *New York Times* – but from the quality of the work itself, and from its ability to attract readers.” No one knows what the future might bring, but it is clear that popular music is a trending topic these days, not only among music journalists but also among the people: “[m]ore people are writing about music than ever before … [and] [m]ore people are reading about music than ever before.

### 3.3. The Advantages of the Internet

It seems that music journalism has suffered a great deal due to the internet. However, to quote former Dutch soccer player Johan Cruyff, every downside has its upside. Though new communication technology has changed and harmed the music industry and music journalism alike, it has also brought both change and promise to a profession that continues to adapt itself. In the race of winning back the reader, music magazines have adopted various ways to reinvent themselves. They use social media to reconnect with readers (also allowing them to send in content) and promote their own articles, and they have been employing digital music

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355 Ibid., 58.
356 Jane B. Singer, “Who are these Guys?” 156.
357 Don McLeese, “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 446.
358 Ibid., 444.
channels to broaden their scope. Furthermore, since the music industry has suffered because of illegal downloading, it has downsized its promotional department, and is therefore less able to exert control over magazines. Lastly, though not all of the blogs and news websites the internet has made possible are of the highest class, there are a few that rival professional music magazines for quality, such as Pitchfork and 3voor12.

According to Manuel Castells, “the internet is a communication medium that allows, for the first time, the communication of many to many, in chosen time, on a global scale” and it has “the ability to distribute the power of information throughout the entire realm of human activity.”\(^{359}\) This is very different from the traditional one-way approach to communication and delivery of information that is taken by newspapers and magazines. First and foremost, this two-way communication allows people to interact with each other, including the people that normally would not do so, such as professional journalists and their readers. In journalism, such communication is usually called participatory journalism, and its product User Generated Content. This has multiple forms and stages. In their research, David Domingo et al. distinguish five different types of UGC, namely access/observation (citizens can submit story ideas), selection/filtering (citizens can select which stories are published), processing/editing (citizens can submit a story or other content, citizens can report mistakes in a story), distribution (citizens can distribute the story further or vote on it), and interpretation (citizens can comment on and discuss the story).\(^{360}\) For example, many online newspapers have created the possibility to let users comment on articles and give their own opinion, sometimes even correcting the article when there are factual mistakes. Users can also enhance the content of the newspapers by providing photos, or distribute and promote articles by sharing them on social media, thus generating more viewers. This of course happens in music journalism in numerous ways as well. For example, visitors of OOR’s website can comment on articles, send in pictures or even write reviews for the website (which are vetted for quality before being posted). They also have the opportunity to share the articles on their Twitter or Facebook account, and promote it among friends. OOR also has its own Twitter and Facebook accounts, through which they promote their articles, share contests, and so on, generating more readers and doing their own free advertising.


Another way music journalists use Twitter is by making themselves visible and tweeting about what they think of certain releases, shows, etc. For example, 3voor12 senior reporter Atze de Vrieze tweets very regularly, and also gets into discussions with music lovers and other music critics. In this way, Twitter provides a public sphere where music journalists function as an authority, and readers of 3voor12 have the chance to interact with someone who writes about their favorite music. Twitter is also popular among musicians and sometimes discussions are sparked among fans, music journalists and musicians. In this case, the internet has given an extra dimension to the craft of criticism. It also gives music journalists an opportunity to promote their work, and create a circle of people around them who like and value their work, and sometimes defend it against others who question it. For instance, when the music festival Eurosonic/Noorderslag took place in Groningen, the Netherlands, any visitor who followed journalists from OOR, 3voor12, De Volkskrant and NU.nl on Twitter, was made aware of interesting bands that were playing and that they could visit. In short, Twitter is a great way for music journalists to build (and restore) their authority online and to share their articles.

Also, while the decline of the music industry has had negative impacts on music journalism (less advertising, less money to spend on promotion and thus on journalism) it also has its advantages. Before, journalists had to rely on labels for access to musicians; now the internet has created possibilities to bypass officials and contact musicians on their own terms, without labels’ interference. Artists can promote themselves by skillfully using the internet and using the power of for example YouTube. They do not necessarily need big music labels anymore. They do, however, need music journalists for the extra exposure – although what we discussed in the section above, this exposure is diminishing. Furthermore, because many labels have cut back on their promotional departments, many former publicists now work as freelance promoters, who fight for the attention of magazines to promote the artists they represent. What has actually changed exactly and what possibilities this gives music journalists, is what we aim to find out in our interviews.

In closing, while blogs are often associated with amateurism, this does not account for all internet based music journalism. As explained in this chapter, the American website Pitchfork started out as an amateur blog, but quickly started to become very influential. The same goes for Dutch 3voor12, which is part of the Dutch public broadcasting system. Both websites make excellent use of the advantages that web-based journalism offers over print journalism: they are quick with buzz news, are perfectly aware of the latest trends and music, and use all the space they need – for example, on a music festival, 3voor12 publishes reviews.
of all the bands that are playing, not just a selection. Both of these companies consist of professionals (except the local division of 3voor12), and have different business models: Pitchfork uses advertisement and 3voor12 is funded by tax money. It remains to be seen if Dutch web based music journalism can also be funded online entirely by advertising the way Pitchfork is, since there are significant differences between the American and Dutch online advertising markets.
CHAPTER 4
Part of the Scientific Scene:
Methodology

I try to abide by the methodology / When all I want is to follow my heart
- We Are Scientists

By word and by action, in subtle ways and in direct statements, researchers say: “I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?”

These are the words of the late anthropologist James P. Spradley and the quote perfectly sums up the essence of our qualitative research. For our thesis we examined the subject of popular music journalism to the point of creating a theoretical and historical framework and contextualizing all the aspects known about the matter. However, such a research is not complete without testing the subject to “empirical scrutiny,” as Bryman notices. This thesis not only aims to discover and discuss the professional roles of popular music journalists, but also the current state of the profession in The Netherlands and its future. Therefore, it is of vital importance to extend this thesis beyond the review of existing literature. In qualitative research, as Corring and Cook emphasize, there is the “belief that the individual experiencing the phenomenon is the expert.” We could not agree more with this statement. We are of the opinion that the popular music journalists themselves are the experts in the field and that it is, therefore, essential to hear their thoughts and opinions. In order to reach our aims, we offer three qualitative approaches to our research: interviews, content analysis and a preliminary ethnographic research. By adding these three qualitative examinations we are able to present the reader with a comprehensive picture of the profession of popular music journalism.

Originally, the plan was to perform an ethnographic research in multiple newsrooms. As Chris Paterson states in the book Making Online News “only ethnographic methodologies

... can come close to providing an adequate description of the culture and practice of media production, and the mindset of media producers.”364 Because we examine, among other aspects, the professional roles of popular music journalists, this type of research would have fitted perfectly since – as Schlessinger explains – ethnographic research makes “basic information about the working ideologies and practices of cultural producers” available.365 However, the media platforms we wanted to investigate, OOR and 3voor12, were not willing to cooperate. Consequently we had to make a change of plans and turned to the qualitative approaches of interviews. As William Foote Whyte explains, there are different types of interviews “ranging from the questionnaire administered in writing and the orally administered interview schedule of predetermined questions to the more freely structured interview.”366 We will utilize the latter and we will come back to this in more detail later in this chapter. Furthermore, to supplement the interviews, we chose to perform two case studies – using content analysis and ethnographic research – that highlight issues raised by the interviewees. These case studies are performed at 3voor12 and at FaceCulture. We will first explain the interviews and then move on to the case studies.

We chose the approach of interviewing because we wanted to talk to the experts in the field and hear their opinions about, among others, the current state of the profession in The Netherlands and its future. Furthermore, the interviews could be used as a helpful check for previously published academic research, which does not center on The Netherlands. We wanted to find out whether the claims these academics make are correct and to what extent they apply to Dutch music journalism. Together with the interviews, we are able to present a more complete overview of what has been said and done in the profession of popular music journalism. When conducting the interviews, there were two aspects that stood out. First, the interviewees – who are all professional popular music journalists – stated that they have little to fear from amateur writers, since the work of amateurs is of less quality than that of the professional journalists, in their opinion. This surprised us greatly since academics claimed the exact opposite, namely that professional journalists should fear (the influence of) amateur journalists. Second, the interviewees explained that the landscape of (music) journalism will continue to change in various ways over the next couple of years. One of the outlets we examined might provide the solution to the insecure future of the profession. As a result, we

365 Ibid., 2.
thought it would be highly interesting to add two additional qualitative approaches to our thesis to offer a more comprehensive overview. Accordingly we decided to study two outlets firsthand.

We will start of by discussing the framework for the interviews. Here we will provide the reader with a research design, offer background information on the different media outlets the interviewees work at and discuss through what methods we analyzed the interviews, which represent the core method of this thesis. After that, the next approach of content analysis will be explained in detail. But first, this chapter will shortly touch upon some earlier publications about popular music journalism that used interviews as a case study.

4.1. Previous Research

“Much of what we know about music critics comes from personal narratives.” As Klein argues, there are several critics who have published autobiographies “of how it is they came to be critics and what it is they believe their function as music critics to be,” such as popular music journalists Jim DeRogatis and Barend Toet. Even though these publications often give readers interesting insights on how it is like to be a popular music journalist, there are obviously great limitations. As Schudson notes in his book The Power of News, autobiographies “provide direct evidence not of the life of the writer but of how the writer conceives his or her life.” Other than biographies, the field of popular music journalism has been much neglected by academics. Even though there are researches available about the profession – as for example in the book Pop Music and the Press – only few have included interviews with popular music journalists themselves. In this section we will shortly touch upon a few of these projects – since they are closely related to our research in terms of interviews – in order to make clear what already has been published and to what extent our thesis can provide a unique angle of incidence.

To start off with Wyatt and Hull, in their research The Music Critic in the American Press: A Nationwide Survey of Newspapers and Magazines the two academics examined the characteristics of popular music journalists and tried to get insight in the music coverage of the American press. Their research is extensive: Wyatt and Hull conducted a nationwide survey, sending questionnaires to a great number of American newspapers and magazines. A total of 195 surveys were received by the researchers, from which 160 critics produced

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368 Ibid., 3.
“usable questionnaires.” According to Wyatt and Hull, there were some remarkable findings. For example, magazines are more likely to exclude negative reviews “as a matter of policy” than newspapers. Moreover, critics argued that they write more positive than negative reviews, only 20 percent of the reviews have a negative connotation. In addition, according to the surveys, critics give “highest priority to genuinely popular music genres with rock leading the pack, followed by soul, jazz and country.”

Even though these are interesting findings and the research is thorough, it has a few shortcomings. First, since the academics sent questionnaires to critics, the latter were bound to a certain set of questions. They did not have the freedom – as one has in an interview – to give additional information or examples. Second, in general, questionnaires are less inspiring and challenging than interviews. We believe that with an in-depth interview one gets better insights and, therefore, results. Naturally, Wyatt and Hull reached a great number of critics, so they have reliable results, but we prefer the method of interviewing. Third, the following is stated in their methodology chapter: “In the hope of reaching the largest possible sample even at the expense of response rate, questionnaires were also sent to persons listed as ‘entertainment editor’ or ‘arts editor’ when no music critic was designated.” However, even though the research focuses on popular music, an ‘arts editor’ can also include a classical or theatre critic, someone who has little to do with popular music. Last – even though this is not much of a shortcoming of the study itself – the research was published in 1989 and the surveys were conducted in 1987, over twenty years ago. This means that, at that time, few had heard of the internet, let alone the terms Mp3, downloading or streaming. Moreover, at the end of the eighties, popular music journalism and the popular music industry were both flourishing businesses. Undoubtedly, outcomes would have been different when the same surveys were done in 2012.

A well-known study about British arts journalists is the one of Gemma Harries and Karin Wahl-Jorgenson. The research focuses on the self-image of these particular journalists and argues that while arts journalists consider themselves being part of the greater field of journalism, at the same time they “lay claim to an arts exceptionalism.” For example, beyond reporting news, arts journalists claim to work as gatekeepers and cultural

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371 Ibid., 1.
372 Ibid., 1.
373 Ibid., 6.
intermediaries. Harries and Wahl-Jorgenson explain that “arts journalists take on a crusading role, and describe their work as infused by a passion which is otherwise frowned upon within journalism.”

Interestingly enough, Harries and Wahl-Jorgenson only consider people arts journalists when they cover “theater, classical music, opera and dance.” Consequently, we can safely state that popular music is not a form of art according to the researchers. This is strange – to say the least – since classical music is deemed an art form and both popular and classical music are discussed in the art section of, for example, newspapers. However, when putting that fact aside, this is a useful research for our thesis since it also discusses more universal themes like objectivity and the roles journalists hold in society we pay attention to as well.

The academics interviewed twenty journalists, varying from freelance music critics to radio presenters. Even though this is an extensive amount of interviewees, the majority does not hold a job at a national newspaper, magazine or online platform. In fact, most of them work at regional media outlets. Naturally, this does not make the interviews any less interesting but this thesis aims for the popular music journalists holding top positions in the field. Moreover, only first names are used when quoting an arts journalist and the specific media outlets they work for are not identified. Consequently, one cannot easily link the opinions of an arts journalist to the particular media outlet, something we deem important. Readers should be able to connect the opinions of the journalists to the media platforms they work for and vice versa.

The last study we want to pay attention to is Dancing about Architecture: Popular Music Criticism and the Negotiation of Authority by Bethany Klein. The research addresses the “impact of the culture divided on the establishment of critical authority through the examination of popular critics.” Through in-depth interviews with music journalists, Klein attempts to find out “how the popular culture critic’s experience might be distinguished from that of high culture critics.” For example, unlike journalists who practice the high arts, popular music journalists often lack formal training and are mainly self-taught, according to Klein. Consequently, they have to establish their authority through their extensive knowledge and writing skills. This is a very helpful research since Klein examined several professional roles we researched as well. Furthermore, she interviewed fifteen “Philadelphia-based critics” – varying from freelancers to music journalists at daily newspapers – and she talked to them

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375 Ibid., 1.
376 Ibid., 1.
378 Ibid., 1.
about the establishment of authority and the different roles that are assigned to popular music journalists. However, where Harries and Wahl-Jorgenson only used first names in their study, Klein changed the names of the interviewees completely. This is shortly mentioned in a footnote and, unfortunately, she does not explain why the names are altered. Another shortcoming of the research is that professional roles of the popular music journalists are constantly in a state of flux and these roles perhaps changed due to the internet, something Klein does not pay attention to at all.

Although the above described research is thorough and present the reader with an extensive amount of information, none of these studies – and in fact most studies – focus on the future of the profession of popular music journalists. Naturally, this has partly to do with the zeitgeist, since no one worried about the future in the 1980s and 1990s and even in 2005 the matter was not nearly as pressing as it is right now. An article by Don McLeese touches upon the subject by stating that the traditional media have two options: “change or die.” Unfortunately, a solution on how to change is hardly offered. Author Jacob Levenson provides his readers a rough solution in the article Why John Lennon Matters: popular music journalists should focus on “deep reporting,” meaning that one should not simply cover a concert or write an album review, but really focus on both in-depth interviewing and reporting to give articles additional value. Even though this is a rather optimistic and reasonable solution, Levenson only discusses deep reporting for two paragraphs and does not investigate the matter in as much to see whether or not it is a realistic solution.

As far as we know, very specific research both focusing on the professional roles of popular music journalists and the future of the profession has not yet been performed. Several researchers have discussed the former and some even have touched upon the latter, but the two never have been combined. Since the traditional roles might have been changed because of the rise of the internet, it is important to examine the two. Naturally, it is impossible to give a clear-cut answer to questions whether or not popular music journalism will exist in the future (and if so, in what form) since no one has the ability to look into the future. However, we are of the opinion that it is vital to hear the opinions and thoughts about this issue from the popular music journalists. We therefore think that interviews with the experts themselves are a great way to gain more knowledge about the present and future state of popular music journalism. In the sections below we will present our research and analysis design.

379 Ibid., 3.
380 Ibid., 4.
4.2. Research Design Interviews

As stated before, we think that this thesis is not complete without the opinions of the popular music journalists themselves. They are the experts in the field and we expect that they can tell us more about the professional roles and their views on the future of the vocation. Given that we are based in The Netherlands it is understandable that we focused our research on several Dutch media outlets. However, since the United States is a key nation when it comes to popular music, we aimed to expand our thesis by interviewing several American popular music journalists via e-mail. Even though three American journalists – working at Rolling Stone, Pitchfork, and The New York Times – were willing to cooperate, they never responded to the questions we had sent them. Consequently, we decided to focus on interviewing popular music journalists from The Netherlands.

We used several criteria when selecting the popular music journalists we wanted to interview. For example, we tried to choose the most influential and/or experienced journalists – such as editors-in-chief of large magazines and journalists who have over fifteen years of experience – instead of journalists who for example write for minor blogs or regional newspapers or magazines. Moreover, we selected popular music journalists from different media outlets – varying from traditional to online media – to get the most diverse opinions as possible. All journalists we approached were willing to cooperate, and we interviewed a total of twelve Dutch popular music journalists. Even though this is still a select amount of popular music journalists, the research “has wider relevance as professional journalists tend to share comparable norms and values,” according to Hermida, especially because we chose a wide variety of outlets.

Below, we present a list of the media outlets we interviewed popular music journalists from, and, in addition, we provide some useful background information.

**OOR**

*OOR* is the longest running popular music magazine in The Netherlands; its first issue appeared at the first of April, 1971. The magazine was founded by Barend Toet – who studied political sciences in Amsterdam at the time – and he wanted to create a Dutch version of the popular American music magazine *Rolling Stone*. According to Van Gelder and Carvalho, *OOR* was the first Dutch attempt to create a magazine containing “professional pop-journalism.” Even though the magazine experienced a great deal of problems with for example their publisher, it managed to survive. In the 1980s and 1990s, *OOR* became the

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383 Ibid., 4.
384 Henk van Gelder and Hester Carvalho, *Gouden Tijden: 50 Jaar Nederlandse Popbladen*, back cover.
most prominent Dutch popular music magazine. Their popularity was also partly due to the introduction of the compact disc, which gave the magazine an economical boost. However, ever since the rise of the internet, the circulation OOR is dropping – from 40,000 readers in 1974 to approximately 16,000 in 2011 – and, nowadays, the magazine is struggling to survive.\footnote{\textcopyright{Opvraagmodules,} \textit{HOI: Instituut voor Media Auditing}, 2012, \url{http://www.hoi-online.nl/798/Opvraagmodule.html#BLOCKTEMPLATE53115_tab2} (accessed January 15, 2012).
\footnote{Opvraagmodules,} \textit{HOI: Instituut voor Media Auditing}, 2012.} In 2005, OOR merged with another Dutch popular music magazine known as Aloha and it went from a biweekly to a monthly magazine. Over the last few years, the staff has tried anything to attract more readers: creating a new website, linking articles to social media and even narrowing the audience focus. In the past OOR tried to pay attention to all existing musical genres but they narrowed their audience down to a so-called “Lowlands and Pinkpop [two major festivals in The Netherlands] audience,” as current editor-in-chief Erik van den Berg states: meaning that, overall, the magazines focuses on people who are many middle-class, white and young of age and naturally people who are great pop and rock lovers, with preferably some interest in alternative and dance music. In 2011, the magazine celebrated its 40\textsuperscript{th} anniversary.

\textit{De Volkskrant}

Newspaper \textit{De Volkskrant} is founded on the second of October 1919. Although it started off as a weekly paper, two years later \textit{De Volkskrant} became a daily newspaper and still is in 2012. Almost a hundred years later, \textit{De Volkskrant} remains a prominent newspaper in The Netherlands. According to the “Instituut voor Media Auditing” (Institute for Media Auditing) the newspaper currently has a circulation of approximately 255,000.\footnote{\textcopyright{Opvraagmodules,} \textit{HOI: Instituut voor Media Auditing}, 2012, \url{http://www.hoi-online.nl/798/Opvraagmodule.html#BLOCKTEMPLATE53115_tab2} (accessed January 15, 2012).} Together with newspaper \textit{NRC Handelsblad} (see below), \textit{De Volkskrant} holds some of the most prominent popular music journalists. Each day, the newspaper pays attention to, among others, theatre, classical music and popular music. According to Menno Pot, one of the popular music journalists who writes for the newspaper, \textit{De Volkskrant} is “the biggest and most important newspaper [in The Netherlands] when it comes to popular music.”\footnote{\textcopyright{De Geschiedenis van de Volkskrant,} VK.nl, November 20, 2002, \url{http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/614928/2002/11/20/De-Geschiedenis-van-de-Volkskrant.dhtml} (accessed January 21, 2012).} The journalists also try to experiment with writing about different musical styles such as hip-hop and dance. Even though the popular music journalists realize that the majority of their readers are probably not interested in these styles of music, the journalists deem it important to pay attention to all angles of popular music.
**NRC Handelsblad**

This newspaper is a lot younger of age than *De Volkskrant*, being first published on the first of October, 1970. When the two newspapers *Algemeen Handelsblad* and *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* merged, *NRC Handelsblad* was formed.\(^{388}\) This is the only newspaper in The Netherlands that is not a morning but an evening paper. Just as *De Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad* also pays great attention to their website and many articles on popular music appear online as well. As almost every major newspaper, *NRC Handelsblad* is experiencing. In the late 1990s, the newspaper had a circulation of about 270,000.\(^{389}\) However, according to the “Instituut voor Media Auditing” (Institute for Media Auditing), the circulation had dropped to approximately 199,000 by the end of 2011.\(^{390}\)

**NU.nl**

“Becoming the largest news website of The Netherlands.”\(^{391}\) This was the plan of Merien ten Houten and partners Kees Zegers en Sacha Prins when they established NU.nl. Their ambitious plan was created in a spare ribs restaurant somewhere in The Netherlands and amazingly they pulled it off. Founded almost twelve years ago – On May 23, 1999 – NU.nl has become the largest news website of the country with 22 million unique visitors a year. Their big breakthrough was in 2000 after the firework incident in the city of Enschede. Where other online media reported about this disaster two days later, NU.nl immediately provided their audience with the necessary information.\(^{392}\) In their music section, NU.nl pays attention to all kinds of artists and music. Under the lead of Pierre Oitmann (head of the music section), this section grew exponentially over the past few years. For example, two years ago they only had access to Dutch artists if they wanted to do an interview. Since the section grew extensively, record labels started to show interest and all of the sudden NU.nl became able to interview famous bands such as Coldplay and Linkin Park. Even though the website is often the first to report news, it is hardly ever extensive – articles that contain more than 1,000 words are a rarity – background stories on artists or new albums. Instead, the website mostly focuses on


\(^{389}\) Ibid.

\(^{390}\) Ibid.


\(^{392}\) Ibid.
instant news instead of background articles. Authors who work for NU.nl either write articles on a voluntarily basis or paid. Additionally, NU.nl embeds content from other media outlets, for example FaceCulture. The latter creates, among others, video interviews and articles that they provide to NU.nl.

3voor12

3voor12 is a multimedia platform for popular music and is part of the Dutch public broadcaster VPRO (that is funded by the Dutch government). 3voor12 consists of several aspects, namely two digital video channels, radio channels, a radio show that airs four times a week on the radio station 3FM, a website and live events (that are broadcasted on 3voor12 Radio Live). The website of the company holds quite a lot of functions. One of them is the so-called Luisterpaal. Here, people are able to stream new albums; sometimes these albums are so exclusive that they have not yet hit the music stores. Second, one can find a news and interview section on the website that not only features on musicians and in-depth interviews with musicians but also pays attention to broader news concerning, for example, music and technology or new laws on downloading. Third, 3voor12 reports on and about different large music festivals, such as Lowlands, Pinkpop, Crossing Border and Eurosonic Noorderslag. On these festivals, live-reports, entire concerts and music sessions are recorded, which are all shown for free on the website of 3voor12. In addition, a large part of festival reporting consists of reviewing several shows. These reviews are often written and are always done within a standard format – using a plus and minus and giving the particular shows a grade.

There are two types of employees at 3voor12: the reporters that are employed by 3voor12 and thus get paid for their work – for the website these are the final editor and four reporters (all men) and, naturally, people who are working for different divisions such as the radio show on 3FM – and thousands of volunteers that are part of 3voor12/Lokaal [local]. 3voor12/Lokaal is at its turn divided into different websites. Every province and even some cities have their own 3voor12/Lokaal website. It depends on how large the city or province is whether it gets its own 3voor12/Lokaal website: for instance, there is both a 3voor12/Amsterdam and a 3voor12/Noord-Holland, but only one 3voor12/Groningen. These volunteers have localized meetings and report on concerts and festivals in their hometown or province. Additionally, they interview either musicians from their hometown or musicians that come and play in their hometown or province. When reporting on large festivals, some volunteers even help the core group of 3voor12 reporters. Furthermore, 3voor12 sometimes
hires freelancers for festival reporting. All in all, 3voor12 is a flourishing multimedia platform that constantly extends and renews itself.

**FaceCulture**

FaceCulture, founded in 2002, is a production company that functions in two different – albeit connected – ways. First, it is a press bureau for music video news. This means that they produce content that is sold to other media outlets, such as NU.nl, *OOR*, and *De Volkskrant*. This content mainly consists of edited clips from interviews with musicians. Sometimes these videos are accompanied with an article about, for example, the musician or album. Second, FaceCulture is an online multimedia magazine and has its own YouTube channel. On this channel, not only entire video interviews with musicians are uploaded, but also music sessions (recorded after interviews or on festivals) and short items that are shot on festivals. The amount of views of the videos differs greatly – some videos have over a million views while others do not even reach a hundred views. FaceCulture has a business model that consists of multiple ways to generate revenue, and the company is producer and publisher at the same time. The company works with paid freelancers which all have their own specialty, ranging from camera people to journalists. Even though it is not the standard media outlet, FaceCulture is very interesting to examine for our thesis, since it is both a company that serves other media outlets that we are investigating and it is a publication of its own, using various channels to place its content.

**Muziek.nl Magazine**

Originally, the website Muziek.nl was owned by the record label Universal. Last year, a plan was created to combine the website with a new popular music magazine. The publisher agreed on the condition that it should be independent and they bought the copyrights of the website from Universal. Under the lead of editor-in-chief Jean-Paul Heck, the website Muziek.nl grew out to be a successful online Dutch media platform where readers can download, listen and read about artists and their music. On November 25, 2011 Muziek.nl published the first issue of its magazine: *Muziek.nl Magazine*. The first issue had a circulation of 40.000 and all magazines were sold out in a few weeks. This is surprising to say the least since a renowned magazine like *OOR* is struggling to sell their monthly circulation. *Muziek.nl Magazine* will appear four times a year. According to the editor-in-chief Jean-Paul Heck, the magazine tries to have the same focus and appearance as the English popular music magazines *Mojo* and *Uncut*, where great attention is paid to background stories and musical
movements. Furthermore, the magazine centers around re-releases and artists and bands like Bruce Springsteen, Tom Waits and The Rolling Stones, who became famous in the 1960s/1970s and still enjoy great popularity today. Simply put, nostalgia is an important theme of the magazine. This does not mean that new bands like The Black Keys or Mumford and Sons are completely ignored, but the focus remains on artists like the ones described above.

The editorial staff of the magazine exists out of well-known popular music journalists such as Menno Pot from De Volkskrant, Jan Vollaard from NRC Handelsblad and John den Braber from the magazine Revu. Furthermore, each publication will include contributions of guest columnists. The combination of the magazine and the website creates a perfect platform for music lovers, according to Heck.

4.2.1. Understanding Interviews

Since we examine the professional roles of popular music journalists and the present and future of the profession, it comes as no surprise that we chose the form of a qualitative research. We think that it is vital to hear the thoughts and opinions of several popular music journalists through the means of interviewing instead of collecting and analyzing data on a quantitative manner. Only through the approach of interviewing, one is able to get in-depth insight in the matters. Furthermore, as Lindhof notes, “interviews are particularly well suited in helping the researcher understand a social actor’s own perspective,” something we are definitely looking for. Moreover, a case study such as this one provides for, as Gerring strikingly notes, “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units.” The interviewees are of course all experts in the field of popular music journalism and it is therefore fundamental to collect their perspectives and thoughts. As stated before, we interviewed a total of twelve popular music journalists who work at several media platforms: in our humble opinion a solid representation of the Dutch media landscape of popular music journalism. Furthermore, the variety and amount of interviewees is large enough to draw solid conclusions.

394 Ibid.
In preparation of the interviews, we made a list of questions we wanted to ask the popular music journalists (see appendix D). Since the majority of the journalists we interviewed hold different positions, a variation in questions was necessary in order get all the needed answers. As a result, the style of all the conducted interviews was semi-structured:

The researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply. Questions may not follow exactly in the way outlined on the schedule. Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by interviewers. But, by and large, all of the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee.  

As the word semi-structured already indicates, the order of questions varied greatly during the interviews in order to give the interviewees as much freedom as possible – which hopefully gave them the opportunity to provide us with the most detailed answers. Bryman also notes that the kind of questions one should ask in qualitative interviews vary as well. We loosely followed the nine types of questions Kvale suggests. These are questions varying from introducing questions, structuring questions to just pure silence in order to give the interviewee the opportunity to formulate the best answer possible. Thus, as Bryman summarizes, semi-structured interviewing “tends to be flexible, responding to the direction in which interviewees take the interview and perhaps adjusting the emphases in the research as a result of significant issues that emerge in the course of interviews.”

The interviews we conducted were roughly divided into three parts. We first asked the interviewees about their background – education, music passion and so on – because it is often thought that popular music journalists are self-taught and we wanted to find out if this was also the deal with the Dutch popular music journalists. Furthermore, it turned out to be very interesting to hear how the interviewees became popular music journalists, which was often a case of luck and accident. Second, we focused on the profession of popular music journalism in general: whether or not objectivity can be seen as an applicable value; how the relationship between the popular music industry and popular music journalists can be described; how it is decided which artist they cover in their outlet, which not and so on. And last, we focused on the age of the internet and the future of the profession, because we

397 Alan Bryman, *Social Media Methods*, 438. [italics in original]
wanted to know what the interviewees thought of for example the blogosphere and whether or not the profession of popular music journalism has a bright future ahead.

The results of this thesis are partly based on the analysis of the twelve interviews done with Dutch popular music journalists. As stated before, we selected the most diverse group of interviewees possible. The majority of the interviewees work at different media outlets and the journalists (often) hold different positions. Simply put, we wanted to interview a diverse group of people in order to create the most complete picture of the profession possible. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face and most of them took place in various coffeehouses in the city of Amsterdam. The interviews were held between December 6, 2011 and February 14, 2012. The length of the interviews varied, but on average, they lasted for about an hour and a half. All but one of the popular music journalists we interviewed are men and the age of the journalists ranged from from 26 to 65. The following journalists were interviewed:

- Erik van den Berg - Editor-in-chief of OOR
- Barend Toet - Founder of OOR
- Atze de Vrieze - Editor/Journalist at 3voor12
- Erik Zwennes - Editor/Journalist at 3voor12
- Martin Kuiper - Founder and owner of FaceCulture
- Hester Carvalho - Journalist at NRC Handelsblad
- Menno Pot - Freelancer at de Volkskrant
- Gijsbert Kamer - Freelancer at De Volkskrant
- Tom Engelshoven - Freelancer at OOR
- Pierre Oitman - Freelancer and head of the music section at NU.nl
- Jean Paul Heck - Editor-in-chief of Muziek.nl Magazine
- Jasper van Vugt - Freelancer at OOR

4.2.2. Analysis of Conducted Interviews

All the interviews we conducted were recorded with a voice-recorder, because, as Bryman puts it, “the interview is supposed to be highly alert to what is being said … it is best if he or she is not distracted by having to concentrate on getting down notes on what is said.”

The majority of the interviewees actually told us that they very much appreciated it that we worked with a voice-recorder and that we could pay our full attention to what they had to say.

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instead of writing down notes. We decided to transcribe every interview we conducted. According to Heritage, there are several advantages when it comes to recording and transcribing interviews. For example, it “helps to counter accusations than an analysis might have been influenced by a researcher’s values or biases” and “it allows more thorough examination of what people say.” Even though these are great advantages, transcribing interviews is highly time-consuming; every hour of speech takes up about four to five hours of transcribing. Naturally, we only transcribed the sections of the interviews that are relevant to our research, and not the portions where, for instance, tea was ordered or the weather was discussed. Thus, even though transcribing interviews costs a lot of effort and time, we believe that in the end, transcriptions give the best results since they provide a complete and clear overview of all that has been said.

“An attractive Nuisance.” Miles described qualitative data like this because of “the attractiveness of its richness but the difficulty of finding analytic paths through that richness.” He could not be more right. Once we transcribed all the interviews, we gathered nearly 150 pages (see appendix B) of questions and answers, containing a significant amount of information. Therefore, in order to guide the analysis of our interviews, it was necessary to utilize “a general strategy of qualitative data analysis” – i.e. a framework to guide the data analysis. Whereas there are well-established techniques when it comes to the analysis of quantitative data, there are not any “widely accepted rules for the analysis of qualitative data.” Even though there are undoubtedly more approaches, qualitative data analysis knows two common strategies, namely analytic induction and grounded theory. For our thesis, we will use the latter, being the “most prominent of the general approaches to qualitative data analysis.”

Originally, grounded theory has been developed by Barney G. Galser and Anselm L. Strauss as described in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, published in 1967. From 1967 onwards, the content of the theory has often been redefined and there is still no full agreement on what grounded theory exactly is. A

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402 Ibid., 453.
405 Ibid., 539.
406 Ibid., 538.
most recent version of grounded theory is defined as following: a “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another.” However, as Bryman notices, “although it has just been suggested that grounded theory is a strategy for generating theory out of data, in many cases, reports using a grounded theory approach generate concepts rather than theory as such.” This is also the case with our thesis, even though we did not come up with a new theory, certain categories or topics were created from which we could draw clear conclusions.

One of the main processes within grounded theory is coding. Charmaz states that “[c]odes … serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organize data.” According to academics Strauss and Corbin, one can distinguish three types of coding, namely selective coding, axial coding and open coding. For our thesis, we will use the latter, which contains “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data”; this process of coding yields concepts, which are later to be grouped and turned into categories.” Simply put, open coding is a process where potentially significant parts of the interviews are connected through the use of labels or concepts. Pages and parts of the transcriptions that have the same topic or theme will receive an identical concept. This way, one can retrieve them easily at a later stage for further comparison. These concepts are the “building blocks of theory” as Strauss and Corbin mention. Later, these labels will be turned into larger and more coherent categories – a category holds two or more concepts. From these categories we could draw results. When bringing this back to our thesis, we broke down the interviews into coherent parts in order to get a clear overview of all that has been said. These separate components were given labels such as “objectivity”, “blogosphere” and “authority”. Some of these labels overlapped and we had to alter others until we covered all coherent parts of the interviews. After that, we created more general categories or themes out of all the labels from which we could draw results, as can be seen in chapter 5 and 6.

But before we move on to the next chapter we will first provide the reader with some details about our case studies

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409 Ibid., 541.
410 Ibid., 541.
413 Ibid., 13.
4.3. Research Design of the Case Studies

As is made clear above, this research employs a mixed method, although all three methods are qualitative. In the case of our research, we found that the best way to supplement the interviews was to perform two case studies at two media, 3voor12 and FaceCulture, whose representatives we had also interviewed. These case studies serve as examples. In these, we sought to highlight and further investigate issues that were raised by the interviewees. According to Robert E. Stake, a case study “is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances,” these circumstances being the issues and themes raised during the interviews.\footnote{Robert E. Stake, \textit{The Art of Case Study Research} (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1995), xi.} We performed two intrinsic case studies, meaning that we aimed “to learn about that particular case,” instead of picking random cases that all have the same value.\footnote{Ibid., xi.} We picked 3voor12 and FaceCulture carefully, because we feel that these two platforms best represent the issues that we are interested in, namely the rise of the amateur in journalism and media production. These case studies bring into practice what the journalists talked about in the interviews and therefore act as a check to the interviews. Furthermore, we also believe that these two platforms employ a way of working that stands out from the rest of the outlets we interviewed journalists from. Their unique way of working makes the outlets worth researching, as they both work with a model that is not standard in music journalism.

\textit{Case study 1: 3voor12}

Let us start with 3voor12, which holds a unique position in the landscape of Dutch music journalism. Not only because they are funded by the Dutch public broadcasting system – which more than once faced enormous cuts – but because they have a high level of experimentation. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, 3voor12 operates as a group of professionals working together with thousands of amateurs. As we explained in chapter 3, many academics claim that amateur journalism forms a threat to professional journalism, because anyone with an internet connection can write about music. However when we posed this to our interviewees, they were less likely to vie the rise of the amateur as a threat. Because of cutbacks in media, journalists need to do more work with a tighter budget. Therefore, working with amateur journalists can be an outcome, as long as the latter has professional supervision. We were very interested how this exactly worked and investigated the matter in a case study. In this case study, we used a mixed design. First of all, we used
literature on participatory journalism to lay groundwork for this influence of citizens in journalism. Second, we asked a variety of people why and how this works; the volunteers that work for 3voor12 (why are they working there for free?), the people that coordinate the volunteers (what are the pros and cons?) and how the idea was developed and how its execution takes place: these questions were asked on Twitter and Facebook. Third, we used the method of content analysis to investigate how exactly the writing of amateur journalists differs from professional journalists. As we already mentioned in chapter 3, Levenson argues that “if anyone can make pop music, and anyone can be a pop-music critic, do we really need professional critics to tell us what it all means?”

Although we are aware of the fact that investigating the writing at 3voor12 does not mean that all amateurs write in such a specific way, it can serve as an interesting example. Therefore, the research question for the content analysis reads as following: Are there differences (in the quality of the writing) between amateur and professional popular music journalism, and if so, what are these? We will now explain what content analysis exactly is and how will we perform the coding at this specific case study.

According to Bryman, “content analysis is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seek to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner.” As stated above, interviews helped us to understand and perceive the roles and beliefs of social actors, while the analysis of documents and texts can explain why a particular response was given during an interview. As Yan Zhang and Barbara M. Wildemuth argue, “qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text.” This quote is interesting, because it exactly shows why it is so important that we conduct this analysis: the key of this content research is to find out if the opinions and differences in these opinions – some people viewed amateur journalism as a threat, others as a blessing – we heard while conducting the interviews can be traced back into the texts of popular music journalism. These texts are our check. Because this thesis aims to paint the most complete picture as possible of the future for popular music journalism, this particular research on amateur journalism complements the aim to understand different sides and performances of popular music journalism. Our approach is not interested

417 Alan Bryman, Social Research Methods, 247.
in the intended meaning of the texts, e.g. how the author meant the text to be read, but on how the potential reader perceives the text and the techniques used to craft it.

In this research, we coded reviews of live performances written by professional and amateur journalists. We chose them randomly by picking professional reviews from different festivals (ranging in grades) and picking amateur reviews from different local branches: we picked the first review we encountered when opening the local website. As opposed to the grounded theory approach we took to analyze the interview data, the schemes used for coding the content analysis are based on outcomes of the interviews, mainly on the question “what kind of qualities does a professional journalist need to have?” Therefore, our coding scheme is informed a priori, by our research results from the interview portion of this thesis. Furthermore, the process was also based upon the theory we put forward in the first three chapters. The resulting coding scheme can be viewed in appendix E. More about the content of this scheme will be explained in the next section.

4.2.2. Developing the Coding Sheet

To start off, the terms ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ need some further clarification. It is difficult to give a safe and sound definition. According to Robert A. Stebbins, a popular (although simplistic) conception is that “(1) The professional gains at least 50% of his livelihood from his pursuit while the amateur, at the most, only supplements a principal source of income earned elsewhere. (2) The professional spends considerably more time at his pursuit than does the amateur.” This does not mean that the amateur never intends to work as a professional music journalist, but rather that he or she does not does so at the moment. As Stebbins rightfully argues, it cannot solely be based on always or never gaining income from work, because some professionals work for free to, for example, expand their portfolio. Also amateurs – who, to borrow Jay Rosen’s words, were formerly known as the audience – can get a small compensation for their work. Finally, someone can do work on a voluntary basis for a certain publication just for the fun of it, but can get paid for journalism work at other publications. For our research, we define someone as an amateur when he or she does not get paid for the work and he or she does not work within the field of journalism. Therefore, all authors were checked if they were indeed amateurs or professionals.

In order to dissect what is important when analyzing the value of professionals versus the value of amateurs, we first again examined the characteristics we found in the second

category of chapter 5: the popular music journalist. In this category, we established a framework of characteristics that a good music journalist has to have according to our interviewees. These characteristics led us to ask the following questions:

- Who is the author?
- Is the text mainly descriptive or mainly argumentative?
- Is the text critical of the work of art?
- Is the object of the review placed in a larger context or described as an object that stands alone?
- Is the text written from a personal perspective, using the first person singular?
- What types of artists are involved?
- Are there mentions and comparisons to other works of music?
- What kind?
- Are there mentions and comparisons to a historical framework?
- Is the editing done well?

These questions led to us form the following categories and themes, which were used to code the reviews. These are level of criticism, knowledge/context, personalization/distance, topic and professional technique. We will now explain what these categories encompass and how and what variables will be measures.

1. Knowledge / Context

Most interviewees stated how important it is to provide context to the music they write about. For example, NU.nl journalist Pierre Oitmann stated that historical knowledge is vital in order to “place frameworks.”

OOR editor-in-chief Erik van den Berg also argued that popular music journalists have to have a lot of knowledge and therefore should be capable of putting popular music into context. This is supported by literature. According to Van Venrooij and Schmutz, who researched how popular music is classified by critics, “discussion of context positions the critic as an expert by providing the mediating knowledge needed to properly understand and appreciate the album.”

Examples of this are connecting the music to societal problems or current events, or looking back at musical history. Another aspect of context is making comparisons. Shyon Baumann, who researched the intellectualization of

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421 Ibid., 405.
film, lists a number of techniques and concepts in film critique that are used by critics when reviewing films. One of these is comparison. According to Baumann, “making connections between different works allows critics to justify their analyses and to display their cinematic erudition.”

With this technique it is important that the author not solely states the title of the other film – in our case, band or album – but that there is a comparison. Therefore, the variables we used in this category are (1) historical or social framework (2) biographical context (3) references to other bands (4) references to musical genres and (5) references to popular culture.

- Example of (1) en (3) combined: “[the Arctic Monkeys] started in the slipstream of the Libertines and ended via the desert rock of Josh Homme in the 1970s. Today, Alex Turner has a 1950s haircut and a leatherjacket with its collar up. Like a squinting James Dean.”
- Example of (2): “You thought that Hanson was a one-hit wonder from 1997. Nothing is further from the truth. The fans all stayed sixteen.”
- Example of (4): “Where U2, Oasis and Bon Jovi make love and The Drums then looks after the children. Something like that.”

2. Level of Criticism

According to Jones and Featherly, “the job of the music critic is, fundamentally, to convince readers that particular music is good or bad.” This viewpoint also came forward in the interviews. For example, Atze de Vrieze stated the following: “In the end, taste is the only thing that matters. Some people tell us: this is not an objective review. That’s true, but it’s taste that matters.”

According to Baumann, “a vocabulary of criticism is a common feature of artistic commentary.” Critical engagement means that there is mention of for example originality, which also named by Van Venrooij and Schmutz as a criteria for the evolution of art. Because criticism is important, we were curious to find out if this is an aspect that both professionals and amateurs use in their reviews. The level of criticism in the reviews that we coded fell into three labels, namely (1) engages critically (2) purely descriptive (3) fandom/celebratory.

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3. Personalization / Distance

Common heard is the notion that amateurs bring personal stories to the table and their own unique viewpoints. Therefore, in this category, we use two variables, namely (1) mentions the author and (2) mentions relationship with the artist; that relationship can also be traced in the wording of the author, if he or she for example names the first name of the artist.

4. Topic

Because we examined reviews from the same outlet, it was impossible to compare and contrast reviews written by both groups about the same bands. Therefore, we took Erik Zwennes’ line of thinking when he argued in our interview with him that amateurs can cover “the local acts that are underexposed.” The variables for this category are (1) local artist (2) national artist (3) international artist.

5. Professional Technique

This category aims to investigate the techniques that are employed by the writers in terms of writing style and editing. An obvious danger from amateur reviews is of course the lack of editorial control, leading us to check the variables (1) edited well and (2) edited poorly. In this technique, how the review is written is also important. Of course, a good popular music journalist also has to be able to present the gathered content in an engaging and professional manner: according to OOR editor-in-chief Erik van den Berg, a good popular music journalist: “has to write well, preferably in a sharp way. … There has to be some humor or perspective. … you shouldn’t take music journalism too serious.” This resulted in the variables (3) makes use of metaphors and (4) written creatively.

- Example of (4): Seeing is believing: Omar Souleyman restores broken legs before your eyes.

In chapter 7, we will then, after we have explored the relationship between professionals and amateurs at 3voor12, explore and explain the results per category.

Case study 2: FaceCulture

Just like 3voor12, FaceCulture (FC) takes a unique position in music journalism. The company does not only have its own platform, but is also a press agency specializing in music journalism. Interviews are not written, as with most music media, but are recorded with a
video camera. Just like 3voor12, it goes far in working cross-media and adopting convergence, and they produce content for multiple media platforms. Also, they work with a slightly different business model than most music journalism media. During the interviews, we interviewed owner Martin Kuiper and asked his viewpoints on music journalism. These were interesting enough to take a much closer look at FC. Because we are interested in how the company works, we decided to use ethnographic research and study the company ourselves firsthand. What this method encompasses will be explained shortly.

In our case study, we considered at a few interesting points that set FC apart. First of all, we looked at its business model. A lot of media are struggling to find suitable business models to survive online, so we investigated how FC works as the company finds itself only online, thereby being unique among the outlets we interviewed (although NU.nl is a website it, of course, does not only rely on music journalism). Second, its structures and methods were reviewed in order to create a full picture of who works at FC and how they work. Third, because this thesis is most importantly interested in journalistic roles, these were considered within the context of its workplace routines. Fourth, a key element of popular music journalist that was raised during the interviews is keeping the audience in mind when producing content, because not everybody is equally interested in music or equally common with many terms and artists that seem natural to others. Because FC serves, in essence, as a press agency, we are curious to find out how the company implements the idea of producing for an audience. Throughout these four issues, we are interested in what the advantages are of an audiovisual way of working.

To answer these four issues, we spent a day at FC’s office, observing how people work and talking to them how they felt about certain issues. Of course, a day is short; some researchers spent two years observing a newsroom. However, it also has some benefits, namely that certain issues will be noted instantly. Frances Julia Riemer describes such ethnographic research as the “systematic study of a particular cultural group or phenomenon based upon extensive fieldwork in one or more selected locales.” Clearly, this description focuses on sociology and anthropology, but that does not mean that this method is only used in these disciplines, although it carries elements from these. According to Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, it is a very important method in journalism studies:

Since the 1970s, ethnographic research has contributed tremendously to knowledge about news production processes and newsroom

cultures, providing a rich description of journalists’ ways of life and work. Ethnographers of news production have charted the cultures of newsrooms and the production processes unfolding within them, and shed light on the routines, values and professional practices of journalists.\textsuperscript{426}

This kind of research contributes to a wide knowledge on how journalists perform their daily job. Of course, interviewing journalists gives a good base for insight in working methods. However, observing their work contextualize examples raised in our interviews into actual daily practice.

Central in journalism then is the newsroom. Wahl-Jorgensen argues that “the newsroom is the most obvious place to seek out cultures of journalism because news production, as a professional practice, has been centralized and concentrated there.”\textsuperscript{427} Interestingly, in the same article, Wahl-Jorgensen examines the blind spots of ethnographic research in journalism and notes that “other forms of journalistic production that operate at the peripheries of the newsroom – even though they may be an integral part of the content put out by news organizations – are equally neglected by ethnographic researchers.”\textsuperscript{428} Music journalism is one of these. She goes on to argue that “this is particularly true of specialisms which are removed from the excitement of the news-gathering process and frequently occupy the lower rungs of the newsroom hierarchy. As a result, the work of arts journalists, music critics, and features reporters has received little attention.”\textsuperscript{429} Therefore, more work should be done in researching the practices of music journalism via ethnographic research. However, a downside of ethnographic research is that – besides the fact that it is very time consuming and takes a lot of planning in advantage – the medium itself has to agree to work with the ethnographer. In the case of OOR and 3voor12, we unfortunately did not get the chance to wander around the newsroom. After the interviews, we approached them and after discussing it with their employees, 3voor12 decided they were too busy and OOR does not have a central newsroom anymore, so they were also not available for us to research the company. However, because we had some knowledge prior to FaceCulture, we could get around these pitfalls. This knowledge was acquired by an interview with owner Martin Kuiper and a previous relationship based upon a three-month internship where one of the researchers had the chance to experience firsthand the way in which FC works. This is an important, because, as a guide

\textsuperscript{427} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{429} Ibid., 30.
to ethnographic research states “[i]t takes time to build trust with participants that facilitates full and honest self-representation.”\(^{30}\) This trust was established already before the research. Also, the guide notes that short-term observational studies are not well suited for ethnographic research, exactly because of trust building. Although we spent only one day observing at FC, we were not troubled by this, because of the pre-established familiarity.

Our method consisted of four parts. First of all, as stated before, we conducted an interview with Martin Kuiper, to gain more insight into his views on music journalism and his vision of the future of music journalism. In this interview, he named and elaborated on FC’s function as a press bureau, triggering our interests because it is a diversion from a traditional direct sales business model. It also gave us a few starting points that led to the formation of the issues that we focused on while doing the research (its business model, structures, journalistic role and audiences). Second, we observed the process of working and creating content throughout the day that we were there, taking personal field notes that helped us form questions. Third, we asked the employees during the day questions and interviewed them on their standpoints. Because these interviews can be very valuable for this kind of study, and the goal of this research is to gain an insiders perspective, it was necessary that the interviews were informal and conversational and employed open-ended questions; no interview questions were developed beforehand. Fourth, we used documents, such as the weekly planning that is emailed to all employees, to gain full insights into the working habits of FC. But before we move on to the case studies, we turn to chapter 5 where we present our findings from the first stage of this project, namely the in-depth interviews conducted across a broad spectrum of Dutch music journalism.

\(^{30}\)“Disadvantages of Qualitative Observational Research,” writing@csu: Colorado State University, http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/observe/com2d2.cfm (accessed May 7, 2012).
“We receive these kinds of requests every week. However, due to a limit of time, we simply cannot say yes to every one of them.” The majority of the popular music journalists we interviewed told us that many students request interviews for their theses. Upon asking why they agreed to be interviewed by us, the journalists explained that we presented them with an interesting and pressing matter that concerns them all. Since the interviewees are all dedicated to their profession and are extremely interested in popular music journalism, they had clear thoughts and opinions about our subject. Moreover, the popular music journalists were not only willing to pass on their knowledge and points of view, but they also provided us with some great stories about, for instance, legendary interviews and the old days of rock ’n roll (or in fact, deconstruct these).

Rather than discussing and presenting the interviews one by one, we decided to transcribe the interviews and then analyze them collectively, examining common themes and overarching narratives. This process resulted in two broad themes and a total of nine categories. The first theme, which holds four categories, focuses on the music journalists themselves, their background, professional roles, and their (changing) authority. In chapter 6 we will examine the second theme (that of ‘Music Journalism and its Surrounding Environment’) and continue to present the other five categories. The following categories will be discussed in this chapter:

1. Background – It is worthwhile to take a look at the backgrounds of the interviewed music journalists. Academics claim that since most of them did not follow formal training to become a music journalist, it is hard to experience the same level of authority as people who did receive the proper education that prepared them for their profession. We will examine the backgrounds of the interviewees and will discuss whether they experience any authority related issues due to a lack of formal training.
2. The Popular Music Journalist – As discussed earlier, the profession of music journalism lacks a well-established framework of needed characteristics. Academics even debate on the importance of the most basic values. Consequently, it is vital to examine what the interviewees – a.k.a. the experts in the field – think it takes to qualify as a good music journalist.

3. Authority – Authority is present in almost all of the categories, since it is considered a crucial concept within the profession by the academics we reviewed. However, the question remains how music journalists themselves consider a topic such as authority. Is there indeed a link between the lack of formal education and authority? Do the journalists experience less authority than a number of years ago? Is the concept of authority shifting from traditional to online media? These questioned are asked to the interviewees and the results will be presented in the fourth category.

4. Professional Roles – Academics have assigned four broad professional roles to popular music journalists, namely: gatekeeper, promoter, consumer guide and cultural intermediary. The interviewees discuss what roles fit best and whether or not these are still applicable in the digital age.

Even though these categories (and those in chapter 6) will overlap from time to time, for the sake of explaining, we will discuss each of them separately and will examine the thoughts and opinions of the popular music journalists we interviewed per category. Furthermore, in order to give the reader a contextualized analysis, we connected the results from the interviews to the theoretical framework we presented in the first chapters, and examined how these results relate to the literature we discussed. By combining these two aspects, we are able to discuss any similarities and/or differences in the opinions and findings of academics and the popular music journalists themselves. We think this is vital, because in this way we are able to provide the reader with an extensive overview of all that has been said and done on the profession of popular music journalism.

We interviewed a total of twelve popular music journalists. Beforehand, we selected the most diverse group of interviewees possible. Most of the journalists work at different media outlets (newspapers, music magazines, and online) and hold different positions; some of them are high placed and experienced but we also interviewed journalists that had just entered the business. Furthermore, we thought that age was an important selection criterion
since the younger generation might view things completely different than the generation that entered music journalism in the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, we chose a group that holds a wide variety of age. Simply put, we wanted to interview a diverse group of people in order to create the most complete picture of the profession possible. By carefully selecting these journalists, we interviewed a representative group of Dutch music journalists. Consequently, we were able to draw some solid conclusions once we finished conducting and analyzing the interviews. Given that we interviewed popular music journalists who work at several media platforms, the interviewees, understandably, had different viewpoints on the subjects we discussed. For example, newspapers and popular music magazines differ greatly in the decision which artists to cover in their outlet. The reason for this is that magazines and newspapers hold completely different business models, because the circulation of a newspaper does not depend on popular music, where this is the case for popular music magazines. Whenever differences are apparent, they will be discussed within the separate categories.

5.1. Background

As can be read in the first chapter of this thesis, Lindberg et al. note that popular music journalists experience a “common lack of university education, formal musical training and diplomas from journalism schools.”\textsuperscript{431} Klein, Frith and in fact most academic researchers concur and, furthermore, state that popular music journalists are often “self-taught.”\textsuperscript{432} However, this is only partly true. In contrast to what Lindberg et al. state, all of our interviewees received a university education – though some did not finish their study – varying from studies like Dutch language and culture, political science and cultural studies. Only one of the interviewees majored in journalism. However, the academics rightfully state that most popular music journalists are self-taught since the majority of the above mentioned studies do not specifically focus on (music) journalism. The self-teaching process happens at various stages. First of all, most of the interviewees were already great music lovers – some even call themselves ‘music freaks’ – at an early age and avidly read popular music magazines like Aloha and OOR. Furthermore, some of the interviewees, like Gijsbert Kamer (De Volkskrant) and Atze de Vrieze (3voor12), worked at record stores in The Netherlands. In addition, a great part of these popular music journalists already started writing – mostly on voluntary basis – album and concert reviews et cetera for newspapers and magazines when

\textsuperscript{431} Ulf Lindberg et al., Rock Criticism from the Beginning, 18.
\textsuperscript{432} Ibid., 18.
they were still in school; some of the younger ones practiced by writing for non-profit blogs such as Kindamuzik (Atze de Vrieze) and 3voor12/Limburg (Pierre Oitmann). By writing for outlets like these and by being great popular music fans, the interviewees taught themselves the ins and outs of being a popular music journalist. For example, Kamer mentions that he was trained on the job; he did not receive any education in journalism. Back in 1991, he worked at a local record store where a journalist from De Volkskrant often stepped by. This journalist was impressed by Kamer’s musical knowledge and asked him to start writing reviews for the above mentioned newspaper. Now, more than twenty years later, Kamer is a respected popular music journalist in The Netherlands.

Given the fact that the majority of the interviewees did not follow a formal training to become a popular music journalist, they are, as Klein explains, “forced to establish their authority without the aid of paper credentials.” As a result, academics claim that popular music journalists experience less authority than, for example, journalists who cover classical music, because the latter often did follow a formal training in playing an instrument and/or in the subject. However, the interviewees did not recognize themselves at all in this statement. Even though it is acknowledged that their subject of study might not be as important for society as that of a war correspondent for example – the editor-in-chief of OOR even calls popular music and the writing about it merely entertainment – the journalists do not experience any authority related problems for not receiving formal education. They argue that popular music journalists are predominantly judged by the readers on their level of expertise and writing skills and not on previous education. Moreover, Menno Pot (De Volkskrant) argues that because there is such a vast amount of popular music available these days, people “just want to read something good, a good story of a journalist who they have known for several years and who holds a great level of expertise.” As a result, music journalists function as a guide in the great ocean of popular music. The subjects of guidance and authority will be discussed in greater detail in the third and sixth category.

The above discussed quote of Lindberg et al. also states that popular music journalists often lack formal musical training. He is spot on. Most of these journalists are specialized in criticizing and writing articles about popular music, whereas they lack any technical knowledge. The same goes for our interviewees. The only exception is Jean-Paul Heck, editor-in-chief of Muziek.nl Magazine, who has played as a drummer in several bands since he was ten years old. According to Heck, this gives him a great advantage when interviewing

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433 Ibid., 4.
an artist or band, since he knows what it is like to be on stage and is, consequently, able to identify with the musicians. Furthermore, he can make certain links and observations many of his colleagues cannot: “Sometimes, when I attend a concert and read a review about it afterward, I notice that the particular journalist completely missed the point since he did not understand what exactly happened on stage.” Thus, according to Heck, one has a great advantage when being familiar with the technical side of popular music. However, not many popular music journalists deem technical knowledge important, something we will also talk about in more detail in the next category.

According to the interviewees, there are two kinds of popular music journalists: music lovers who accidentally become popular music journalists and journalists who happen to write about popular music. Obviously, the latter is also greatly interested in popular music – without a passion for popular music one cannot perform this profession properly, as Menno Pot (De Volkskrant) explains – but these journalists are also capable to become professional journalists on totally different subjects like human interest and sports. For example, Pot and Heck both claim that they are popular music journalists who are able to write about different subjects when they would stop writing about popular music. On the contrary, Kamer (De Volkskrant) was a great music lover in the first place and became, by coincidence, a popular music journalist.

Thus, the popular music journalists we interviewed come from very different backgrounds and were – just as the academics state – mainly trained on the job where they gradually learned the ropes of the trade. However, the interviewees did not agree on every aspect the researchers claim. For example, academics argue that it is hard for popular music journalists to claim authority towards other journalists and their readers due to their lack of formal education. The journalists themselves argue, however, that the readers do not judge them on whether or not they received some sort of education but rather on their extensive knowledge and their production of content as a whole.

5.2. The Popular Music Journalist
This research started off by trying to answer the following question: “What is a music journalist?” As stated, unlike professions like doctors or pilots, the vocation of music journalism lacks a well-established framework of needed values and characteristics according to the academic field. As a result, the exact features these journalists should possess remain unclear. For that reason, we asked all our interviewees the question “what aspects make a good popular music journalist?” Even though several concepts and characteristics overlapped,
the journalists came up with various (and sometimes even contradicting) answers. We will lay out the most important characteristics below, starting with the concepts of inventiveness and initiative.

5.2.1. Inventiveness and Initiative

According to Barend Toet, founder of the popular music magazine *OOR*, it is important for a popular music journalist to be extremely curious and one should be capable to “think out of the box.” Simply put, one should know how to find unique angles when producing new content. For example, musicians almost always have to promote their new album. During such a promotion period, record labels often arrange so-called press days where artists talk to dozens of journalists on a single day. For that reason, it is vital for a popular music journalist to find a unique subject to talk about: this is the only way to distinguish oneself from other journalists. During an interview, there are three aspects of major importance, according to Martin Kuiper (FaceCulture): one, showing that you are really interested in the story the musician has to tell; two, choosing the right opening question and; three, listening carefully to what the artist has to say. Only by following these three aspects and, of course, by talking about inspirational subjects, one is able to make an interview successful. Naturally, this does not always work out as planned, but a popular music journalist should have a clear idea what he or she wants to talk about when doing an interview, according to 3voor12 journalist Atze de Vrieze.

To explain Kuiper’s aspect of listening carefully a bit more, we will use the example Heck provided us. Heck agrees on the fact that popular music journalists always have to be all ears during an interview. Only then, one is equipped to successfully reach the next important characteristic, that of timing. According to Heck, “a proper journalist knows when he can change the direction of an interview in order to receive information the artist initially did not want to share.”

Heck tells us about his conservation with James Brown, who was supposedly a very difficult man to interview. During the interview, Brown went on an on about subjects such as racism and the Black Power movement, when all of a sudden Heck tells Brown: “I think your hair looks fantastic!” Brown was completely surprised by this comment and reacted by stating “Yes, I thank this hair to God because God is my hairdresser” – notably ignoring his hairdresser who stood next to him the entire interview. This is obviously a great quote and the interview switched to the hair of Brown, and gave Heck the opening to change the stiff interview to a nice conversation. This conversation only took place because Heck took the initiative to change the subject of the interview. Heck explains that it does not
matter how famous these artists may be, as a popular music journalist one should have the guts to make an interview challenging for both the interviewer and the musician.

So, initiative and inventiveness are important values in every fact of popular music journalism, may it be interviews, reviews or background stories. Barend Toet (founder of OOR) criticizes current popular music journalists for not being inventive enough; popular music journalists copy each other’s opinions and do not come up with their own stories, according to Toet. In the article of Klein, these kinds of journalists are called “me too critics”: they lack initiative and “blindly follow the opinion leaders.” Simply put, me too critics show “lemming behaviour” as Klein calls it. This means that as soon as an influential popular music journalist expresses his or her opinion about, for instance, an album or concert, there is the possibility that others will duplicate this standpoint. Furthermore, these days, there is such an extensive amount of media platforms that it becomes significantly harder to produce exclusive stories. Consequently, the temptation to plagiarize content or copy themes from other journalists or outlets increases. As the current editor-in-chief of OOR, Erik van den Berg, explains, it is essential to have a distinct vision on matters. However, he also states that this often does not happen since many (especially young) journalists dutifully copy styles of writing and content from other music journalists. Sometimes, there is such a lack of a unique writing style, that “one is virtually able to upload particular data to a computer program that automatically generates reviews,” Van den Berg points out. He just sees too little personal viewpoints in reviews. When writing content, there are four aspects of real importance according to Van den Berg. A popular music journalist has to have a lot of knowledge and should be capable of putting popular music into context. Furthermore, he or she needs an own vision on popular music and, naturally, should be a decent writer with a unique style.

Thus, according to Van den Berg, one needs an exceptional vision on popular music. In fact, this is what most interviewees stated: one has to have the ability to produce unique stories. In line with the previous paragraph, Kamer (De Volkskrant) states that many popular music journalists do not take enough initiative to produce their own exclusive stories and “they leave it all up to the record labels,” that provide journalists with promotional material such as a biography of the artist. As a consequence, popular music journalism heavily relies on new releases and concerts of musicians, and therefore almost becomes a sort of calendar journalism. This kind of journalism comes close to what Boorstin would call pseudo-events. In his book The Image: A Guido to Pseudo-Events in America (1961) Boorstin explains a  

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435 Ibid., 17.
436 Ibid., 17.
pseudo-event as a happening that “is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted, or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview.”\(^{437}\) In essence, this sums up a press day. These events are set up by record labels to promote new work of artists. Music journalists are invited to press days where they can interview (one of the) band members about their new album in a narrowly set time-slot. There is nothing “spontaneous” about these events, it is all is pre-planned to generate as much profit as possible, or in this case, generate as much promo for the artist. Or as Boorstin explains, a pseudo-event “is planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced.”\(^{438}\) The main goal of record labels and artists during such a day is to promote a new album. Record labels try to attract as many music journalists as possible in order to spread the news about the new album as wide as possible, since the success of such a press day (or pseudo-event) is “measured by how widely it is reported.”\(^{439}\)

Naturally, calendar journalism is not surprisingly, according to Toet, since media outlets are supposed to produce stories about new albums, concerts and the like. However, other than that, there are hardly any unique stories. For example, to promote his new album, Sony, the record label of Bruce Springsteen, organized a press meeting in Paris. A total of 130 popular music journalists from all over the world were flown to Paris to hear Springsteen talk about his new album. He did not take the time to speak to them individually but held a press conference in front of all the journalists. As a result, almost identical stories were found in newspapers and magazines since Springsteen provided every journalist with the same information. Or even worse, when a relative new artist enters the scene and brings with him a nicely set up biography, chances are high that every story looks the same. In Springsteen’s case, even though it might not have been easy, the question remains whether these journalists should not have found another news angle in order to make sure they would have produced a unique story. Naturally, this matter knows two sides. One, does covering the event according to ‘proper’ journalistic logic mean trying to come up with a unique angle, or, two, does it mean trying to convey and report what happens? Although most journalists try to have it both ways, this is very difficult as these two desires are not necessarily compatible. Furthermore, one has to keep the audience in mind: do people want to read what exactly happened at such a press conference or do they prefer a unique story (because audiences most likely consume


\(^{438}\) Ibid., 11-12.

\(^{439}\) Ibid., 11-12.
more than one media outlet). Thus, journalists have to find some balance between conveying what exactly happens and producing a unique story; a daunting task for many.

On a side note, although not unique to music journalism, it is worth pointing out that PR tries to ‘shape’ stories of journalists as well. For example, when music journalists receive new albums or audio streams, biographies of these particular artists are often included. According to academic Alex van Venrooij: “By providing press kits and biographies to journalists, the publicity departments of record labels try to construct a particular image of an artist, which can include the framing of an artist in terms of influences, inspirations, and so on.” However, not every journalist likes to read these biographies. For example, Heck states: “I think those [biographies] are completely uninteresting … I throw them in the thrash as soon as I get them.” In this way, he makes sure he is not remotely influenced by this image record labels want to construct and therefore warns himself of falling in the pitfall of predetermining an identical story.

Gijsbert Kamer (De Volkskrant) also criticizes his fellow journalists the lack of inventiveness and argues that he does try to find unique stories, and stresses that this takes some personal initiative. Over the last few years, as is laid out in chapter 3, the popular music industry had to cut down expenses. One of the consequences is that record labels cut back on arranging paid trips for popular music journalists to interview artists and bands in other countries. This is experienced as a negative development by many, but Kamer also sees several possibilities: “These days, when you want to talk to a particular artist or band [in a foreign country] and you are willing to pay for the trip by yourself, you are most likely to get an exclusive story,” whereas before, dozens of popular music journalists were sent to the same country to talk to an artist. As an example, Kamer tells the story about the English rock band The Police. Back in 2007, they started their Reunion Tour with two shows in Vancouver. The band does not produce any new material and is not “owned” by a record label, according to Kamer. Therefore, it was very hard for popular music journalists to arrange an interview or even tickets for one of the two shows – since music journalists depend so greatly on record labels. Kamer took his chances and booked a flight to Vancouver. The night before the first concert, The Police gave a small, exclusive, gig for members of their fan club. Fortunately, Kamer was able to buy a ticket for this concert on the black market. It turned out that he was the only popular music journalist present at the performance that night, which resulted in an exclusive story. Thus, taking initiative is extremely important according to

Kamer. Naturally, not every journalist or media platform has the budget to purchase plain tickets to see a particular concert. However, in general, journalists have a passive approach while they should be actively searching for stories as Kamer explains.

Jasper van Vugt (*OOR*) also recognizes this passive approach. He criticizes his fellow music journalists for taking not enough initiative and staying behind their computer: “I think that a music journalist shouldn’t write a review from his lazy chair, but he should go to shows." Van Vugt explains that he hardly ever sees some of the other popular music journalists he knows at shows, and therefore, he argues they cannot have an opinion. “It means you don’t a feeling of what is active at the moment, you only read the American and English blogs, but you don’t go to the clubs.” As an example he names Amsterdam band Jungle by Bight, “young white kids who play afrobeat.” When they became popular, Van Vugt argues, his colleagues were surprised. “They – I’m not going to give you names – were really astonished, like, ‘afrobeat, what?’ while I already spotted their capability of being a festival band at earlier shows.

Up until now, the interviewees mostly discussed needed values in order to start writing a proper piece of journalistic work. However, when it comes to the process of writing itself, there are also several characteristics popular music journalists should hold according to the interviewees. All the music journalists we interviewed agreed on the fact that they function as a sort of guides or leaders so to speak. There is an incredible amount of popular music available today, supported by technology such as Spotify as we explained in chapter 3. However, the majority of people do not have the time (and/or interest) to make a musical selection on their own, and, therefore, depend on popular music journalists who have extensive knowledge of popular music and whose job it is to filter popular music and present it to their audience. Whether or not popular music journalists literally function as consumer guides – in which they successfully influence the consuming behaviour of people – will be discussed in the third category. Nonetheless, it is important for popular music journalists to inform their readers of the new trends in popular music and provide them with all details necessary. When writing an article, three concepts are of particular importance according to the interviewees, namely that of historical knowledge, technical knowledge and what kind of audience they write for. Moreover, the interviewees had contradicting standpoints about whether or not they should write opinionated articles; this issue will be addressed last in this category.
5.2.2. Historical Knowledge

To start with the first characteristic, the majority of the interviewees believe that historical knowledge – i.e. the realization that current popular music is always influenced by older musicians, genres and movements – is extremely important for any popular music journalist. However, Erik Zwennes (3voor12) states that the importance of historical knowledge depends on the medium one writes for. Some popular music journalists need to know everything about popular music from the 1950s onward, while others are specialized in one genre such as journalist Saul van Stapele, who is specialized in hiphop. Pot (De Volkskrant) agrees with Zwennes. He states that even though every popular music journalist needs to have extensive knowledge about popular music, the need for historical knowledge varies because some media outlets focus on background and historical stories (for example Muziek.nl Magazine) and, therefore, require a great deal of historical knowledge, while others have a signalling function (such as NU.nl) or focus more on recent popular music like the outlet of 3voor12. Consequently, Pot notes that “one can be an excellent 3voor12 employee without knowing any details about The Beatles.” However, De Vrieze (3voor12) opposes these viewpoints by stating that extensive historical knowledge “is always a surplus value” for a popular music journalist. He is of the opinion that it is not only significant to be aware of different popular music movements and genres, but also how these genres succeed and influence each other and so on. Heck (Muziek.nl Magazine) even takes it a step further; he states that historical knowledge distinguishes the amateur from the professional journalist. Furthermore, journalists “need to be able to connect the dots and anticipate correctly during interviews; the only way to do this successfully is when you know what you talk about and when you have a wide-ranging knowledge of popular music,” according to Heck.

OOR journalist Jasper van Vugt agrees. In line with De Vrieze, he claims that the need for historical knowledge does not depend on the medium one works at. One should always be able to inform the reader with the fundamentals of popular music. Even though he is only 32 years old, Van Vugt argues that, nowadays, the importance of historical knowledge is greatly underestimated by popular music journalists:

The building blocks of popular music are really important; I notice that many music journalists don’t take 60 years of popular music history into account. People state that they couldn’t care less about Led Zeppelin, but I’m of the opinion that one should be able to draw parallels. Current musicians are inspired by earlier albums, and [as a music journalist] you should know these as well. … If you don’t recognize that a band like Vampire Weekend is greatly inspired by
Paul Simon, The Talking Heads or Brian Eno, you’re missing a critical characteristic [as a popular music journalist].

Thus, popular music journalists need to have the ability to put popular music into context, according to Van Vugt, and, should be able to recognize re-appearing genres and movements.

5.2.3. Technical Knowledge

The interviewees were more divided about the necessity of being familiar with technical aspects of popular music and, moreover, about informing the audience about these aspects in their articles. As explained in chapter 2, Dutch author and comedian Mike Boddé argues that it is awful that only a small percentage of the popular music journalists is familiar with the technical side of popular music: “While jazz and classical music journalists often know very well what they are talking about, popular music journalists excel in superficiality.”

Boddé states that popular music journalists solely focus on the timbre – or ‘sound’ as it is popularly called, according to Boddé – of songs, instead of also paying attention to melody, harmony and rhythm. He argues that people just do not need popular music journalists who are able to define killer horns, angry drums or raging guitars in a song, since “every idiot is able to tell this when hearing that particular song.”

Even though this might be a generalizing statement, it also raises the question whether popular music journalists should indeed be familiar with the technical aspects of popular music. In 2006, journalist Sashe Frere-Jones, for example, wrote an article on Mariah Carey’s “record-breaking career.” Besides writing about her career, Jones also paid attention to her vocal range: “[W]hen she sang her perky dance hit “Emotions” at the 1991 MTV Video Music Awards, she reportedly sounded a G-sharp three and a half octaves above middle C, one of the highest notes produced by a human voice in the history of recorded music. (Party poopers say that the note was actually an F-sharp.)”

Despite the fact that this might sound impressive, the question remains whether readers are interested to read these details in articles, or to take it a step further, actually understand what it means. Since it is a much debated aspect of the profession, we were eager to know what our interviewees thought about this subject.

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441 Mike Boddé, “Popjournalisten,” Mike Bodde, 2011.
442 Ibid.
443 Ibid.
445 Ibid.
As stated earlier, the interviewees did not all agree on the importance of technical knowledge. Overall, the younger popular music journalists were more open to it than the older generation of popular music journalists who immediately stated that technical knowledge is not important for their profession. One of the journalists who does not see the need of technical knowledge is Menno Pot (Volkskrant). When one judges popular music on the level of the academy of music, little remains Pot states, since technically, popular music is not as complicated as jazz or classical music: “The most important aspect of popular music is not the instrumental complexity of the music itself … people who state that they love Led Zeppelin because Jimmy Page is such a brilliant guitarist [are wrong] since one can easily find greater guitarists when one steps into an academy for music.” According to Pot, “popular music is an excellent means to portray the zeitgeist.” Implicitly, he states that a popular music journalist should be able to portray the zeitgeist and put music into social context, and therefore should not focus on time signature and note value of songs. Van den Berg (OOR) agrees with Pot insofar that technical knowledge is not necessary for their journalistic discipline, but is more suited for specialized music magazines such as De Gitarist [The Guitarist].

Technical knowledge can be used by popular music journalists in two ways. First, solely for personal use; this can give the popular music journalist an advantage in recognizing certain technical aspects and movements in popular music. Second, one can inform the audience with their knowledge like Sasha-Frere Jones did in The New Yorker. Even though, as Zwennes (3voor12) states, it can be an advantage to know a lot of the technical side of popular music, it is often not interesting for the audience one writes for – at least the audience Zwennes is writing for. According to Zwennes, “an artist might think it’s really cool when I discover that that the song was written in the key of C-minor, but my audience probably doesn’t have a clue what it means.” Even though most journalists we spoke state that they do not bother their audience with details about the technical side of popular music, it is useful to be acquainted with this side of the profession according to part of the interviewees.

Van den Berg (OOR) stated earlier that the importance of technical knowledge depends on the medium a journalist writes for. However, it is always useful to know something about this side of popular music, according to others. Oitmann (NU.nl) explains this point of view by using the example of Phil Spector. The famous record producer is known for his Wall of Sound, a music recording technique that he developed in the early 1960s. His Wall of Sound was “[c]haracterised by bombastic, reverberating instruments
which constantly threatened to drown out the vocals." Furthermore, the record producer "put together an enormous ensemble of musicians to record his Wall of Sound records." This is a unique recording technique and applied to songs of, for example, Ike and Tina Turner, Leonard Cohen and The Beach Boys. Being a popular music journalist, it is essential to know details about the Wall of Sound according to Oitmann; one cannot clarify a song that uses this technique when not knowing anything about the Wall of Sound, its history and what it entails. De Vrieze (3voor12) is of the same mind. He explains that technical knowledge is not an aspect that is high on the agenda of popular music journalists, whilst, according to De Vrieze, popular music journalists should be able to understand this side of popular music: “When an artist deliberately uses a time signature with irregular bars or there is a great contrast between high and low notes, it is important for a popular music journalist to spot that.” However, the audience is only interested in these details at a certain level. Consequently, one should not bother the audience with all the ins and outs of techniques but should mention it when it is important, as De Vrieze explains.

5.2.4. Audience

The third aspect a popular music journalist has to take in account is the audience he or she writes for. As Klein explains, popular music journalists have to “strike a balance between writing for the subset of music criticism consumers and the broader readership.” Naturally, this is different for each of the examined media outlets. For example, journalists who work for OOR write their articles for a different audience than journalists who work for newspapers, since they believe that their readers are, overall, highly interested in popular music and know much about it. Therefore, as Van den Berg explains, “we do not have to explain every musical term and basically just assume that people know certain bands and artists.” Naturally, employees at newspapers cannot assume any basic knowledge of popular music from their readers and, for that reason, have to introduce certain terms and artists. According to Pot (De Volkskrant), he has to walk a thin line between explaining every single aspect of popular music and assuming certain facts to be known. For example, as Pot explains, when introducing Elvis Presley as “the American artist who became famous in the 1960s, all readers think: what is this nonsense? However, other artists do need an introduction … drawing that line is difficult.” Van den Berg explains that something similar happens at

447 Ibid.
Although a certain level of basic knowledge on popular music is assumed, the magazine also has to be interesting for people who (partly) lack this kind of information. Therefore “one cannot be too obscure [when writing about popular music], but at the same time, one should avoid stating the obvious,” Van den Berg clarifies.\textsuperscript{xxxi} According to Zwennes, it is vital to have a perception of the audience one is writing for. The media platform 3voor12 is, for example, active on social media, participates in discussions and panels, gives several lectures, is able to measure viewership on their website and so on. By doing all these extra curricular activities, the popular music journalists from 3voor12 have a clear idea what kind of audience they have and are, consequently, able to adjust their writing style.

The practice of name-dropping is closely related to this aspect. In many popular music articles, the practice of mentioning other band names is exercised. Artists hate to be compared to other musicians, according to Zwennes: “every artist is unique and every song is unique, so how can I be compared to another artist?”\textsuperscript{xxxiii} For example, as stated in chapter 1, at the beginning of his career, Bruce Springsteen was immediately deemed as the “new Dylan.”\textsuperscript{449} Springsteen himself addressed this in his keynote speech at the South by Southwest Music Festival he gave on March 16, 2012: “Signed by John Hammond at Columbia Records, along with Elliott Murphy, John Prine, Loudon Wainwright III; we were all new Dylans. And the old Dylan was only 30. So I don't even know why they needed a fucking new Dylan, all right?”\textsuperscript{450}

However, to what extent is it important for a popular music journalist to mention other names of artists and bands when writing, for example, a review? Hester Carvalho (\textit{NRC Handelsblad}) considers name-dropping as an admission of weakness:

Although it is virtually impossible, the highest goal of a popular music journalist is to write about popular music in such an illustrative way that one can almost hear the music. Since it is really hard to do this, journalists often refer to other artists [to show what the music they talk about is like] and, for example, state that ‘it is a mixture between The White Stripes, and such and such.’\textsuperscript{xxxiv}

Even though it is not always possible, Carvalho tries to avoid the practice of name-dropping whenever she can. However, according to Zwennes (3voor12), name-dropping can be very useful for the audience, since they immediately know what to expect from an artist. Thus, Zwennes does not consider the practice of name-dropping as an admission of weakness. As an example, Zwennes said that “it can become an ugly technical story when you for example explain The Black Keys without referring to Blues heroes or genres, without pointing to rock ‘n roll and without naming the production of Danger Mouse. Personally, this is not an admission of weakness.”

Naturally, Zwennes explains that one cannot randomly start to drop names in an article; it has to have a clear goal, such as informing the readers. Furthermore, Pot argues that name-dropping is just really practical nowadays. Articles are becoming smaller; reviews (at least in newspapers) often have a maximum length of a 150 words. As a result, one just does not have the room to write extensively about an album or concert; it needs to be short and snappy so it is very practical when one is able to refer to other artists. In addition, these days, people want to know things instantly; they are no longer willing to read extensive articles according to Pot. Therefore, name-dropping is perceived as a useful practice. We did not examine whether or not this last statement is actually true, since it lies outside the scope of this research, but it is would be very interesting to research whether people are indeed no longer willing to put time and effort in extensive articles about, for example, popular music.

5.2.5. Neutral or Opinionated?

The last concept we want to discuss is the tone a popular music article should hold – should popular music journalists merely focus on informing the audience when writing an album review or should they centre on their opinion? As noted previously in this thesis, according to Jones and Featherly, the fundamental job of popular music journalists is “to convince readers that particular music is good or bad.” Furthermore, as popular music journalist Everett True points out, popular music journalists “write to make an impact.” He continues by addressing other popular music journalists directly:

You write to entertain. You write to put your message across. … You write to make people remember what you’ve written and to act upon it. You write because you believe that you can change the world. If

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you didn’t believe that, you wouldn’t be writing. You’re a music critic and you don’t like something? DESTROY IT. Destroy it. If you love you also hate. So … DESTROY.453

However, Kuiper (FaceCulture) thinks otherwise. He argues that popular music journalists above all should function as a gateway of information – opinions of the author are of less importance. Furthermore, he states that “a good popular music journalist does not slate albums but merely informs the audience about it.”xxxvi As Kuiper points out, there are roughly two ways of writing a review:

One can write a review stating that an album is pure crap, that the artist should have done a better job and that there are only two proper songs on the entire album. However, one can also write a review by arguing that ‘the new album sounds like this and this which is a different style than their previous album, since that album contained more rock songs. However, when preferring that style of music, there are numerous songs on the new album which you might like.’xxxvii

This way, the popular music journalist subtly informs the audience about the pros and cons and is it up to the reader on deciding whether the album is good or bad. Moreover, Kuiper stands up for artists. He states that only few popular music journalists realize that musicians work incredibly hard to realize a new album and that they put their heart and soul into it. As a result, Kuiper argues: “Who has the right to slash an album – after listening to it for two or three times – in a short article that contains no more than a couple of hundred of words?”xxxviii

Thus, one of the fundamental tasks of popular music journalists is to inform their audience. Even though it is logical to have a subtle opinion, the main job of the journalists is to provide readers with details about new content; the consumer should have the ability to form his or her own opinion about a new album, concert and so forth, according to Kuiper.

One can wonder whether it is the duty of a popular music journalist to take the feelings of an artist into account. Needless to say, not every interviewee agreed with the opinion of Kuiper and rather shared visions with True, Jones and Featherly. De Vrieze (3voor12) acknowledges that it is most important to inform readers with details about a new album and provide necessary context. However, in the end it is all about taste. With the right context in mind, a popular music journalist should be able to explain why a particular album is good or bad. Furthermore, De Vrieze also states that, sometimes, it is just entertaining to write and read a cheeky and/or negative review. According to De Vrieze, there are two reasons for

453 Ibid.
writing such a review: first, because these are just fun reviews to write. Second, because albums who actually receive a great review (of 5 stars) stand out between others. When giving each album 3 or more stars, no album will stand out of the crowd.

We started analyzing this category by asking the question “what aspects make a good popular music journalist?” Even though there are undoubtedly more values popular music journalists should hold, we examined the dominant themes which arose during the interviews and evaluated these in the context of theoretical discussions on what makes a good popular journalist. As discussed, popular music journalists have different opinions about their needed characteristics. This is not surprising since there is not a well-established framework of the needed characteristics for the profession as explained in our theoretical framework. However, according to us, the main tasks of these journalists come down to what Oitmann (NU.nl) pointed out during our interview: “You [music journalists] need to have extensive knowledge about popular music and should be able to write articles in such a way that the audience … understand and bond with the music one writes about.” By combining the viewpoints from the academics and the interviewees, we created an inclusive image of the music journalist, who needs to have the ability to put music into social and historical context, and have to keep their audience in mind. As we explained in chapter 1 and 3, due to the internet, the authority of the music journalist changed greatly. How it actually transformed – and is in fact still altering – will be explored in the next category.

5.3. Authority

The subject of authority was widely present in our theoretical framework. Virtually all academic researches we discussed stated that the subject of authority – and how music journalists experience this, now that information is free and everybody with a blog can call him or herself a journalist – is much debated within the field of popular music journalism, for multiple reasons. First of all, as stated in the beginning of this chapter, the popular music journalists are “forced to establish their authority without the aid of paper credentials.” Consequently, academics state that these journalists experience less power than their colleagues in classical music, from which most of them did study the subject and/or an instrument. However, the journalists we interviewed all argue that popular music journalists are judged by the readers on their level of expertise and writing skills and not on previous education. A second reason is that the characteristics and values of the profession are

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454 Mark Deuze, “What is Journalism?” 442.
constantly in flux, and so is authority. Due to the profound presence of the internet, a lot changed in the field of popular music journalism and the value of authority is no exception. For example, several journalists and academics have argued that “the authorial voice of music journalists is currently fading” because of the rise of amateur blogs.\footnote{Petra Davis, “You Are What You Read,” \textit{Drowned in Sound}, July 16, 2009, \url{http://drownedinsound.com/in_depth/4137396} (accessed April 10, 2012).} This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter in the category blogosphere. The interviewees hold different viewpoints when it comes to their authority. While some argue that it is slowly declining others state that their authority has never been this strong. Furthermore, the majority of the interviewees agreed that authority for journalists is shifting from the written field of journalism to online and television platforms. This means that where magazines and newspapers held great authority in the previous century, online and television platforms take over on this authority.

Let’s start of with the latter. This shift might be caused by the fact that people increasingly no longer want to rely on a written review. They no longer take the quality of an album for granted if it received an excellent review, but they want to find out for themselves whether or not the albums sounds and looks good. Therefore, more people visit the website of 3voor12 where they can stream certain songs or albums and watch talk shows like \textit{De Wereld Draait Door} where popular music plays an important role. Where all interviewees acknowledged that there is a shift in the level of authority, the younger generation of journalists (as seen before) saw plenty of opportunities where to seek and find authority, whereas the older generation of interviewees mostly viewed the shift as a negative development. The reason for this might be that the older generation often works in print (and authority is moving away from that field of journalism) but also because of the lack of willingness to develop and renew. For example, \textit{OOR} just renewed their website but editor-in-chief has a reluctant attitude toward social media and does not use Twitter, while, according to Erik Zwennes (3voor12), Twitter is the perfect way to create communities, and consequently, draw people to the medium you work for. Therefore, in order to maintain their authority, Zwennes explains that the staff of 3voor12 constantly renews its organization. To give an example, their website is visited by 13 million unique visitors each year, a substantial number. In order to keep every single one of them, Zwennes argues that one needs to renew the website and experiment with new things constantly. Naturally, Zwennes explains, this is not only important for the organization of 3voor12, but – in order to stay relevant in the current landscape – should be done by every journalistic organization.
As a lot of things, the reallocation of authority started with the rise of the internet. Back in the days, people would bring newspaper reviews to the record store to show the salesman what album they wanted to buy. This practice has declined and to some it virtually disappeared. However, according to Dick van Dijk – owner of two major record stores, that of Concerto and Plato – the daily talk show *De Wereld Draait Door* is now of major influence on sales. A couple of times a week a band or artist – either just beginning or advanced – is invited to play a song in the show. However, they are only allowed to play the song for one minute, trying to keep all viewers. Even though this might be very short to some, the minute is of major influence and, the next (or even the same) day, people buy music from the artist on iTunes, buy it online or go to a record store, according to Van Dijk. Consequently, the show experiences a great level of authority. *De Wereld Draait Door* even won the so-called Pop Media Prijs [Pop Media Award] for their category named American Recordings. Here, musicians cover their all time favourite song, just as Johnny Cash did on his American Recording albums. The award was given to the show because they enrich the landscape of Dutch popular music, according to the jury.457

Where television and online platforms experience an increase in authority, the editor-in-chief of *OOR* states that its authority is declining. Van den Berg states that while *OOR* is still a strong brand in The Netherlands, the circulation of the magazine is declining and its increasingly get harder to get interviews from record labels because they are not deemed the most important popular music outlet as before. Furthermore, Van den Berg argues that even though their popular music journalists still experience a certain level of authority, it is not as impenetrable as it used to be. According to Van den Berg this is mainly caused by the fact that people are now able to respond to reviews and articles immediately. Thus, viewpoints of popular music journalists are no longer sacred, but just an opinion as any other and people grasp every opportunity to start a discussion. As a result music journalists are far more approachable than before, for example on Twitter, as will be explained in the next chapter in the category social media.

Next to the fact that the field of authority is shifting from written journalism to television and online platforms, the value of authority also changed because people no longer depend on a single newspaper or radio station for their information, according to Zwennes and Heck. Before, when a well-established newspaper or magazine would give a particular album an excellent review, the record would be sold out the next day, Zwennes explains. Ever

since the rise of the internet, online music platforms, blogs and so on have been founded. This eventually led to the splintered landscape of popular music journalism and, consequently, led to the decline of authority of the traditional popular music journalists. Even though traditional media outlets such as *De Volkskrant* and *OOR* will undoubtedly remain to experience a certain level of authority, they now experience fierce competition from a lot of different media outlets. No longer do a couple of media outlets determine what the landscape of popular music (journalism) looks like; it is much more stretched out these days, as 3voor12 journalist Atze de Vrieze explains. Zwennes argues that this is good development because people now have more media outlets to choose from. Furthermore, since popular music has become so much more accessible to people, they can sort out for themselves whether they like certain music or not. Consequently, even though academics such as Jones and Featherly argue that the fundamental task of popular music journalists is to “convince readers that particular music is good or bad,” Zwennes points out that this is only a small part of the tasks of the journalists.\textsuperscript{458} Especially in this day and age – since people have access to virtually all popular music – it is most important to share information on popular music and let people decide on their own what to do with the provided information, according to Zwennes.

On the whole, there are two sides to the subject of authority according to the interviewees. On the one hand, these days, people have more outspoken views and no longer blindly accept the points of view of popular music journalists. For example, as stated above, Van den Berg explains that due to the internet people suddenly got the opportunity to give their opinion on articles and argue with the respective journalists about the content. While this can be a good development – since there is more interaction with journalists and their profession is no longer solely top down – when the argumentation is nuanced, Van den Berg claims that people merely just “exclaim that they don’t agree and that the journalists don’t have any expertise, which consequently undermines the authority of the journalist.”\textsuperscript{xli} No longer are thoughts and viewpoints of music journalists considered as the sole truth and people argue that they are able to sort out their own needs and do not need the expertise of the popular music journalist anymore. On the other hand, however, there is such a vast amount of popular music available, that people need music journalists “to connect the dots and are able to create useful content” according to Pot (*De Volkskrant*).\textsuperscript{xli} Since many simply do not have the time to invest a lot in popular music, people are happy that music journalists make a selection for them. Furthermore, Pot explains that people “tend to listen to the music


\textsuperscript{xli}
journalists they know, that have build a reputation over the years." Since it has become easier to literally ‘follow’ the journalists – on Twitter, Facebook and the like – people easily know the taste and credibility of music of the journalists; when they like the kind of content these journalists they produce, people will easier accept their opinions according to the interviewees.

Thus, the subject of authority remains a controversial and complex one. Whereas it used to be relatively easy, the landscape of popular music and journalism is now completely splintered and everyone is claiming a little bit of the authority. On top of that, because of the internet, people no longer blindly follow popular music journalists but now have the ability to figure things out on their own. This supports the argument earlier outlined in chapter 3 about purchasing websites such as amazon.com. People all have the chance to have their say on a certain product; no longer do they depend on professionals to do that. However, at the same time, there are so many people exclaiming their opinions and there are so many commodities – in this case popular music – available, that the interviewees state that people are now, more than ever, looking for an authoritative voice that they can trust and follow. Thus, even though the subject of authority might not look the same as it used to be, there is definitely still a sense of authority in the profession of popular music journalism.

5.4. Professional Roles

When we set up our theoretical framework, we also discussed four main professional roles that are assigned to popular music journalists by several academics, namely that of gatekeeper, promoter, consumer guide and cultural intermediary. In this category, we will discuss these roles individually and connect the arguments of academic researchers with the viewpoints of the popular music journalists we interviewed. Furthermore, we will examine whether or not these professional roles have changed in this digital age and if they have a bright future ahead.

5.4.1. The Gatekeeper

As stated previously, the process of gatekeeping contains “selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news.”459 Thus, through these procedures, this quote assumes that (popular music) journalists have the power to determine what content becomes news and, therefore, ultimately decide what

459 Pamela J. Shoemaker and others, “Journalists as Gatekeepers,” 73.
information reaches the audience. Consequently, as Dave Laing explains, popular music journalists (in their role of interviewer or reviewer) function as a pass on between the producer of music (the artist or industry) and the consumer.\footnote{Dave Laing, “Anglo-American Music Journalism: Texts and Contexts,” 335.} During the interviews, we asked the journalists if they recognized themselves in the professional role of gatekeeper and whether or not their function as a relay altered because of the digital age.

According to Barend Toet (founder of OOR), the distribution of popular music used to be very structured. As we noted in the discussion on the history of music journalism, from the moment popular music journalism was considered a serious business, record labels, “began advertising in rock publications and servicing the journalists with albums and concert tickets.”\footnote{Devon Powers, “Bruce Springsteen, Rock Criticism, and the Music Business,” 207.} On their turn, popular music journalists were able to decide what popular music they wanted to cover in their media outlets and, consequently, determined what popular music reached the audience. For instance, Erik van den Berg explains that, in the age prior to internet, OOR was seen as “the Bible” of popular music.\footnote{Thorbjorn Broddason, “The Sacred Side of Professional Journalism,” \textit{European Journal of Communication} 9, no. 3 (1994): 241.} Every two weeks people would wait eagerly for the moment when the magazine dropped on their doorstep and they could read all about new albums, artists and concerts. Since there was no such thing as the internet – let alone social media, blogs and such – people were dependent on the magazine for their news. Consequently, the popular music journalists were of great influence in determining what popular music would reach the audience. Thus, there was a clear step by step plan how the content was dispatched to the consumer. However, as early as 1994, academics like Singer and Broddason feared that “the gate-keeping function of newspeople” would diminish as “newsgathering expert systems [i.e. the internet] become available to the general public.”\footnote{Stuart Leslie Braithwaite, “It wasn’t meant to end up like this,” \textit{Drowned in Sound}, July 13, 2009, http://drownedinsound.com/in_depth/4137351-it-wasn%E2%80%99t-meant-to-end-up-like-this-by-mogwais-stuart-braithwaite (accessed March 1, 2012).}

Nowadays, as musician Stuart Leslie Braithwaite points out, “the idea of even waiting for the release of a record before hearing it never mind buying it is antiquated. The very mention of a new band’s name and you can go to their MySpace and hear what they sound like.”\footnote{We ended our description of this professional role in chapter 1 by pointing out that the professional role of gatekeeper faced a very uncertain future due to the internet. When asking the interviewees if the function of gatekeeping still exists in the digital age, they came up with various answers. According to Toet, the professional role of gatekeeping “is partly gone because of the internet.”\footnote{The transmission of popular music does not need the interference}}
of popular music journalists (and sometimes even record labels) anymore. People are able to discover new popular music on their own, since everyone who surfs the web has “immediate access to virtually everything, usually for free.” Furthermore, through Twitter and other forms of social media, people are able to share their music. As a result, popular music journalists are in all directions surpassed by regular people. The latter no longer need journalists as a gatekeeper – or as freelance journalist Meg White states “the idea of 'gatekeepers' between information and the public have spurned.”

However, others state that the professional role of gatekeeping is more vibrant than ever before. It might sound great that consumers now have the ability to avoid the pre-selections of popular music journalists and are independently able to discover new popular music, but there are only few people who have the time to do that. As Pot (De Volkskrant) and Zwennes (3voor12) explain, there is such a vast amount of popular music available these days on the internet that people are more than glad that popular music journalists make a selection for them. Although a bit generalizing, White hits the nail on its head with her explanation of this pre-selection: “The plebeians don’t know what’s out there, they can’t find everything and listen to it; they have day jobs, wives, weekend obligations, domestic improvements, self-help books, obese and obnoxious spawn. They’re still not quite there. They still have needs.” Therefore, according to White and several of the interviewees, many people are willing to rely on popular music journalists for their selection of popular music.

As a result, many are of the opinion that the process of gatekeeping is a kind of public service. Without it, people would drown in the amount of offered popular music. However, this public service might be influenced by market sales. As is widely known, the circulation of various popular music magazines dropped greatly and many of them are struggling to survive. Therefore, the number of memberships is of great importance. Chances are likely that this may influence the decision which artists are discussed in a particular magazine, since a cover with Lady Gaga on it might sell better than a Frank Turner cover. Or as De Vrieze (3voor12) stated, the act on the cover of a magazine should be an artist or band who at least can sell out Heineken Music Hall (capacity of 5,500 people) and preferably can play in stadiums like the Gelredome (which can hold approximately 35,000 people). In line with De Vrieze, Henderson explains that “pandering to "what’s cool" versus "what’s good" was a

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465 Ibid.
466 Ibid.
467 Don McLeese, “Straddling the Cultural Chasm,” 444.
deliberate ploy on the part of the magazines to maintain a hold on or increase their readership.”

Thus, selection of popular music might focus on new hypes and not necessarily on what’s good.

As a result, popular music that is not part of a new hype is often not considered interesting by the outlets. For instance, Van Vugt (*OOR*) explained that, last year, he wanted to write an article about singer-songwriter James Vincent McMorrow after watching his performance at a music festival that June. Even though the singer-songwriter was already widely known, *OOR* refused to publish the article because the McMorrow’s album was not officially released in The Netherlands yet. Instead, the article was published in December of 2011 when the album hit the record stores in The Netherlands, seven months after Van Vugt initially wanted to publish the article. This exemplifies that certain traditional media firmly hold on to old standards. Even though the means to download or stream music are widely available – and people do no longer have to wait until an album hits the stores – some media outlets wait until the release dates of the country. As a result, *OOR* might (temporarily) have withheld new popular music from their audience, which was in turn not ‘new’ anymore once the magazine decided to publish content on it.

Furthermore, this demonstrates that media outlets – in this case *OOR* – cling to record labels for releases instead of going out and discover new music on their own. As we already pointed out in the previous category, many popular music journalists rely on record labels to provide them with new music, press tickets, interviews and so on. Naturally, the journalists are supposed to produce content about new albums and concerts, but they often do not take enough initiative to produce their own stories. Even though this might be due to a lack of time, the fact remains that little initiative is shown to produce unique stories. Consequently, popular music journalists may function as gatekeepers, but they also choose their content from a (by the record label) pre-selected list of artists. As a result, the audience might be missing out on a lot of popular music, or even more likely, already know the music due to various other sources such as blogs. Therefore, as we already discussed – to use the words of Bourdieu – “the journalistic field is permanently subject to trial by market, whether directly, through advertisers, or indirectly, through audience ratings.”

Fortunately, in addition to the popular music the journalists offer, people now have the ability to search for music themselves on the internet.

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469 Ibid., 230.
Thus, the internet changed the profession of popular music journalism in many facets, but the function of gatekeeper (and all its flaws) remains important for both the journalists and the people. Even though people now have the ability to discover new popular music by themselves, the interviewees state that they still lead the way in selecting popular music for their audiences. Or as Kamer (*De Volkskrant*) puts it: “It does not matter that virtually all popular music is available on the internet these days, consumers still need to know what they should listen to. Therefore, there will always be a gatekeeper function.”

### 5.4.2. The Promoter

In her article, Klein argues that the professional role of gatekeeper is not suitable for popular music journalists but that other roles, such as that of promoter, fit the journalists better. “The positive tilt of music criticism, dictated in part by space constraints, makes the music critic appear to be more of a cheerleader than a gatekeeper.” Thus, according to Klein, the content these journalists produce is overwhelmingly positive in tone. There are multiple reasons for this trend as Klein explains. One of them has to do with the constraints of space. As stated earlier by Pot (*De Volkskrant*), there is often little space reserved for, for example, reviews in newspapers. Consequently, according to Klein, in the field of popular music journalism “there was general agreement that, when one only has a limited amount of space, it is preferable to share with the reader good albums rather than bad ones, except perhaps to warn readers of an awful, high-profile release.”

This corresponds with the opinions of many of the interviewees. For example, Pot explains that journalists at *De Volkskrant* “hardly ever slash debutants or small bands; when we don’t like what they produced, we just don’t discuss it. If we would review such an album, one would actually write an article with the following message: ‘you might not know this band, keep it that way because it is rubbish’. It doesn’t get people anywhere.” *De Volkskrant* reviews three albums a week. One or two reviews will be about albums from big artists – these reviews can also be negative in tone – and one or two reviews are about smaller acts that were picked up by the newspaper or that the journalists simply like. Pot argues that one of the most important tasks of a popular music journalist is to make people enthusiastic about popular music, which will, obviously, be reached by writing in a positive tone about popular music. However, when necessary, the newspaper will write negative reviews about albums from (mostly renowned) artists – for example, *Lulu*, a collaborative album between

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472 Ibid., 12.
singer-songwriter Lou Reed, and heavy metal band Metallica, received only two stars.473 The same method is employed at 3voor12. Atze de Vrieze explains that the approach of the platform is a positive one. This means that, in general, most attention will be paid to things the employees deem good and they will take less notice of albums, concerts and the like that are of less quality. According to De Vrieze, this is done, because the platform argues that there is plenty of interesting content out there. However, this does not mean that 3voor12 completely avoids writing any negative reviews and such. For instance, the platform reviewed 35 acts that performed on the festival of Noorderslag/Eurosonic 2012 and reviewed three acts with an insufficient mark.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, several academics argued that from the moment the field of popular music journalism began to develop, it became an “important publicity mechanism” for the industry of popular music. As a result, the two built up an interdependent relationship.474 The popular music industry started to advertise in several magazines and newspapers and granted popular music journalists access to artists, concerts, albums and the like. To maintain a good relationship, it is suggested by several researchers that popular music journalists try to avoid writing negative reviews.475 Hence, popular music journalists cannot perform their work autonomously because they depend on the popular music industry for access, as argued by Bourdieu. Consequently, Powers points out that this field of journalism became “an object of promotional discourse.” 476 Klein takes it a step further and even compares the popular music journalist to a “cheerleader.”477 Naturally, at the same time, the popular music industry needs the popular music journalist to cover their artists. However, according to Klein, “because so many publications cover popular music, popular music critics have a lot of competition for access” which gives the music industry a great advantage.478

Pot (De Volkskrant) was greatly surprised when we confronted him with this professional role and he argued that he does not consider himself or the newspaper he writes for as a promoter at all. Pot takes it a step further and states that in many cases the exact opposite happens since “the music industry is not as powerful as it used to be.”479 As an example, he tells the story about the book Life; the autobiography of the founding member of The Rolling Stones, Keith Richards:

478 Ibid., 15.
When the autobiography of Keith Richards was about to be published, the record label offered us an interview with him. However, we would only be granted the interview if we promised that we wouldn’t write about the book in any way before it was publicly available. Coincidentally, Gijsbert [Kamer] was able to receive a copy of the book from a befriended bookseller before the original publication date. We figured that if he [Gijsbert] would read the book in the next two days, we would be the first of all media outlets with an extensive review of the autobiography. So we published the review and were no longer welcome to interview Richards. So be it. Beforehand, we weighed our options … and we figured it was most important to review the book as soon as possible. xlviii

Pot explains that they weighed the pros and cons and all thought that the discussion of the book was most important. As a punishment, the record label could completely ignore the popular music section of the newspaper from that moment on but De Volkskrant is one of the biggest and most importance newspapers of the country, as Pot points out. As a result, the record label would burn its fingers since they would lose an important publicity outlet. Kamer (De Volkskrant) completely agrees with Pot. He thinks it is complete nonsense that popular music journalists only write positive reviews to keep the popular music industry satisfied. Even though the audience might not always like it – most critique comes from fans of the particular artist – one needs to be honest, according to Kamer.

However, Zwennes (3voor12) states that the academics were not all wrong. He points out that over the last couple of years, the popular music industry and popular music journalism had to cut down costs. Contrary to what Pot stated, Zwennes argues that both industries rely greatly on each other. As an example, Zwennes questions the positive tone of reviews in the magazine of OOR these days. They are predominantly positive, while “OOR would used to slash certain albums about 10-15 years ago.”xlix This is a result of the inter-dependence of the two industries, according to Zwennes: “Imagine that Universal wants to place an advertisement of the new album of Pink in your magazine. At your turn, you completely slash her new album in a review. Then, you would probably have a major problem with Universal.”l As a result, the level of harsh criticism went down according to Zwennes. The editor-in-chief of OOR does not agree with the statement of Zwennes: “We are committed to independent, honest and upright journalism and they [record labels] should respect that.”li Sometimes, Van den Berg states that deals about certain artists and cover stories are made with record labels – “if you [record label] give us the opportunity to talk to an artist for a certain amount of time, we will write an article of 4 or 5 pages on it.”lii However, Van den Berg makes clear that such a deal “is never about the content [of
articles].” We will discuss the relationship between the two industries more extensively in the next category, ‘the popular music industry vs. the popular music journalist.’ In closing, opinions about the professional role of promoter vary greatly. Where all the interviewees consider their own outlet as sincere platforms, they critique others for having an overtly positive tone.

5.4.3. The Consumer Guide

The professional role that is mostly ascribed to popular music journalism is that of the consumer guide. Within the role of consumer guide, the journalists, ideally, make a selection of the best popular music that is available, help consumers to sort out their needs and determine what the consumer will ultimately buy or visit. This role is closely related to that of the gatekeeper, since it is both about the selection process, only this role focuses more on the influence of sales. As can be seen in chapter 1, academic research have contradicting opinions about the influence of this professional role, varying from statements suggesting major influence to academics who state that “reviews rarely have a direct effect on sales.” Consequently, we wanted to hear what the interviewees thought about the role of consumer guide and whether or not this professional role changed in this digital age. Although the interviewees could not provide us with any percentages or numbers of to what extent their writing directly influences sales, they were able to present us some interesting insights.

These days, according to Engelshoven (OOR), the most important revenue for artists and, consequently, record labels are concerts. Real money used to be in album sales, but due to the rise of internet – where people can download and stream popular music for free – this switched to concerts. In his study, McLeese even states that “bands release albums in order to tour.” Simply put, people spend less money on buying albums but are still willing to invest in concerts. Thus, before the digital age, “popular music journalists used to be able to influence the number of album sales directly,” but, as Pot (De Volkskrant) explains, “this is not the case anymore.” Kamer observes the same trend. He used to work in a record store back in the 1980s and 1990s. Every Friday – the day that reviews appeared in newspapers – people would walk into the store with the newspaper in their hand to buy the album they just read a review of. Just as Pot pointed out, Kamer notices that De Volkskrant still has a certain kind of influence as a consumer guide, but not on the same level as it used to have.

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There are multiple reasons for this decline of influence and most of the changes can be traced back to the internet. We will discuss the two most important reasons. First, as stated above, people are able to download and stream popular music for free online and do not longer massively buy albums. Consequently, reviews of popular music journalists are of less influence on the consumer behaviour of people. Second, influence declined because of the increasing amount of reviews. Pot explains that in the age prior to the internet, reviews of a certain album appeared in only one or two newspapers or magazines. Consequently, when people read an interview in OOR or NRC Handelsblad they more or less blindly followed the opinion of the popular music journalist. However, due to the rise of free newspapers, the founding of millions of blogs, social media and the like, people are bombarded with opinions about certain albums and do no longer strictly follow the review that appears in a newspaper or magazine. On the other hand, however, the professional role of consumer guide still has relevance to some. As stated in previous categories, Pot explains that there is so much popular music available on the internet, that it is more important than ever to guide the way. Thus, for the people who do not have the time or simply do not want to put effort in it, popular music journalists still function as a consumer guide. Even though they do not need to tell people what popular music is available, according to Pot, the journalists should be able to guide consumers to popular music that fits their taste. Therefore, opinions of well-known popular music journalists become more important. Moreover, Jean-Paul Heck (Muziek.nl Magazine) argues that the consumer guide is a professional role of all times, by being “a gatekeeper of taste.”

5.4.4. The Cultural Intermediary

The professional roles of consumer guide and cultural intermediary are often used interchangeably. However, the former focuses mostly on commercial aspects of popular music while the latter centres on the cultural elevation of popular music. From the moment the field of popular music journalism required a certain level of autonomy – and, consequently, authority – these journalists gained power to canonize, historicize and legitimize popular music, according to Fenster.481 As can be seen in the previous categories, all the interviewees agreed on the fact that they had (and maybe still have) the power to shape the field of popular music. They determine what “makes good, important music, and what makes disposable crap (as well as what makes bad important music and good disposable

crap), as said by Fenster.482 This implies, as Klein notices, that popular music journalists control the “written history of popular music.”483 Although this might be a bit of an overstatement, there are popular music journalists who (did) control the opinions about and attention to popular music artists to a certain extent.

However, this declined with the rise of the internet. Before the digital age, as mentioned earlier, OOR (and in fact many other outlets) was considered “the Bible” of popular music, popular music journalists could make or break artists and people blindly followed the opinions of popular music journalists.484 Times have changed and so do professional roles. It might have become more important to inform and guide the reader instead of creating hypes and the making and breaking of artists. Or as popular music journalists Andrew Ramadge strikingly notes, “[o]ne of the most important roles of [popular] music journalists is to record the history, or create the folklore, of a particular time – to give music a context and a narrative.”484 All the interviewees agree, it might be cool that the field was once able to consecrate popular music, but the main task of a popular music journalist is to contextualize popular music and inform the audience the best possible.

In sum, the professional roles of popular music journalists are not clear-cut, and remain metaphors. Not only do academics assign different roles to the profession, the popular music journalists we interviewed do not agree on all facets either. Where some argue that one should be able to ‘slash’ an album, others state that popular music journalists should solely inform the audience and let the latter find out for themselves if they like it or not. However, this makes the profession even more interesting, since people are able to choose their favourite popular music journalist and follow him or her via several ways. Even though the rise of the internet created great changes in the field, many professional roles remain of importance but for a totally different reason. For example, although the direct influence on sales might be decreased, according to the interviewees, consumers still need popular music journalists to guide the way. This guidance is necessary since people will otherwise drown in the vast amount of popular music that is available these days.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, by interviewing twelve music journalists, we have constructed a set of (debated) characteristics and needed abilities that popular music journalists should have. On
the whole, we can conclude that – although there is no overall consensus – most interviewees agreed on the fact that a good popular music journalist should be able to put music into social and historical context, should be inventive and innovative, should have a lot of knowledge on music, knows something about the technicality of music, can write well, can present a grounded opinion on particular music, and, last but certainly not least, is beware of the audience the content is written for.

With these characteristics, we also found a number of pitfalls. While our interviewees claim that inventiveness is an important part of the profession, the way in which the greater part of music journalism is structured approaches the idea of pseudo-events as laid out by Daniel Boorstin. A solution is offered by Gijsbert Kamer (De Volkskrant), who argues that journalists should focus on producing unique stories, rather than wait for invitations from record labels for press days, and read biographies instead of finding an own news angle. Jasper van Vugt (OOR) also criticizes his fellow journalists, and argues that not enough of them go out to shows, while that is where it happens according to him – not solely on the internet and on blogs.

While the internet does not change the fact that music journalists should be inventive and take initiative, it does changed the way authority is experienced. While some academics argue that the journalists’ sense of authority is declining since people now are able to discover new music on their own instead of depending on music journalists, the interviewees argue that there is such a vast amount of popular music available that people need journalists to filter the best music. Simply put, journalists need to make a pre-selection from which people can choose their own music. Today, a shift in authority is experienced from print outlets to television and online journalism. Since society is still in the midst of all the changes, there is no conclusive way of stating whether the authority of music journalists will further decline or thrive again. What is most important is that the journalists themselves believe that people will continue to rely on them for their professional thoughts and viewpoints on music. Up until this far we mainly examined the characteristics an ideal music journalist should hold. Let’s move on to all factors surrounding popular music journalism and look at its future.
You could have a steam train / if you'd just lay down your tracks / you could have an aeroplane flying
/ if you bring your blue sky back
- Peter Gabriel

The profession of music journalism is influenced by many external factors. After analyzing the conducted interviews, we created five overarching categories that present the most prominent outer aspects – everything from the music industry to social media – that influence music journalists mostly. Last, we will discuss the standpoints of the interviewees on the future of their profession. Even though no decisive answers can be given, it is interesting to discuss how each of the interviewees regards their future. In this chapter we present the following five categories:

5. **Popular Music Industry vs. Popular Music Journalist** – The popular music journalist and the popular music industry are greatly intertwined and (are forced to) work together closely. Research on this relationship did not clarify much since academics often have opposing viewpoints. Consequently, it is necessary to ask the interviewees how they view the relationship between the two industries and whether or not there is (still) mutual dependence.

6. **Institutional News** – The five values of Deuze claim that journalists, among others, should function as “newshounds.”

In the field of music journalism this means that the journalists should not only focus on the review and interview (the key forms of music journalism according to Laing) but also pay attention to institutional news. However, this characteristic is neglected by both journalists and researchers. Thus, we would like to find out to what extent institutional news is important to the interviewees.

7. **Blogosphere** – With the rise of the internet, the blogosphere was founded. Now, millions of people have the ability to publish content on, for example, popular music and have a platform of their own on the internet. Many have argued that with the rise
of the blogosphere the opinion of music journalists are not important anymore and that “the authorial voice of music journalists is currently fading.”

We wondered whether the interviewees really see the blogosphere as a threat and, if so, what are some of the measures the popular music journalists can take to regain their authority.

8. **Social Media** – Another concept that arose with the internet is that of social media. Research ignored (or is not yet done on) the (possible) impact of social media on music journalism. Therefore, it is vital to pay attention to this increasingly popular form of media by examining to what extent it is important for the interviewees and whether or not social media introduces a public sphere in the once top-down field of journalism.

9. **The Future of Music Journalism** – Opinions about the future of music journalism vary from greatly negative to very positive: where some journalists and academics are sceptic, others see a bright future ahead. It is certain, however, that the field of (music) journalism finds itself in a state of flux and that the profession will continue to change over the next couple of years.

### 6.1. Popular Music Industry vs. Popular Music Journalist

We will continue our analysis by discussing the relationship between the popular music industry and the field of popular music journalism, a controversial category since opinions and thoughts of the examined academic researches and our interviewees are greatly divided. In chapter 1 we discussed five values, addressed by Mark Deuze, that define the ideology of journalists, and we specified it to popular music journalism. The most controversial value was that of autonomy. According to Deuze, it is expected of journalists to be “be autonomous, free and independent in their work,” meaning that journalists are sovereign from other parties.

However, according to the examined research, this is not easy for popular music journalists, since they are largely dependent on record labels for their information and access to musicians. As Garofalo argues, “like any culture industry in a market economy, the role of the music business is fundamentally to transform its cultural products into financial rewards.”

Thus, Garofalo points out that record labels solely have a commercial interest and, consequently, ‘use’ the journalists to their own advantage. However, one could also argue that record labels need popular music publications to promote their artists to consumers. Put in

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486 Petra Davis, “You Are What You Read.”
487 Mark Deuze, “What is Journalism?” 447.
this way, the relationship between the two industries appears to be in balance. Nonetheless, research we examined in chapter 1 shows something else. According to Klein, the two industries are not mutual, “because so many publications cover popular music, popular music critics have a lot of competition for access.” Naturally, this gives the popular music industry a great advantage. Other academics agree with Klein. For example, Alex van Venrooij states in his research that “journalists of pop magazines and, to a lesser extent, quality newspapers rely on the record industry for information and access to artists.” Simply put, this means that the popular music industry has leverage over the press: because they have so many opportunities – i.e. publications to gain publicity – they can grant access to whomever they want, and even more importantly, deny access.

The researchers that studied the relationship between popular music journalism and the popular music industry often have an outspoken negative view. For example, academics such as Klein and Power state that popular music journalists mainly work as promotion vehicles for the popular music industry. Any positive examples – about, for instance, the currently steady relationship between the music and journalism industry – are hardly ever included. Furthermore, the majority of the research we discussed in our theoretical framework treated all media outlets alike – i.e. they did not distinguish between the different kinds of journalism such as traditional and online. We interviewed popular music journalists from several media outlets and they all had different viewpoints on certain matters. For example, it was quite interesting to hear various opinions about the relationship between the two industries. As a consequence, after interviewing twelve Dutch popular music journalists, we are able to paint a more nuanced picture.

First, let start of with the popular music journalists who write for newspapers. They seem to be more independent from record labels than journalists who write for popular music magazines. This is for several reasons. According to Pot, newspapers do not solely depend on popular music for their revenue, as specialist music publications do. Pot points out that popular music is not deemed really important at the newspaper. He thinks that this is actually beneficial since it gives the journalists much freedom. Consequently, they have the opportunity to choose what to write on and can be somewhat freer in their decisions. For example, the journalists try to be ‘all round’ – meaning that they write stories varying from Bob Dylan to hiphop even though the readers might not even like hiphop. OOR cannot afford

490 Alex van Venrooij, “Classifying Popular Music in the United States and the Netherlands,” 612.
such freedom since no one would be reading their magazine if they write only large articles on obscure bands.

Furthermore, because newspapers publish only a couple of album reviews a week and one or two large stories on popular music – while, for example, *OOR* has fill their website continually and do a big publication once a month – they can often choose which artists to interview (instead of interviewing every artist made available for interviewing by the labels, if they already do an interview) and, as stated before, what subjects they write on. Finally, newspapers often have a higher circulation than the specialist popular music press. As Tom Engelshoven (*OOR*) explains, record labels mostly look at the circulation and credibility of media outlets when promoting their artists. Since newspapers are, overall, deemed credible and have a higher circulation than popular music magazines, they are willing to invest a lot of time and effort in their relationship with newspapers. According to *NRC Handelsblad* journalist Hester Carvalho, both industries need each other, and she never encountered any problems. Kamer and Pot (*De Volkskrant*) concur in this view. They argue that the alleged tension between the music industry and music journalism is a myth. Furthermore, Pot explains “it has never happened that a record label called me to complain about a negative review I wrote. The interference of the music industry is not as present as is often thought.”

However, this might work differently at smaller and more specialized media. Take for example *OOR*. The magazine focuses on popular music and the revenue of the publication depends for a great part on its circulation. Currently, *OOR* is trying to secure its existence – over the past years, the magazine is struggling to survive – in print and continues to develop itself online. Just as Kamer, Carvalho and Pot, the editor-in-chief of *OOR* points out that his staff determines the tone of their articles independently, they will never write in a certain way to please the record label: “We are not an advertising folder,” Van den Berg claims. However, in contrast to what the newspapers writers told us, there is a game of negotiation (at least) between record labels and *OOR*, for two main reasons. First, because the reporters of *OOR* review a great number of albums each month, they have to interact much more with labels and publicists. Second, since popular music is the selling point of the magazine, they cannot easily turn down offers from record labels: “Sometimes we get more time to interview artists if we spend four or five pages on them in the magazine.” This is how the game works, Van den Berg explains. The magazine has two main goals: informing people about popular music and selling the magazine. Sometimes, negotiations with record labels are necessary. However, according to Van den Berg, there are never any negotiations about the content of an article: “no record label ever stated that we could only interview an
artist when we would write a positive review or something like that.” Yet, the founder of 
*OOR*, Barend Toet, does state that there are in fact arrangements made between *OOR* and 
record labels: “The journalists of *OOR* deny this, but they limit themselves to the records they 
deem good.”

As stated earlier, when promoting artists, record labels mostly select publications that 
have a large circulation and are deemed credible. For example, last year The Black Keys were 
doing interviews to promote their new album, *El Camino*. Tom Springveld, who works at 
FaceCulture, had the opportunity to interview the drummer of the band, while Tom 
Engelshoven – an established music journalist who writes for *OOR* – got to interview the 
frontman. Even though FaceCulture has more viewers, *OOR* is more credible and has a more 
established name. Or take for instance the band Coldplay. When a press day was organized to 
promote their new album, *OOR* was invited to come to London but could only interview the 
drummer. Chris Martin – the lead singer of the band – was interviewed by the presenters of 
the television show called *RTL Boulevard* since that program reaches a wider audience. Thus, 
even though credibility is important for record labels, exposure is essential. As with all other 
audience-oriented items, recognition means more readers and lead singers are in general the 
most visible members of the band. The frontman is the band’s business card to the outside 
world, and the fandom centers on him or her. Therefore, these interviews will most likely 
attract more readers or viewers than an interview with the drummer.

Even though *OOR* is still a widely known magazine, they get less of 
offers from record 
labels than let’s say 20 years ago. “We used to be able to fly to the United States for exclusive 
interviews and the like,” Van den Berg explains, “However, these days … we are increasingly 
ignored by record labels.” This might be caused by the cutbacks of the popular music 
industry. However, the interviewees who work at (online) platforms like 3voor12, NU.nl and 
FaceCulture see an increase in interview offers, mostly because their companies grew over the 
last few years whereas *OOR* had to cut back. For example, as FaceCulture grows bigger and 
succeeds in building a steady reputation, among both artists and people working at record 
companies, Kuiper finds it easier to get things done. Furthermore, Oitmann explains that just 
three years ago, the music section of NU.nl was small and insignificant in the field of popular 
music journalism. Now, the music section expanded and the website had 22 million unique 
visitors last year. Record labels noticed this trend and Oitmann started to receive offers to 
interview Coldplay, Foo Fighters, Avril Lavigne and the like.

Due to enormous cutbacks in both industries the past few years, the relationship 
between popular music journalism and record labels changed greatly. For example, Van den
Berg explains that although the record label of Universal might be of great influence in theory, they “recently fired their entire promotion department, six or seven people. They just do not need them anymore.” There are a couple of advantages to the cutbacks of the popular music industry, according to the interviewees. For instance, since the popular music industry is not as powerful as it used to be, the relationship between the two industries is more in balance. Furthermore, due to the revolutions in technology, it is easier to record and release popular music independently than ever before. Consequently, artists no longer depend on record labels but can work around them. Since these artists are not embedded in the promotional circus of the record industry, they are easier to reach for popular music journalists. And because it is now so easy to record and release music, both the consumer and the music industry alike need music journalism more than ever; the music industry needs journalism to cover their releases, while the consumer needs the music journalist to make sense of this wild growth of music. With this proliferation of choices, consumers can rely on music journalists to navigate in this sea of releases to assess what is worth listening to and what is not.

Thus, the relationship between the record industry and popular music journalism is a bit more nuanced than the academics make us believe. Of course, just as any industry puts pressure on journalists – for example, newspapers and their reporters are frequently banned by sports teams, and politicians are well-known to ‘freeze out’ unfriendly reporters or publications – pressure is exerted on popular music journalists by the music industry. This method is what Herman and Comsky call ‘flak’ in their book *Manufacturing Consent*. According to the academics “‘Flak’ refers to negative responses to a media statement or program.” These negative responses may come in many forms (letters, speeches etc) but all include “complaint, threat, and punitive action.” To put simply, Herman and Chomsky consider ‘flak’ as an attempt to bring individuals or organizations who talk negatively about the established power in disrepute. In music journalism this often means that the music industry (temporarily) bans certain journalists from press days or interviews. This most likely happens after the journalist crossed a line – for example, when a journalist included certain details in an article the music industry wanted to keep secret or if the journalist talks to an artist about a subject that he or she insisted not to discuss.

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492 Ibid., 26.
However, these bans are not as likely as they were used to be, since there is no longer a strict top down relationship. “At the end of the 1990s, the record industry was very big and powerful,” Pot (De Volkskrant) explains, “but it has become a lot smaller and more humble, especially in The Netherlands.”\textsuperscript{lxiv} The industry got hurt a lot because of the digital age. Record labels no longer have the budget to organize international press trips on a large scale. However, there is still a pecking order: the distribution of certain interviews depends on the status and publication a popular music journalist works for. In the end, all fields of journalism are involved in an everlasting game with PR people aiming to get the most out of it. For now, it seems that the relation between popular music journalism and the record industry is a healthy one in basis; it then is up to the popular music journalist to not solely depend on it.

6.2. Institutional News

A core characteristic a journalist should hold according to Deuze is that of public servicer. Deuze states that “journalists provide a public service (as watchdog or ‘newshounds’, active collectors and disseminators of information).”\textsuperscript{493} However, during the interviews we found out that there is a marked difference in the way popular music journalists fulfil this service in regard to other fields of journalism. Surprisingly, in popular music journalism, hardly any attention is ever paid to institutional news – which often has to break immediately in order to be relevant. According to academic Laing, “for more than half a century, the key forms of [popular] music journalism have been the review and the interview” and, consequently, not news texts.\textsuperscript{494} Naturally, news about artists will be published immediately but, for instance, when Buma/Stemra – a Dutch organization that protects the copyright of music authors – was under siege because of allegedly bad management, this was predominantly covered by ‘regular’ news journalists instead of popular music journalists. As a result, we wondered whether or not popular music journalists consider institutional news part of their day job, and asked the interviewees viewpoints on this matter.

Various answers came up and, again, age played a big part in that variety. The younger popular music journalists all deem institutional news important, whereas the older generation of journalists do not pay too much attention to it. This is in line with what has been argued in the previous chapter. We noticed during the interviews that younger journalists are more open for change in their profession, such as the inclusion of social media and the cooperation with amateur journalists. Furthermore, they consider subjects like institutional news – that is not

\textsuperscript{493} Mark Deuze, “What is Journalism?” 447.
\textsuperscript{494} Dave Laing, “Anglo-American Music Journalism: Texts and Contexts,” 337.
popular music per se but is closely related to the subject – a vital part of their profession. Although we did not find a conclusive answer to this remarkable difference, a plausible reason would be that (as is the case with traditional media) the older generation of journalists tries to hang on to their established principles of focusing on covering popular music, while the younger music journalists realize that such a thing is simply not enough anymore and want to provide their readers with the complete spectrum. Consequently, the younger generation is of the opinion that they should produce content for multiple platforms – for example video with an accompanying article – and produce news that is closely related to the subject of popular music, such as institutional news.

For example, when the matter of Buma/Stemra became known, Carvalho (NRC Handelsblad) was happy that she was not obligated to write a piece about it: “I might be able to write a journalistic piece about it when trying really hard, but it is not really my cup of tea. … I rather write about things that that touch people emotionally [popular music].” The same goes for the popular music journalists who write for De Volkskrant. According to Pot, the reason why their newspaper does not pay much attention to institutional news within their music section is because Kamer and he are freelancers, meaning they are above all hired for their knowledge and writing skills on popular music. The subjects that have to do with popular music (such as technology, streaming websites, Buma/Stemra and the like) but are not popular music, are mainly done by the investigative journalists of the newspaper. He argues that those journalists have more time to examine a matter intensively. However, sometimes – “when we have the time and if we are enthusiastic about the subject” – Kamer or Pot tackle such a subject. Although we did not investigate this matter to such an extent that we can draw a solid conclusion, it appears that institutional news is not deemed very important by (a certain group of) music journalists and only if the journalists are into the subject, they are willing to investigate and write about the matter. Consequently, this observation almost seems to imply that for ‘important’ institutional stories, popular music journalists put ‘real’ reporters on the job.

However, where writers for newspapers rather pass institutional news on to investigative or economical journalists, online platforms try to deal with all the news surrounding popular music. For example, Zwennes (3voor12) points out that online platforms, such as 3voor12, try to pay great attention to institutional news. Also, since 3voor12 does not depend on deadlines – as newspapers do – they can update their website at every moment of every day. This way one is easily able to keep the audience informed about institutional news. Furthermore, Zwennes states that 3voor12 has the advantage of being a non-commercial
organization; this means that they are more freely to investigate matters that are not widely popular, whereas newspapers and, especially, magazines depend on widely popular stories for their sales. Consequently, at 3voor12 and many other online platforms institutional news is just part of the deal; cutbacks in the popular music sector, the development of streaming websites such as Spotify, discussions about copyright of music authors to name a few. This is what De Vrieze (3voor12) likes most about his job, being able to discuss popular music and everything surrounding that topic. The lack of institutional news about popular music in the Dutch media bothers him greatly. “It [institutional news] is not considered as a crucial part of popular music journalism,” De Vrieze explains, while all things surrounding popular music also greatly influence the music itself. For example, because of all the online developments – such as piracy, streaming websites etc – the popular music industry alters, which ultimately changes (the way) popular music (is made). As an example, De Vrieze, states that because record labels cannot spend the same amount of money to promote their artists as they used to, the artist maybe has to change the way he records albums. Chances are likely that the artist moves to a cheaper recording studio or that they record songs at home (which is now possible because of technological developments) and they may even distribute the music themselves (thus without a record label). In the end, all these institutional developments alter the way popular music is made, published and even sounds. Therefore, it is of major importance that institutional news is also covered; one cannot simply ignore that part of the job, according to De Vrieze.

Thus, opinions vary whether or not popular music journalists should also discuss matters surrounding popular music. Upon asking whether there is room in the magazine Muziek.nl Magazine for institutional news, Heck explains that he wants the magazine to focus on popular music and discuss institutional news on their website. Even though Heck is open for institutional news, we believe that he does not consider it as an integral part of the profession since they do not discuss it in their magazine. The magazine has to be sold so it might be the safest to discuss subjects that are popular among a large audience instead of more niche subjects like Torrents or Buma/Stemra.

6.3. Blogosphere

With the rise of the blogosphere, all kinds of doom scenarios were painted by both journalists and academics on the future of the profession. For example, journalist Petra Davis stated the following in an article:
The authorial voice of music critics is currently fading, barely perceptible above the babble of blogs; what once seemed like democratisation of access to critique is resulting in less variety; enough deviation in flow eventually makes any deviation imperceptible. As newspapers and magazines feel the pinch of falling sales and diminished advertising revenue, music journalists – freelancers in particular – are wondering whether their profession will survive.\textsuperscript{495}

Furthermore, author Tim Footman points out that “the very idea of the professional critic comes under increased pressure from the opinion tsunami that is the blogosphere.”\textsuperscript{496} To top this, Andrew Keen not only considers the blogosphere – and in fact internet as a whole – as a threat but the researcher moreover claims that journalists have to fight back in order to “retain the structures and profession that are in danger of dying out.”\textsuperscript{497} These statements show that journalists and academics both have a reluctant (to say the least) attitude towards the blogosphere. For that reason, we assumed that our interviewees would also consider the blogosphere as a negative development and as a threat to their profession. However, their opinions turned out to be much more nuanced than the above statements. It needs to be mentioned – as we already explained in our theoretical framework – that when speaking about the blogosphere a distinction needs to be made between amateur bloggers and blogs that turned into professional organizations such as Pitchfork. The statement of blogs being amateurish and the argument that only traditional media can be taken seriously is old-fashioned since many blogs have been proven to be authoritative and professional. Here, when talking about the blogosphere, we mean the blogs that work with amateur journalists.

Naturally, with the rise of the blogosphere, the amount of opinions has grown wild; as stated above, Footman even calls it a tsunami of opinions. Consequently, it might not always been easy for consumers to filter any nuanced opinions from all the babble. Van den Berg explains that it is therefore of vital importance that the opinions of the established media – in this case that of \textit{OOR} – outweigh the opinions of the blogs. According to the interviewees, this is fairly easy. For example, De Vrieze (3voor12) explains that “there are a lot of blogs that write really short pieces and have a signalling function, and that is one aspect of music journalism. But contextualization is [for example] better done at \textit{The Guardian, The New York Times} or \textit{De Volkskrant}.”\textsuperscript{lxviii} Thus, there are many blogs that publish small articles and

\textsuperscript{495} Petra Davis, “You Are What You Read.”
mainly have a signalling function. As a consequence, these blogs focus on updating the reader on the latest news, albums, concerts and the like. Even though the interviewees acknowledge that this is an important function of popular music journalism, they also state these blogs often lack writing skills. As a result, for broader perspectives, contextualization and proper writing skills, the interviewees state that one needs to read articles of the established media (both traditional and online media outlets). According to de Vrieze (3voor12) although record labels increasingly give blogs the chance to talk to artists, the published interviews lack any quality:

> When I prepare for an interview, I visit international blogs and read other interviews … and there’s just a lot of hooey and stuff you do not want to read … How is it possible that every time I read those interviews the first six questions just had to be cut out. Stuff like: ‘hey, how’s the tour going?’ ‘very well, we’re just back from San Francisco’ ‘oh, how do you like San Francisco?’ That’s the stuff you ask an artist first, when you let them get used to you and then you move on doing the interview. But blogs just write this stuff down.\(^{lxix}\)

Thus, whereas for example Davis argues that the “authorial voice of music critics is currently fading” because of the omnipresence of blogs, the interviewees do not consider the blogosphere being a threat to their profession.\(^{498}\) On a side note, this confidence might also be caused by the presence of the Dutch language. A blog that is written in Dutch would never greatly threat the profession of journalism since its reach is too small, because of a language barrier. Consequently, there is little competition from blogs for the established popular music journalists.

Actually, some of the interviewees embrace the blogosphere and also have blogs of their own. Take for example Kamer (De Volkskrant), his blog – that is connected to the outlet he is working for – is called Popblog. Here he “writes content on everything that has to do with popular music.”\(^{499}\) The tone of his blog is much more personal since Kamer is not obligated to be balanced and somewhat more neutral as in De Volkskrant.\(^{500}\) Because his blog is connected to De Volkskrant, Kamer has to decide what articles will appear in the newspaper and on his blog. He explains that the content that does not necessarily have to appear in the

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\(^{498}\) Petra Davis, “You Are What You Read.”


newspaper – such as certain opinionated articles, concerts he attended or other matters – will be turned into a blog post. Naturally, the practice of journalism and blogging creates certain tensions. For example, Singer argues that “blogs challenge long-standing professional norms and practices, namely non-partisanship and the traditional gate-keeping role” and Wedland, furthermore states that blogging is a “new form of real-time reporting that does not have the filtering or editing associated with established media.”501 However, Kamer does not seem to take it that seriously. He mainly sees his blog as a hobby and as a service to his readers because he is of the opinion that “the integration between the internet and the newspaper should improve.”5xx As a result many “traditional media have begun incorporating the practice as part of their internet content,” according to Schultz and Scheffer, “because blogs generate so much comment and attention from readers they can drive more traffic to newspaper Web sites.”502 Surprisingly, Kamer explains even though the blog is connected to the newspaper – since it can be found at www.volkskrant.nl/popblog – De Volkskrant does not actively promote the blog.

In closing, whereas we assumed that the blogosphere would be a controversial subject during the interviews, it turned out that the popular music journalists take a neutral stance on it. They do not consider the amateur blogosphere as a threat by definition. Furthermore, interest in blogs varies greatly among the interviewees. The journalists either see it as a great addition to the field (when it is a good blog) or simply ignore it since the journalists believe that they will always produce content of better quality. For example Van den Berg only visits a few blogs that he likes and Carvalho does not put a lot of energy in it either. However, working for a blog as an amateur music journalist can serve as a good training ground as we will see in the case study of 3voor12 in the next chapter.

6.4. Social Media

As described in our theoretical framework, the profession of journalism began to develop in the eighteenth century and journalists were elevated to fulfill the role of opinion leaders. Where once people gathered to discuss societal problems and form public opinions on their own, journalists now started to function as mediators of public discussion. Consequently, journalism became a top down profession. It remained this way for a long time but the vocation is slowly opening up. One of the main reasons for this is the rise of the internet. The

World Wide Web has changed the entire journalistic landscape. Social media as a whole (and especially Twitter) is a beneficial application to create a new public sphere. It comes close to the original public sphere that Habermas explained as a “realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens.”

The impact of social media on both popular music and journalism is massive. The social media forms of Twitter and Facebook are widely present and millions of people make use of them. Within popular music, social media have a triangular shape: in the three corners are the musicians, journalists, audience. These three groups are all able to send and receive information from the other corners. Because of social media, musicians now have the opportunity to directly talk to their audiences instead of having record labels and journalists as relays. This might seem as a negative development for popular music journalists but they also can greatly benefit from social media. Popular music journalists are easily able to reach a large audience and people, at their turn, are now able to discuss matters directly with the journalists. As a result, the relationship between popular music journalists and the audience has never been so direct.

On Twitter, the audience is roughly able to do two things. They can follow, for example, popular music journalists who also have Twitter and be updated on new music, concerts and the like. Besides this, people also have the opportunity to start discussions with the popular music journalists they follow, or watch discussions among music journalists. This was hardly possible in the age prior to internet. Even though one could send a letter to a newspaper or magazine in which they criticized something, one could only hope that the letter was published, as Van den Berg (OOR) explains. Now it is all public. Social media do not only form a public sphere for people, but also for popular music journalists, since they greatly use social media in order to receive (and share) news. De Vrieze (3voor12) even argues that “we get at least half of our news through social media.” This not only happens because people share links of interesting websites with each other, but also because people know what kind of journalist they follow and decide to share interesting information with them, as De Vrieze explains. Therefore, it is of major importance for a popular music journalist to manifest him or herself on social media. De Vrieze furthermore notes that once people know you as a journalist and are aware of the kind of music you like and so on, they will approach you with advice and maybe even news. Thus, it is vital to develop a great network of people, especially on Twitter. According to De Vrieze, a modern journalist should try to utilize all the

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503 Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere. An Encyclopaedia Article,” 136.
platforms that are available, so next to their own outlet, he advises journalists to be active on Twitter, Facebook and the like.

Naturally, social media have to be handled with care. Not every tweet tells the truth and it should be considered as any other news source – i.e. it should be checked and verified before usage. De Vrieze explains that Twitter can be compared to a sort of telex where messages keep on passing by the entire day. Out of these stack of messages one can select the most interesting ones and produce news. Thus, journalists can take things out but also put interesting things in and, consequently, share interesting thoughts or news with the ones who follow your account. Furthermore, Twitter is an excellent medium to become a well-known popular music journalist. For example, Pot (De Volkskrant) sees Twitter as an extension of his professional activities and tweets links to articles he has written and so on. Pot argues that “Twitter is a great medium, mainly because it is purely democratic. People can follow you if they are interested in you. If you still have 23 followers after two years you apparently did not build any authority. But when people consider you authoritative that number [of followers] keeps on rising.”

The majority of the journalists we spoke to were highly interested in social media and considered social media as an integral part of their day job. However, Van den Berg (OOR) seemed a bit reluctant. Even though the magazine just launched their new website and provided an application on Spotify, Van den Berg stated that they need to be active on social media instead of wanting to – the focus will always be on their magazine. Even though Van den Berg acknowledges that social media might attract people to the organization of OOR, he is not active on Twitter – “I don’t feed the need and don’t have the time, I’m actually pretty much anti-Twitter” – and does not actively promote it among his employers. None of the interviewees was obligated to have an account on Twitter, it is all their own initiative. According to Van den Berg and Zwennes, one cannot make such things obligated, it only works when one is interested in social media and is willing to put effort into it.

In short, attitudes of the interviewees toward social media fluctuate but the majority of the interviewees view social media as a positive development. The journalists use it in multiple ways: not only to draw attention to the outlet they are working for, but also to create a tight community through which they can produce news and promote their stories. By creating such a tight community, people are more likely to share their own stories and information, which can be helpful for the journalists. Thus, the journalists are able to use social media as a means to extend their professional services.
6.5. The Future of Music Journalism

According to journalist Meg White, the profession of music journalism is currently developing into a new “cultural shape”:

We find ourselves in a time of peer review and direct distribution. Everyone has immediate access to everything, usually for free. We can get albums, artwork, official/unofficial anecdotes, blogs, photos, streaming video and the rest of it with little to no hassle at all. Expand that further: it no longer requires any depth of effort or dedication to obtain specialist awareness (we don’t need to mail order records and wait weeks for their arrival, we don’t need band biographies, liner notes, magazine subscriptions and creepy recall of the band trivia therein – it’s all instantly accessible on the web). It is obvious that the role of today’s critic must reform somewhat, because many of its distinguishing features have now been democratized. Much of what the audience once needed, what was important to them, has been handled by the internet.504

Her statement captures the feeling we both had when we started working on this thesis. White recognizes that both the music and journalism industries experienced great transitions and claims that the role of the professional music journalist therefore has to restructure. We wondered if music journalists felt the same way. Because of the transition and the profound presence of internet in our society, we wanted to examine whether or not there is still place for popular music journalism and, if so, how the field has to adapt in order to stay relevant to its public(s).

As can be seen in this chapter, the viewpoints of academics and that of the interviewees do not always match. Whereas the majority of research was overtly negative of tone, the journalists themselves saw plenty of opportunity for the future. Naturally, they acknowledge that the landscape is changing and, consequently, some alterations have to be made in order to stay of value. As discussed, the music journalists we interviewed varied greatly in age; they ranged from 26 to 56 years old. As a result, some journalists had a more positive attitude towards the changes in their profession than others – we noticed that the older generation of journalists like to cling to their traditional values and habits. Although they viewed the developments of their profession differently and despite the negative views of academics, most of them saw a bright future ahead. For instance, Menno Pot is convinced that the argument “we don’t need popular music journalists since we can download and listen to music ourselves” does not work.5xiv As stated before, Pot – and in fact most other

interviewees – claim that there is so much music available, that people need popular music journalists in order to guide the way.

Noteworthy is the opinion of Pot about the vanishing of mediums. Not only has the amount of popular music increased over the last few years, the number of opinions also greatly enlarged. Therefore, it is more important than ever to have original and creative story angles when producing content. Consequently, Pot argues that the medium itself is not as important as it used to be, it’s about the quality of the content. No longer is someone per definition a good journalist when working for *The Rolling Stone* or *OOR*, as it used to be back in the days. Journalist Everett True for example argues that “[n]o one single music title today has the reach of the UK and US music press in the late ‘70s. Even *Rolling Stone* is preaching to a clearly defined, niche audience.”505 The prestige of these magazines – and in fact most traditional media – mainly reduced because of the enormous amount of information that can be found online. Consequently, the foremost thing that separates amateurs from professionals nowadays is the quality of the content.

Whereas Bourdieu claimed that the “individual journalist’s autonomy depends on the position occupied by his newspaper within the larger space of newspapers,” this will not be the case in the future, according to Pot.506 Naturally, this is an optimistic statement since one has to keep economics and exposure in mind: a journalist that writes for *De Volkskrant* has greater exposure than someone who writes for a small blog. However, as noticed, magazines like *The Rolling Stone* and *OOR* are not as sacred as they once were. Therefore, it is likely that the profession moves to a business model where it is quality over medium. Consequently, the sense of autonomy of journalists will no longer depend on whether he or she works at the *De Volkskrant* or *OOR* but on the quality of the content that is delivered, be it online or in newspapers or magazines. Thus, in the words of McCleese, “[m]usic journalists will no longer derive their authority and influence from the platform in which they publish – be it Pitchfork or the *New York Times* – but from the quality of the work itself, and from its ability to attract readers.”507 That will probably also mean a shift in business models. However, it must be mentioned that we – and all the journalists we interviewed – are aware of the fact that a large part of the future is dependent on how journalism as a whole will be shaped, and the demand from audiences. 3voor12 could disappear when the Dutch

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507 Don McLeese, “*Straddling the Cultural Chasm,*” 446.
government decides to stop funding the public broadcasting system. Menno Pot, Gijsbert Kamer, and Hester Carvalho will not write about music anymore when their newspapers go out of business. This thesis does not have the wider sphere of journalism and its economics as a scope, but needless to say, innovation is important in music journalism, something that will be discussed in the next chapter.

This thesis tries above all to identify issues and lay ground for further research. Out of the interviews came nine big themes – background, the music journalist, authority, professional roles, the relationship of music journalists with the music industry, institutional news, social media, the blogosphere and the future of the profession – that all need further attention. In the next chapter, we will shine light on two cases studies that we have conducted, and by combining different methods we investigated how the issues identified in this chapter and in the interviews work out at different media organizations. As we state above, how well popular music journalism will venture in the future is partly an economic issue that works on journalism as a whole, but needless to say, innovation is key. In this chapter, we argued that authority is largely shifting to an online environment that works with a different business model than print media. Therefore, we decided to study a music journalism outlet that is active in such an environment, namely FaceCulture, which works as a press agency for music journalism. Through an in-depth study, complimented by ethnographic research, we try to identify their strengths and weaknesses, focuses on their production style. In the next chapter, we also study 3voor12, where professional journalists work together with local amateur journalists. We studied their relationship, identified the strengths and weakness, and (dis)advantages of that relationship. This is done by surveys and a textual analysis. After these case studies, we will give recommendations for further research and will provide a final glance towards the future.
CHAPTER 7
Counted Among Them:
Two Case Studies

Every crooked lane that you can see / Every open home, every hollow tree
/ Is a home for creatures loved by me / And oh to be counted among them
- Villagers

For this research, we interviewed twelve professional journalists working in Dutch popular music journalism. Chapter 5 and 6 provide a solid overview of what we have gathered and learned so far. Needless to say, the interviews also raised some significant questions that led us to do two case studies on the media platforms of 3voor12 and FaceCulture. These case studies are a necessary addition to our thesis, because they contextualize issues raised during the interviews. Furthermore, because we also interviewed people working at these outlets (Erik Zwennes and Atze de Vrieze at 3voor12 and Martin Kuiper at FaceCulture), we were curious to see how their statements work out at the outlet they work for. Therefore, the best way to investigate this is a case study format. Finally, because we investigate two fairly unique examples, we believe that – by exposing their working methods and their struggles – they can both set an example for music journalism as a whole and inspire other companies, who can profit from what they do and learn from their mistakes. Before explaining exactly how we conducted our case studies and why these outlets are unique, we will discuss what key themes and issues raised by the interviewees triggered us to do these two specific case studies. Both studies are provisional, which means that the two outlets could in the future serve as in-depth, long term research projects. As a result, these case studies provide the groundwork for further research.

7.1. Identifying Themes and Issues
Three main themes and reasons triggered us to investigate the outlet of FaceCulture: media transcendence, innovation, and journalistic tone. First of all, a key theme of this thesis is (securing) the future of music journalism. As we argued in chapter 3, the digital age provides a number of challenges to music journalism, to which the profession should adapt to secure a stable future. As we concluded in the previous chapter, the interviewees were not afraid of the future. For example, Menno Pot (De Volkskrant) – and actually most interviewees – argues that the medium that one produces content for is not as important as it used to be, what
matters mostly is the quality of the content. Besides quality, innovation is important. Barend Toet, founder of OOR magazine, stated that it is important to think out of the box. Therefore, music journalists should know how to find unique story angles when producing content. That innovation not only goes for writing stories, but also for finding a suitable business model. When we interviewed Martin Kuiper, owner of FaceCulture, he explained to us his business model, which strongly resonates with how a press bureau works. Furthermore, he argued that the problem in music journalism is that exact lack of innovation Toet describes. According to Kuiper, “because there is no money, people do not invest anymore. And because music journalists only work there and do not own the company, they do not take [any business related] risks themselves.” FaceCulture seems to work with these two premises. Firstly, quality is more important than the medium, since the company sells its content to other media outlets. Secondly, the only way for FaceCulture to stay valuable is constantly adapting and thinking out of the box. This out of the box thinking and innovation will be explained in the case study. As we explained in chapter 3, news outlets are still figuring out valuable business models. Therefore, it is interesting to take a look at FaceCulture’s model because it is different from the traditional direct sales model.

The second reason why we want to examine this outlet comes forth from another main theme in our thesis: what aspects make a good music journalist? One of the core discussions around these aspects focused on what tone a popular music journalist should employ; should they focus on informing the audience when writing a review, or should the review center on opinion? This was inspired by a quote of academics Jones and Featherly, who argue that the fundamental job of popular music journalists is “to convince readers that particular music is good or bad.” Interestingly enough, almost all journalists except for Martin Kuiper agreed on this. Kuiper states that informing the audience is the most important aspect of music journalism, above taste-making: “a good popular music journalist does not slate albums but merely informs the audience about it.” This is not a complete surprise, since FaceCulture functions as a press agency. Karianne Vermaas and Frank Janssen argue that providing balanced information instead of commentary and discussion are important for a press agency because “[press agencies] have different groups of customers they have to serve.” Curious to find out what kind of implications this has for journalistic roles and authority, we decided to examine the outlet in more detail. For our research, we used the method of ethnographic

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research. As Schlesinger argues, this method makes “basic information [available] about the working ideologies and practices of cultural producers,” by observing these practices in the newsroom, and gives insides that other methods cannot since those only center on content that is already produced.\(^{510}\)

After exploring FaceCulture, we will move on to our second case study at 3voor12. A very important aspect that set the stage for the case study of 3voor12 was the notion of amateur journalism that is omnipresent in music journalism in the digital age. At this online platform, funded by the Dutch government as part of the public broadcasting system, professional music journalists cover the national music scene in its broadest sense. They collaborate with more than a thousand volunteers throughout the entire country, who are responsible for covering local and regional news. As we explained in chapter 3, a challenge for the profession of music journalism is the infinite number of amateur blogs roaming the internet that all offer an opinion on music. Moreover, in the previous chapter, we discussed the opinions of the music journalists on this matter in the category of blogosphere. We found that most journalists either thought amateur blogs were a good addition because they have a signaling function, or the interviewees just ignored this kind of journalism as they do not consider it important or of any influence. This is an interesting discrepancy from chapter 3, where our literature study indicated that amateur journalism is a threat to professional journalism. We learned that at 3voor12, amateur journalists cover popular music in cities and certain regions, and, therefore, provide hyperlocal news. At 3voor12, instead of citizen journalists’ influence being seen as a threat it is actually embraced in the form of collaboration with professional journalists. For example, at big music festivals, such as Pinkpop or Eurosonic / Noorderslag, the professional staff takes amateur journalists with them so their team can fully cover the festival. In the case study, light is shed on the positive and negative sides of this relationship, tapping into issues of the growing number of amateurs that call themselves journalists. A textual analysis is employed to briefly investigate what exactly the differences are in the writings of these professionals and amateurs at 3voor12. Also – in the same argument as FaceCulture – because 3voor12 operates on different media platforms, its high level of innovation makes it an interesting example.

The 3voor12 case study focuses primarily on participatory journalism, a form of journalism where amateurs and professionals work together. This term can be interchanged with citizen journalism or amateur journalism. However, the term ‘participatory’ highlights

the collaborative notion of journalists and ‘ordinary citizens’ working together instead of a more top-down approach where journalists crowd source ideas or sometimes get input from citizens. According to researchers Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, a good working definition of participatory journalism is: “The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.” These researchers note that this kind of journalism is bottom-up and “there is little or no editorial oversight or formal journalistic workflow dictating the decisions of a staff.” In section 7.3.1. the concept of participatory journalism will be explained in detail. For this case study, we asked 3voor12 volunteers and professionals about their collaboration. Furthermore, we did a textual analysis in order to contextualize how amateur and professional writing differs. But before we present our case study of 3voor12, let’s first take a look at FaceCulture.

7.2. Producing Content for Other Media: FaceCulture

For our interview chapter, we interviewed Martin Kuiper, the owner of FaceCulture (FC), a media production company that specializes in music. It was founded in 2002 and currently works with eight freelancers and sometimes an intern. The company functions in two different – albeit connected – ways. First, it is a press bureau for music video news; news that mainly consists of edited clips from interviews with musicians. Sometimes these videos are accompanied with an article about, for example, the musician or album. Second, FC is an online multimedia magazine and has its own YouTube channel, which started in 2008 and now has a total of sixteen million views. On this channel, not only entire video interviews with musicians are uploaded, but also music sessions (recorded after interviews or on festivals) and short items that are shot on festivals. FC has a business model that consists of multiple ways to generate revenue, and the company is producer and publisher at the same time. FC works with paid freelancers which all have their own specialty, ranging from camera people to journalists.

In the Dutch music journalism landscape, internet based FC seems the odd one out, as it has no strong, well-known brand name as for example OOR or 3voor12. Still, some of its content is viewed over a million times on YouTube, and some of it is bought and used by

512 Ibid., 55.
other, larger media organizations and television programs such as *RTL Boulevard* and *De Wereld Draait DOOR*. This is what makes FaceCulture (FC) slightly different from other music media. It is a company that not only has its own platform (in the form of a website), but also functions as a press agency specializing in music journalism, producing multi-media content for other news organizations. To that end FaceCulture employs a mixed business model, which differs from other media – most of the journalists we interviewed work either for media that are non-profit (3voor12), printed publications where the consumer pays (*OOR, Muziek.nl Magazine*), or at media where music journalism is not the main focus (*De Volkskrant, NU.nl, NRC Handelsblad*).

The core of FC’s strategy is the packaging of content in divergent ways to be distributed to different organizations. So while press agencies specializing in mainstream news, such as *Associated Press*, offer content that is then packaged by the news organization buying it, FC delivers prepackaged content, which is then published unaltered. This means this content always has to be rather neutral of tone, making the company fundamentally different from mainstream music journalism, where editorializing is an important aspect of the production process.

Through ethnographic research, we were able to gain more insight into FC’s working methods. This case study will explore these working methods – FC’s business model and the packaging of content – and analyze how the company deals with certain issues that came up during our interviews. If placing music into context is one of the most important aspects of professional music journalism, what happens with content that has no contextualization? Furthermore, we stated in chapter 5 that “all the popular music journalists we interviewed agreed on the fact that they function as sort of guides or leaders.” Since FC has to deliver content neutral of tone to several media outlets, guidance cannot be performed in the traditional way of writing a review of a concert or record. So if showing one’s colors is not part of the routine, the question rises which aspects of music journalism remain. In our literature research, but also during the interviews, we found out that an important aspect of music journalism is taste, which means that a good music journalist should be able to explain to his or her audience why a particular album is worth listening to or not. To put in simple terms, a music journalist should determine whether an album is good or bad. Of course, this is mainly applies to the art of reviewing. FC’s content, however, is created and packaged by different people, which has implications for authorship and for authority: it means that taste is not applicable anymore. For example, we explained in chapter 6 that through social media, music journalists can establish authority for themselves. According to Erik Zwennes
(3voor12), people “know where to find me and Atze [de Vrieze], also because we use Twitter from our own name,” which means that in this way, readers can get to know Zwennes and de Vrieze and their taste. This does not happen at FC since authorship is not clearly established.

Another concept that arose during the interviews was that of writing for a specific audience arose. We even determined it “[one of the] three concepts [that] are of particular importance according to the interviewees,” which means that popular music journalists always have to keep an audience in mind when producing content. In analyzing the interviews we established that journalists who work for OOR write their articles for a different audience than journalists who work for newspapers, as not all newspaper readers may be interested in very specialized music articles. As FC caters to multiple audiences – even across borders – we will find out how that influences the work the music journalists do. Moreover, we will explore the advantages and disadvantages of re-packaging content for different media, and finally the way in which FC deals with audiences. But first we will examine the unique business model of the company.

7.2.1. Business Model
Finding a suitable business model in online journalism is fairly hard. Now that news for a large part has moved to an online environment, many newspapers and websites are struggling to find a clever way to make money without losing readers and, consequently, customers. The million dollar question is: how to get people to pay for content, when they can access news for free? Some newspapers, such as The New York Times, have erected a pay-wall, a system which prevents users from accessing content without paying (the so-called subscription model), with varying degrees of successes. According to Hsiang Iris Chi, “many publishers see the subscription model as a last resort for survival although little evidence suggests users are ready to pay for online news at this moment.” The reason for this is that there are many free alternatives to get news, both online and offline. Another way of earning money online, bypassing the model of letting users pay for content, is the advertising model. Many newspapers reserve space on their websites for advertisements, but these do not yield great returns and advertisers now have better places to go to target the consumer – on Facebook, for example, ads are linked to users’ information, and Google uses interest-based ads. These interest-based ads are also the model that FC uses for their videos on YouTube.

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There are three ways in which FC manifests itself, each with its own flow of funds. First, FC has its own YouTube channel with a little over five thousand videos, consisting of music sessions, video interviews with artists, and news items. The first video dates back to October 28, 2008. Since then, the channel has garnered sixteen million views. FC earns income from these videos by allowing YouTube to place short advertisements in front of them, which the viewer has to watch before being able to see the actual (news) clip. These advertisements are associated with cookies, and therefore, different for each user according to their preferences (or more specifically, their browsing history). As stated above, these are called interest-based ads. How many times these videos are viewed depends on a number of factors, for example the popularity of the artist. Some videos are viewed many hundreds of thousands of times, while others do not even approach one thousand views. The revenues from YouTube are steadily growing, as FC uploads more videos each day. At the moment, YouTube yields a few thousand euros revenue per month. Martin Kuiper, FC founder and owner, said in December 2011: “Right now, I’ve got some 4000 videos online. That is one third of the entire archive; so once all videos are online, we’ll have some 7,500-10,000 videos. Every year, 1000 videos are added.” In other words, chances are likely that revenue through YouTube will grow over the upcoming years.

The second way FC manifests itself is by selling its content to other media, most notably OOR and NU.nl. For a monthly fee, these clients have access to FC’s video feed. In addition they receive articles or short leads to accompany the videos. Others (including such media as vk.nl and AD.nl) can embed FC’s content for free, but they will not receive any additional written context in the form of an article. The company earns money from this through the advertisement system; the media that embed the content do so from another video-platform called Videostrip, which places advertisements in front of the video in a similar way YouTube does. Finally, FC also serves as a video production company for external parties, making short reports or documentaries about events (usually, but not always) associated with music. For example, a few times a year, FC makes short documentaries at the Amsterdam School of Arts which the school can then put on their website.

7.2.2. Structures and Methods

FC’s content is created by employees who excel in different abilities. All employees are freelancers and on average work there two to four days a week. The regular staff consists of eight people, but on big events such as the music festival of Lowlands, additional people may be hired. All editors have their own specialties, although some are more all-round than others.
in terms of skills and therefore assignments. Some employees focus on the filming and editing of videos, while others only write and interview. Another part of the workers employ all aspects: writing, editing, filming and interviewing. Furthermore, two people serve as final editors, checking all items on content and style before publication. Their background is diverse: some studied at the Utrecht School of the Arts and are trained in video production and camera techniques, while others studied journalism. Kuiper (the founder of FC) is also able to do everything, but focuses mostly on the organizational and financial side of the company.

On a typical day, two or three news items are produced – depending on how many people are working that day – and an equal amount of articles are written. At the end of each week, a schedule for next week’s items is prepared; for an example of such a planning, see appendix H. FC uses Google’s Agenda functionality to make sure everyone can see what has to be done on a given day. NU.nl receives a video and article three times a week, in consultation with their chief of music. With the same frequency, the website of OOR receives a video accompanied by a short lead. Interviews are planned in consultation with press agents of the music labels that FC works with, as well as with the rest of the staff (e.g. ‘is this artist interesting enough?’). As FaceCulture grows bigger and succeeds in building a steady reputation – among both artists and people working at record companies – Kuiper finds it easier to get things done and record labels grant the company interviews with bigger artists. However, Kuiper argues that some artists consider internet interviews being “cheap” and therefore do not want to engage in this kind of interview. Also, some artists dislike video interviewing, but on the whole, the company has access to most artists that the labels offer.

At the office, everyone sits in two rooms that are connected by a small kitchen; doors are open. In one of the rooms, there is a space with a couch where bands come to play songs. Other than that, it looks like a normal newsroom, with messy desks, coffee and tea mugs and computer screens – the only difference would be that people are not constantly on the phone with sources since music journalism does not consist of fact-checking 24/7. People are dressed casually and the atmosphere is informal. The day we visited day, the editor that was assigned an interview called the press agent of the artist to confirm the time. Because everyone sits so close together, editors walk to each other when they need help (for example, with something technical or just for advice). In the morning, all editors start working from 10 AM, usually where they left off the previous day or start a new item. The day knows one break in which everyone has lunch together. As a result of this situation most issues are discussed on the spot. Shortly before we visited, Kuiper had decided to also have regular
meetings each Monday morning. We did not attend such a meeting, but Kuiper explained to us that these meetings are used to evaluate work.

Academic Roel Puijk notes that when the work of journalists became digitalized, routines changed. “While much information formerly was exchanged in meetings, internal bulletins, copied documents, etc., now much is transferred to data based systems (intranet, email, etc.).” At FC, the weekly planning is e-mailed, so meetings are used to evaluate work rather than to determine who does what. Issues that are talked through are the ones where everyone’s input is needed, and therefore face to face gatherings are better suited for this kind of information exchange than e-mail. Therefore, these meetings differ from story meetings employed in traditional journalism, where editors can pitch their stories. Throughout the day, ideas are pitched at FC. For example, when we visited, one of the editors proposed to Kuiper that the banner on their Facebook page should be the featuring artist of that week; it got approved. Usually a work day ends at 6 PM, although every now and then productions for external parties and interviews are planned in the evening.

The regular content that FC creates consists – next to documentaries and productions for external parties – of video interviews with and (mostly) acoustic performances by artists. The interviews are edited into short news items, intersected with a music video by the artist in question, and are published when an important date draws near – usually the release of an album or when the particular artist gives a concert in The Netherlands. Interviews are usually done as part of a press day, and in general by two people, one of whom operates the camera, while the other interviews. The video is then edited by whoever happens to be working on the day it needs to be edited. As such, it is quite typical that when an interview goes online, four people have worked on it – including the author of the accompanying article. In addition to the news item, the interview is also published in its entirety, divided into several three to six minute pieces, which are then chronologically uploaded to YouTube by Kuiper.

To give an impression of what is produced in one day: during our day of observation, two items were made for other media, one for OOR (singer-songwriter Patrick Watson) and one for NU.nl (DJ Paul van Dyk). The editors (Lisette and Kristiaan) who worked on these two pieces picked interesting quotes out of the interview, which was earlier conducted, and edited them with pieces of a video clip. Titles and texts in the video are edited, resulting in a video of approximately three to four minutes about both artists with one news angle. When

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Lisette’s video was done, Tom (writer and final editor) checked it in the afternoon, and changed some of the texts. Kristiaan’s item was also checked by Tom. At the same time, Tom wrote a story on Paul van Dyk, while he listened to the audio of the quotes that were selected by the video-editor. Furthermore, one editor, Jasper, worked on a longer documentary about Flemish singer Guido Belcanto, polishing and color-editing what was already been edited in the days before our observation day. Another editor, Lucas, worked on the editing of an interview with Kris Berry, doing the same work as the editors that worked on Watson and van Dyk. A news item about Kris Berry was scheduled for NU.nl and OOR on a later date. In the afternoon, one video interview was done by Kristiaan (with Orbital). Two hours before the interview took place – it was scheduled at 14.20 at Hotel Backstage – the editor that performed the interview started preparing by listening to an audio stream of Orbital’s new album *Wonky* and by reading more information about the band online. Kristiaan took a piece of paper with him to the interview on which he wrote down topics he wanted to talk about with the band. This overview of the day shows that multiple people work on the same stories, instead of each his or her own. Also, raw content is used to create multiple stories, both text and video.

### 7.2.3. Journalistic Roles

An important question for our thesis was what kinds of professional roles music journalists perform, and how these change(d) in a digital world. In our theoretical framework we laid out four main professional roles: gatekeeper, promoter, consumer guide and cultural intermediary. After conducting and analyzing the interviews, we concluded that there is no clear-cut role that covers all of popular music journalism and that the applicability of the roles depends on the music outlet one works for. However, we could conclude that popular music journalists are needed to give the consumer guidance in the vast amount of music that is out there, especially now that access to music is so much easier. Since FC does not editorialize and does not produce reviews, it is interesting to investigate how the people working for the company see their roles as popular music journalists – and if they even consider themselves popular music journalists at all. Although we did not interview all the employees of FC in depth – since we wanted to interview the most diverse group of Dutch music journalists we also focused on other outlets – by observing the company and talking to the employees that day, we received a good picture on their perception of the professional roles we laid out in our theoretical framework.
As we explained in chapter 5, according to Kuiper (owner of FC) popular music journalists should above all function as a gateway of information and therefore, opinions of the author are of less importance. He argues that this not only goes for interviewing, but in general for reviewing as well – though that is not one of the tasks of FC either way. According to Kuiper, informing is the most important aspect of being a good music journalist. Music journalists should focus on informing the audience about a new album or concert, so consumers can form their own opinion about it.

During our observation day, we asked the employees questions and interviewed them on their standpoints. As we explained in chapter 4, these Q&A’s can be very valuable for this kind of study. Since the goal of this research is to gain an insiders perspective, it was necessary that the interviews were informal and conversational and employed open-ended questions; no interview questions were developed on forefront. Interestingly enough, FC’s employees see different roles for themselves, which resonate with the work they do outside of FC and how they were educated. For example, one editor, Lucas, who has his own film production company and was educated as a film producer, said the following about his interviewing technique: “I like to emphasize the personal and the persona of the artist, not so much focus on the music.” He stressed that he does not see himself as a popular music journalist. One of his colleagues, Lisette, who only films and edits at FC, and is also active as a film producer, agreed with him: “I like to make beautiful videos that have a strong story, but I wouldn’t call myself a music journalist.” However, a third editor, Tom, who also works for OOR and started his career there, does see himself as a popular music journalist. When asked why he thought of himself this way, while the others did not, he answered: “I think it also resonates with how you started out. I worked for OOR before working for FaceCulture.” Of course, the question arises whether this view of one’s own profession influences the decision making process about what to include in a story or video. According to Tom, it does not. “Journalism is not only focusing on what is new, but about creating stories as well,” which is also what the other two editors specializing in video production stated. How they view their job is important, because they collaborate a lot with each other.

When an article or lead is send to NU.nl and OOR it is credited to FaceCulture, instead of to the author, much like other press agencies such as AP or Reuters. As stated before, it is possible that up to four people worked on one item: an interviewer, a cameraperson, an editor, and the writer of the article that accompanies the video. This means that the traditional notion of authorship that is employed by writers we interviewed at other media outlets works
differently here. Of course, this way of working has advantages and disadvantages that relate to authority and authorship. According to Tom, “the production speed is kept really high this way,” which is important for the press bureau function of FC, hereby noting what Karianne Vermaas and Frank Janssen also argue: “press agencies have to be quick with their news.” Production is vital at FC: while most music media employ different genres (news, interview, reviews), FC wants to produce as much content as possible. However, Tom also acknowledges that there is no time and place for personal masterpieces: “You know there is no personal gain, so you’re not too eager to really make something perfect.” This means that there is a danger that the work becomes one of mass-production because multiple people work on one item and nobody feels responsible for the whole product. Furthermore, chances are likely that the products all are similar and this mass-production can turn into standardization of items – there is no uniqueness left. As a result, authorship is therefore established in an alternative way: the video is credited to the company. It is difficult to build a portfolio for an editor working for FC.

Another problem of working this way is building authority and serving the audience. The fact that items of FC are not connected to the producers – and, thus, mostly unknown to the public – means that music fans are not able to follow their favorite journalist in a way that Erik Zwennes and Atze de Vrieze (3voor12) described: when a music journalist is very visible, a music fan can sort out whether the taste of the music journalist is in line with their own. In that same line, in our interview, OOR journalist Jasper van Vugt stated that “when you read a lot from journalists, you know what they like and you know you can trust them [or not].” FC misses this kind of individual profiling and this be considered a disadvantage of working like a press bureau. Therefore, it is hard to gain momentum and build a strong company name because its authors are so invisible. Kuiper acknowledges in our interview that this is something he wants to work on in the future. On the other hand, with invisible authors and a high production speed, as Tom acknowledges, there is no space for egos and personal profiling. This enables a good work environment where there is no fighting over the best interviews, but where journalists work together, overall impacting the production process in a good way. Because there is no personal gain, there is also no rivalry among the editors who does what. The fact that FC can be regarded as an entity has some consequences for audiences as well, as we will see in the next section.

7.2.4. Audiences

As we saw in chapter 5, writing for a specific audience is important in music journalism, and all popular music journalists we interviewed keep their audience in mind when producing content. To very briefly summarize, for newspapers this is a more general audience, which is probably not that well informed about music, while in OOR’s case people buy the magazine because they are interested in music. For that reason their writers can write more specialized and use more musical terms. Journalists at FC write for multiple audiences, and are aware of this. When writing an article for NU.nl, the responsible editor keeps in mind “that the readers probably don’t know everything about the band,” and when writing a lead for a video that goes to OOR.nl “you unconsciously know that those readers know more terms and have more background information.”\textsuperscript{xlvii} The key then is that a good interview can be used in different ways, meaning that people who are very interested in a certain band can watch the whole interview on YouTube, while providing an article with a news video can make sure that a general audience (such as the readers of NU.nl) also understand the context of the band. At this point, this happens by accompanying a video with an article or a lead.

As stated before, the emphasis of FC’s videos lies on the personal story behind the artist. Kuiper gives the example of Jannes, an artist who sings Dutch schlagers who is sometimes ridiculed by people that dislike his music. “I once interviewed him and wanted to hear the stories behind him and his record. I don’t like his music, but that doesn’t bother me. The public that likes his music will like it when he talks about his songs. You have to enter his world, because there are enough people that see his music as he intended to.”\textsuperscript{xlviii} This is an example of the fact that Kuiper thinks that “in interviews, the story behind the person and his record has to be told.”\textsuperscript{xlix} However, that does not mean that an interview shouldn’t be critical. “Of course you have to be critical when someone tells you a bullshit story or tells you stuff that isn’t true. But that’s being generally critical, without judging who you have in front of you.”\textsuperscript{xc}

Because most video interviews are in English and are not translated, FC’s YouTube channel attracts a worldwide audience. According to Kuiper, the channel is an advantage for the company in getting interviews from music labels, since YouTube videos are accompanied by a counter that counts the number of viewers of the video. That means that FC is not bothered with the problem that 3voor12 journalist Zwennes briefly touched upon. When we asked him if it would be possible to have a Dutch Pitchfork – i.e., a profitable website that only brings content related to music – working with professional, paid music journalists Zwennes argued that the Dutch speaking region is too small to attract people from all over the
world. “Pitchfork works because the website is in English and therefore can serve a very large language area.” Consequently, a similar website in Dutch would not get enough visitors. FC does not have this problem and therefore has the potential to attract a large audience. Because FC does not edit the interviews before placing them on YouTube – the only editing that is done is some color correction and dividing the interview into pieces of three to six minutes – there is no personal selection that could bother the viewers. Because interviews are placed on YouTube in their entirety, viewers are able to watch an interview unedited, with all the questions the interviewer originally asked included. Writers on the other hand have the ability to masquerade their questions if they do not land. This makes FC’s interviews very pure, and, therefore, transparent for the public, record labels and other media.

7.2.5 Conclusion
This case study has shown that FC’s way of working – its business model and structures, and the implications this has for authorship, authority and audience – has advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, FC proves that video interviewing comes with a whole pallet of possibilities, as video can be used not only for visual items, but can also be turned into text and audio, and it can therefore be packaged, as happens with the material send to OOR and NU.nl. It can make an interview very realistic, because viewers can actually see the artist instead of reading about them. A mass-production system is employed where multiple editors work on one item, which enables a very fast speed of working. Also, because items are not credited to one editor but to the company, there is no competitive atmosphere among the editors. On the other hand, this system also cuts out the ability of building a relationship with viewers, because there is no such thing as authorship. This is also a disadvantage for the journalist himself, because he cannot build a portfolio. Also, because FC has so many ways of generating revenue and because of its invisibility, it is struggles with building a well-known brand name. Our next case study, 3voor12, has this brand name and tries to maintain it with the help of amateur journalists.
7.3. 3voor12: Bundling Strength?

Just like FaceCulture, 3voor12 occupies a special position in Dutch popular music journalism landscape. This is for multiple reasons. First, the organization is part of the Dutch broadcaster VPRO which is funded by the Dutch government. That means that the organization is not designed as a profit-making venture and, therefore, has room to experiment and innovate, a much needed quality. At the same time, for that exact same reason, the outlet has to make it work with the limited funds that are provided. Second, what follows from that room to experiment is extensive convergence and crossmediality; 3voor12 is active on the internet, radio and television. Third, and most notably, professional journalists working at 3voor12 collaborate with more than a thousand volunteers who produce and edit news for the local branches of the website. This case study will focus on that final aspect.

As we have seen in chapter 3, amateurs roaming the internet provide a real challenge to any field of professional journalism. In “Who is a Journalist?”, Alan D. Knight argues: “More than seventy million bloggers, indeed almost anyone who has a computer with an internet connection can write and publish their work, mostly without mediation.”516 As we have heard during the interviews, most interviewees still see the need for professional popular music journalism. Consequently, 3voor12 represents the perfect opportunity for a case study to review what happens when professional and amateur journalism come together. Before we head of, it has to be made clear that, for our research, we define someone as an amateur when he or she does not get paid for the work and he or she does not work within the field of journalism. How exactly professional popular journalism benefits from this relationship will be reviewed, but the disadvantages for both parties is also investigated by looking at how exactly the two parties collaborate. Furthermore, another part of this case study is reviewing the writings from both professional and amateur journalists, to indicate the differences between both parties. Firstly, before diving into the relation between professional and amateur journalism, and terminology, it is necessary to investigate what 3voor12 exactly does – we will only shortly touch upon this since we also discussed the outlet in the methodology section.

3voor12 is a Dutch online platform for popular music that offers its readers various insights, from in-depth multi-medial festival reporting – from broadcasting concerts on television to reviews of concerts on the website – to articles concerning institutional news.

Furthermore, more basic genres such as interviews with artists and record reviews (limited to one per week) are covered. Moreover, all sorts of popular music genres are included, from hip hop to folk, although special attention goes out to artists from Dutch origin. Furthermore, 3voor12 consists of seventeen hyperlocal sections of the website, called ‘local’ (in Dutch: lokaal). These sections are staffed by thousands of volunteers, who for the most part do not work in journalism or study journalism. Most of them are students from all kinds of studies, ranging from urban planning to primary education. What they share is a love for music. The first local branch was erected in 2003, in the form of 3voor12/Den Haag and since then the local section has expanded to cities and regions all around the country. Everyone can start a local branch: interested parties are invited to contact the VPRO, which then helps volunteers build an editorial department. All branches have a traditional approach to journalism and employ an editor-in-chief and a couple of final editors who have access to the content management system of the website. To become involved at such a local department is fairly easy: people who are interested just e-mail the editor-in-chief and can become writers or photographers.

Every year in September, a local day (‘Lokaaldag’) is hosted in Hilversum, where the headquarters of 3voor12 are located. Every local branch sends two of three persons to talk amongst each other, follow workshops and professional journalists layout their plans for the upcoming season. Other than that, according to 3voor12/Friesland editor-in-chief Peter Dijkstra “[t]he national part of 3voor12 does not concern itself at all with the local branches content-wise.” This means that both partners in the relationship work pretty individually. In Hilversum, there is one person that has the function of local coordinator (‘lokaal-coördinator’); he is the contact person for the local branches when they have questions, remarks and so on. At festivals, the professional journalists take a few people from the local branch – in the city or region where the festival is hosted – with them to actually work together. The local sections experience a lot of freedom. According to Dijkstra, “we don’t have guides or plans of actions.” The way in which both parties work together is called participatory journalism and will be explained in the next section. What the advantages and disadvantages of participatory journalism are, and how they work out at 3voor12, will be explained after we have introduced the concept.

7.3.1. Introducing Participatory Journalism

The arrangement of professional and amateur journalists is an interesting phenomenon. However, it is not completely uncommon in journalism; another Dutch example where
professional journalists and citizens work together to provide local journalism is Dichtbij.nl, an initiative from the newspaper *De Telegraaf* that works with hyperlocal websites where citizens can send in news. According to Singer et al., “many terms have been coined to describe the contributions to online newspaper content from those whom media critic Jay Rosen describes as ‘the people formerly known as the audience’.” A few of these terms are user-generated content or the term amateur- or citizen journalism. However, Singer prefers the term participatory journalism, since this term does not capture a top-down approach. This is also the term that seems best suited how 3voor12 operates and cooperates with its contributors. The term “captures the idea of collaborative and collective – not simply parallel – action to, but also with, one another.” Not every media organization embraces the input of the former audience. Stuart Allan argues that “mainstream news organizations for the most part, however, decline to surrender their traditional editorial control, agenda-setting functions or gatekeeper authority when deciding who is permitted to enter ‘their’ news domain, under what conditions, when and how.” However, some academics argue that this is the wrong angle to study participatory journalism. According to Axel Bruns, “stories of conflict between ‘citizens’ and ‘professionals’, though sometimes entertaining, generally tend to be unproductive; they obscure the fact that mutually beneficial cooperation between two sides is possible,” meaning that research on participatory journalism should focus on beneficial aspects instead of a paradigm of conflict. The embrace of participatory journalism means completely brushing aside the notion of the all-knowing journalist sitting in his or her ivory tower who skims through reader responses. It rather embraces a notion of collaboration between amateurs and professionals. The audience becomes active and hence receiving the name user instead of, for example, viewer, reader or in plural, simply audience.

Various authors have written on what they call different stages in the process of user-generated content. For example, David Domingo and Alfred Hermida distinguish between five forms of participation, ranging from access/observation to interpretation. However, in these forms, the professional journalist mainly uses the amateur to provide comment to or add on to their own work. Simply put, users supplement the journalist or serve as a check, while a much further going development is having the user as a co-worker. This kind of co-working is

517 Jane B. Singer et al., *Participatory Journalism: Guarding Open Gates at Online Newspapers* (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2. [emphasis in original]
518 Ibid., 2. [emphasis in original]
far from fully embraced in journalism: Ari Heinonen has interviewed a number of journalists to determine different roles users can take on, for example the role of the commentator and that of the pulse taker. He also sees a collaborative role, but notes that “the journalists in our study were clearly more ambivalent about the role users might play in the core journalistic task of producing actual editorial content.”

Users become “in essence co-workers in journalism.” Most journalists the author interviewed were fine with accepting personal experiences, photos or comments from users, but were very hesitant of letting amateurs do what they deemed “true reporting.” Therefore, allowing users to exercise the same kind of reporting – albeit on a local level – at 3voor12 is not directly a widely accepted way of working in journalism.

To see how this relationship works, it is important to review what the significance of participatory journalism is; in other words, why do so many forms of this kind of journalism exist, and what are 3voor12’s benefits in a far reaching relationship between amateurs and professionals? Furthermore, why do amateurs want to participate? According to researchers, the answer is twofold, as both economic and social reasons both play a large role in the shift from top-down journalism to participatory journalism. However, it is important to realize that while 3voor12 does not make profit – and do not need to attract advertisers – it still wants to manifest itself as the most important Dutch platform for music journalism with limited funds. This means economic reasons do play an important role: their funds are limited and they need to get the most out of them. In the next section, the advantages of the relationship are reviewed.

7.3.2. Advantages of Working Together

In chapter 3, we described how new communication technologies mortally wounded the newspaper industry and the consequences of this development, as well as the difficulty of adopting obsolete business models to an online environment. Vujnovic writes that “as digital networks have grown, media organizations have found it harder and harder to find an economic model to sustain their own growth or even prevent their slide.” In considering the economic motivations for user contributions, Vujnovic has interviewed journalists and identified three economic benefits of user-generated content, namely “building brand loyalty,
boosting website traffic and remaining competitive.”

Building brand loyalty revolves around “drawing users together around particular interests,” in this case, music, and in doing so “creating a sense of loyalty to the website itself.”

This is, according to 3voor12 journalist Zwennes, one of the most important aspects of having a local branch and it has a social aspect as well: “It is good for our marketing that 3voor12 is very visible, even in the smallest cafes. It creates commitment and enthusiasm for the brand.”

This leads to the second benefit identified by Vujnovic, boosting website traffic, which relies on the assumption that users can draw in their own friends. Although 3voor12 does not have to compete with other outlets in order to get revenue, it does need to stay important very relevant in order to receive funding by the government – since a prerequisite of the Dutch public broadcasting system is that its products need to be unique from commercial parties.

According to former community manager Ron van der Sterren, the local branches are very important for 3voor12: “Now, ten years after the local branches have been erected, they get more traffic than the national part of the website. That indicates that there is a need from our readers.”

Another important reason with regard to the limited funds available to 3voor12 is of course that “citizen journalists [are] the most cost-efficient way – indeed, perhaps the only way – to cover hyperlocal news.”

Professional journalists cannot be everywhere at any given time and, therefore, volunteers can be used to cover local acts. For example, according to Zwennes, the volunteers “can do the local acts that are underexposed [by national media].”

This is in line with what Singer writes: “[T]his collaboration [of professionals and amateurs] is most common on stories or topics that would be difficult for a professional journalist to effectively report without such assistance.”

While the main website of 3voor12 mostly focuses on national news, the local branches all focus on news in their own city or region, be it bands, shows or institutions. Van der Sterren indicates that besides the fact that it is cost-efficient to let local amateurs do the reporting, they are also the most suited for the job since they can get access to information that is not always available for professional journalists:

When there is a meeting on the planned development of Doornroosje [a music venue] in Nijmegen, 3voor12/national cannot be there. But thanks to the volunteer who works at the music venue and writes for 3voor12, we can get information from the first source. And when a

526 Ibid., 143.
527 Ibid., 145.
528 Ibid., 149.
529 Jane B. Singer et al., Participatory Journalism: Guarding Open Gates at Online Newspapers, 207.
new music group seems to get erected from a popular regional band, nobody knows sooner than the guy who pours the beer in the rehearsal space – and happens to write for 3voor12.xcvii

The advantages for 3voor12 as a platform are clear. But we were also curious to find out how the volunteers profit from this kind of voluntary work. What are their reasons to spend time on something that is not necessary related or even relevant to their careers (once they complete their education)? According to Vuijnovic, “[t]heir rewards are not wages but rather a sense of being a part of an online community.”530 David Gauntlett, in his book Making is Connecting, explores our need to engage with the world and create and share creative material such as ideas en videos online. According to Gauntlett, “we can see a growing engagement with a ‘making and doing’ culture. This orientation rejects the passivity of the ‘sit back’ model, and seeks opportunities for creativity, social connections, and personal growth.”531 Therefore, the need to participate and create online is part of our culture. We performed an informal survey and asked a small number of volunteers the same question, namely why they work for 3voor12. These volunteers were in our extended network and therefore easily approachable. Some of them want to be active in music or music journalism after they finish their education, but some of them have other reasons. Among them is Sarah Oranje, who studies media and entertainment management; she writes and takes photographs for 3voor12/Amsterdam. According to her, she enjoys multiple benefits. To name a few: “First of all, you build a network working for 3voor12 and get to know nice people with the same interests; it is a nice addition to your resume. Second, you get free access to concerts and third, in this way I’m able to build a portfolio.”xcviii Wilbert Elting, student of journalism at the University of Groningen, and volunteer at 3voor12/Friesland agrees: “You gain a lot of experience working for 3voor12. Of course, free tickets to concerts are a nice extra benefit.”xcix He also states that in provinces where music journalism is not that big – such as Friesland – it is a good way to build a network and get involved in the regional pop scene. Editor-in-chief of 3voor12/Friesland, Peter Dijkstra, also used 3voor12/Friesland to obtain experience and progress in popular music journalism:

You gain a stage to go forward in popular music journalism. It is not only a stepping stone to get a paid job in music journalism, but also a

530 Ibid., 139.
platform to develop your abilities, to work on your qualities as a writing and to build a network. People like [professional 3voor12 journalists] Atze de Vrieze and Ingmar Griffioen also worked for the local sites. And looking at myself, I’ve got a job at the Leeuwarder Courant and some work at OOR now, and I have 3voor12/Friesland to thank.

These volunteers all see the development of a professional network as key. Zwennes acknowledges that the national part of the website also profits from former, professionalized amateur journalists. He states:

Around seventy percent of our internships are filled by people from the local branches. This is not only done from a loyalty perspective, but also because these people have a feeling with our work and work in a comparable discourse. And those interns sometimes stay, like Tomas Delsing (who does Dansen met Delsing, a radio show) and Chris Walraven (who coordinates national live activities).

Some people have other reasons than networking, and gaining experience in music journalism: Edwin Niemantsverdriet, for example, who volunteers at 3voor12/Gelderland states the following:

I have a kind of boring office job. That’s one of the reasons I apply myself to 3voor12. I get a lot of energy from working with people who like the same music. Another reason is that I like to help local bands get national success and I get happy from helping bands like De Staat, Automatic Sam and Shaking Godspeed. You do get some status from this kind of work, which I don’t use for myself, but mainly for helping with a concert hall, festival or artist. It helps that I’m a bit older and have a good (but boring) job.

Therefore, while 3voor12 as a brand gains a lot from working with volunteers, the people we talked also claim that they profit from working for 3voor12: they get experience in (music) journalism, meet nice people and are able to visit free shows.
7.3.3. Negative Sides of the Relationship

Of course, there are also negative consequences connected to participatory journalism, and these also apply to 3voor12. When interviewing journalists, Singer identified two kinds of ethical issues connected to this kind of journalism: “One cluster of issues stems from the difficulty of knowing much if anything about where information comes from a concern related mainly to journalistic norms of accuracy and truth-telling. The other relates to the abusive nature of too many user contributions.” The last part of the quote clearly refers to anonymous user contributions, but the first to the fact that citizens do not get the same education or on the job training as professional journalists. Some media, such as The Huffington Post, have erected guidelines for citizen journalists in order to give them some the same information that journalists get at journalism school. For example, citizen journalists should “check spelling and grammar” and “never plagiarize.” A structure like implemented at 3voor12 does not suffer from abusive nature of content, but does get confronted now and then with journalistic norms. According to Knight, “journalists would argue that their professional system of reports with identified sources; stated codes of ethics, fact checking and professional editing would systematically produce more credible news.” 3voor12 journalist Zwennes states that “most problems are solved internally,” if there are any, however, sometimes “weird schisms” come into existence:

Sometimes [the volunteers] write very positive about a local act and then we as professionals completely destroy the band when they play on a festival. Or sometimes an act is reviewed on wrong grounds, for example on appearance of the band or the composition of the audience. But that’s something that will never go away and doesn’t matter, because the reader knows how to place it in context.

Ron van der Sterren, former community manager, also states that problems occasionally arise. “Sometimes there is some confusion, because it isn’t always clear to the outside that these writers are from a local branch of 3voor12, with angry telephone calls to Hilversum which complained about an unprofessional stance of 3voor12. Or we get complains about bad pieces.” To discuss the latter, 3voor12 puts effort in educating their local journalists by offering them workshops, explains Van der Sterren: “[we] show them the ropes. Exactly that

532 Jane B. Singer et al., Participatory Journalism: Guarding Open Gates at Online Newspapers, 128.
makes sure these volunteers get a bigger sense of self-respect and that makes them work better.”

Notably, literature that focuses on the negative sides of participatory journalism mostly centers on disadvantages or pitfalls for professional journalism. However, a strong case can be made for the fact that media need amateur journalists for more than the need to give them a voice. According to Jason Stverak, “[t]he point all of them miss is traditional news media reporters and editors are being devastated by a financial crisis, not a journalism crisis. Somebody has to fill the void.”

A similar argument is made by Tom Alderman: he argues that “[a]s they [the media] cut costs and chop off hordes of staff, they might increase their information sources – at no cost.” The danger of this is that because citizen journalists can be employed free of charge, they are treated like second-class journalists. As stated above, the amateurs and professionals at 3voor12 work quite separately, except on festivals, where “the rule is that local reporters help with the reporting of the event.”

According to Peter Dijkstra, editor-in-chief at 3voor12/Friesland, at those festivals, the differences between the volunteers and the people that work in Hilversum become clear. He explains that at the festivals he reported “the professionals sleep in an expensive hotel at the beach, while the people from the local section sleep at the camping site.” Moreover, as stated before, an advantage of having hyperlocal sections at the website is that the people working for them can write about acts that are underexposed. However, this brings forth a tension where the local reporters feel that they have to cover bands that are not important enough for the professionals; according to Dijkstra, “I feel that we have to report about the secondary line-up and the less interesting bands.” Dijkstra explains that this means that “we run around the whole festival and sleep in our tents [while] they [the professionals] concentrate themselves on the main stage and sleep in a comfortable bed.”

Another aspect is that of authority. In chapter 5, we discussed the subject of authority and the problems professional journalists encounter now the internet is full of opinions from everyone. Amateur journalists at 3voor12 appear to have an even harder time establishing their authority, since they are volunteering and are set against a professional team. Thus, not only do they have to establish their authority against that of their audience, but also vis-à-vis their professional colleagues. This can be illustrated by the following example. At the festival


Eurosonic / Noorderslag, an anonymous reporter from 3voor12/Groningen was asked to join the team (again, composed of professionals and amateurs) to write reviews on acts that played on the festival. She wrote a review about a band and awarded their performance with a ten. However, the (professional) editor decided to withdraw the review, because he thought the review was not convincing enough in order to give the band a ten. He told the local reporter that bands rarely deserve a ten. The reporter had to write the review again, send it in, but it was never published. According to the local reporter, “they are so busy in Hilversum, so they probably just forgot about it.” At the same festival, the editor that told the reporter to write the review again, gave another band a ten in an own review. Thus, while the idea is given that there is an equal relationship between professionals and amateurs, in fact, this example illustrates that the relationship is unbalanced.

According to Dijkstra, the keyword in this discussion is involvement: “There needs to be someone who focuses on the coordination between Hilversum and the local branches fulltime.” In contrast to Zwennes and Van der Sterren, who state that they sometimes encounter problems and try to solve them, Dijkstra argues that nothing happens. When we asked Dijkstra what happens when the professional journalists see something that they do not like on a local site, he replied: “Nothing! Simply because they don’t see it. At least, at 3voor12/Friesland, I have never experienced such a thing.” As stated in the introduction, the local branches get a lot of freedom. However, Dijkstra criticizes this: “There are no plans or guidelines and in that sense, it’s noncommittal. And that’s exactly the opposite from what I try to tell my volunteers.”

7.4. Comparing Their Work
To see whether the work that is done by the local journalists and their professional peers in Hilversum differs, we did a textual analysis of twenty concert reviews. As we explained in chapter 3, many researchers such as Andrew Keen are not at all positive about amateur journalism. Also, our interviewees were skeptical. For example, NRC journalist Hester Carvalho states that “sometimes I read [amateur] interviews and I think: it’s just like a school newspaper.” From these selected reviews, we coded ten written by professionals, five written by local journalists for a local website of 3voor12 – namely that of Noord-Holland, Groningen, Gelderland, Overijssel and Limburg – and five reviews written by local journalists at a festival where they worked together with professional journalists. In 7.4.1., we will explain the structure of these reviews and in 7.4.2. we will give an overview of the results per category. With these categories, we tried to identify if there are any differences in
professional and amateur writing. This has a two-fold purpose: first, to check whether the claims that are made by our interviewees about the importance of professional skill hold any value, and second, to see if amateur writers also possess these skills.

7.4.1. Structures
All ten reviews written by the professional journalists at festivals employed the same structure with several subheadings: an introduction, music (where the writers explains something about the artist), plus (positive aspects of the performance), minus (negative aspects of the review), conclusion (which include a short summary and final notes), and finally, a grade. Therefore, the review is structured towards giving an overall impression of how well the artist performed.

The local journalists that worked at festivals also used this structure. However, the local journalists that wrote reviews for their own local branch employed a loose structure, which was always more or less chronological, without subheadings. The review is structured towards giving an impression of how and what the evening looked like, instead of grading the artist.

7.4.2. Themes
As we explained in chapter 4, we were curious to find out if the aspects that music journalists should encompass according to most of our interviewees could be traced in the reviews. We will briefly state what these categories (knowledge/context, level of criticism, personalization, topic, and professional technique) encompass and why they matter, and then go over to the results.

1. Knowledge / Context
The first category is knowledge/context, in which we trace what aspects the author used to contextualize the review. All of our interviewees agreed on the fact that contextualization is what sets a professional apart from an amateur. For example, NU.nl journalist Pierre Oitmann stated that historical knowledge is vital in order to “place frameworks.”\textsuperscript{cxvi} OOR editor-in-chief Erik van den Berg also argued that popular music journalists have to have a lot of knowledge and therefore should be capable of putting popular music into context. These claims are supported by literature: according to Van Venrooij and Schmutz, “discussion of context positions the critic as an expert by providing the mediating knowledge needed to
properly understand and appreciate the album.” We use the same questions that Van Venrooij and Schmutz ask in their research – “does the review situate the album in its broader social, cultural, political, or biographical context?” and “Is the album or artist placed in the context of popular music history?” – to determine the level of professionalism in the selected reviews and turned these into categories.

Another aspect of contextualization is making comparisons. Shyon Baumann, who researched the intellectualization of film, lists a number of techniques and concepts in film critique that are used by critics when reviewing films. One of these is comparison. According to Baumann, “making connections between different works allows critics to justify their analyses and to display their cinematic erudition,” and this also goes for music criticism.

We divided this theme into five categories: historical or social framework, other bands, musical genres, biographical information, and popular culture.

538 Ibid., 405.
In the diagram above, the results for this category are displayed. Let’s walk through the results from left to right and then see what can be concluded from them.

- **Historical or Social Framework**

30% of the professional reviews contained historical information or provide information with regard to social situations, and consequentially places music into history or zeitgeist. An example of this is review 1, in which the author positions the performance of Omar Souleyman against the backdrop of the civil crisis in Syria. This is not a high percentage, seeing that almost every interviewee emphasized how important historical knowledge is (although it can also be used instrumental, of course). However, 0% of the amateur reviews contained this information. As we explained in section 7.1.4, the structure of the review leaves not much place for such information, as it is mostly structured towards giving information about the evening itself.

- **Other Bands**

In 60% of both the professional and amateur reviews, there were references to other bands, mostly to compare the music or the performance with other bands. This is done in order to give the reader an idea of what the act sounds like, or as reference points so the reader can place the band into context. Sometimes just as a mention (review 17: “they were support act for bands like No Age and Titus Andronicus”), sometimes as a colorful addition (review 15: “The psychedelic brass piece at the end of the song has been replaced by Iron Maiden-worthy solos of the second guitarist”), or sometimes to compare (review 11: “although the show is reminiscent of work by Fever Ray from Norway, and Múm or Sigur Rós from Iceland, is Rodelle simply from Zaandam”).

- **Musical Genres**

60% of the professional reviews made connections to musical genres. For example, review 1 (“a mix between traditional-like rhythms and hard beats, in a style called Dabke”), review 5 (“power pop and grunge ballads”) and review 6 (“detached doom pop”). 90% of the amateur reviews referred to genres to contextualize the music and thereby outreached the professional reviews. A possible explanation is that it is easy to mention a genre, and professionals may want to vary in their description of music.
- **Biographical Information**

100% of the professional reviews gave biographical information. Under the subheading ‘music’ – as explained at the beginning of this paragraph – the writers always thoroughly introduced the bands. Biographical information is important in order to give context to the band and introduce the reader to the band. In 80% of the amateur reviews, some biographical information was given, but not always complete; we also counted the review if they just mentioned where the band was from. Therefore, while both groups included biographical information, the professionals used more words explaining the biography of the artist. This difference can in part be explained by the structure of the reviews, but also by a lack of knowledge.

- **Popular Culture**

30% of the professional reviews mentioned popular culture in the form of Lord of the Rings, Jurassic Park, and Camping Life (an often ridiculed Dutch television show), while 0% of the amateur reviews mentioned popular culture. It seems that the professional journalist has a bigger toolbox than the amateur journalist and puts the performance in a more complex context. However, the results are not that far apart.

2. **Level of Criticism**

Most of our interviewees agreed on the fact that taste making is important as a music journalist. According to De Vrieze (3voor12), “[i]n the end, taste is the only thing that matters. Some people tell us: this is not an objective review. That’s true, but it’s taste that matters.”\(^{540}\) In the literature we reviewed, the same was argued by Jones and Featherly, “the job of the music critic is, fundamentally, to convince readers that particular music is good or bad.”\(^{541}\) Furthermore, according to Baumann, “a vocabulary of criticism is a common feature of artistic commentary.”\(^{541}\) However, as we explained, the structures of both reviews differ. The professional journalists use a structure that ultimately leads up to a grade and therefore is written to determine whether the performance was good, bad or something in between. The amateur journalists do not give grades but rather give an overview of the evening. We again coded ten reviews from the professional journalists (fig 1). From the amateur journalists, we coded five reviews that were written for the local branches (fig 2), and five that were written

in cooperation with professional journalists on festivals (fig 3). We used four variables in this category: engages critically, purely descriptive, fandom/celebratory, and overtly negative.

![Figure 7.2. Level of Criticism among Professional Journalists](image)

We found that 90% of the professional reviews engaged critically with their subject. Among the artists that were reviewed, there were high grades (a nine for Omar Souleyman) and low grades (a three for Lifehouse), but all those came with convincing arguments. One of those ten reviews was coded overtly negative, because the performance got a low grade, but the arguments were not convincing.

Of the five reviews coded from the local branches, a little less than half – 40% to be precise – got the label engages critically. 20% got the label fandom/celebratory, just like another 20% was purely descriptive. The last 20% got the label engages critically/fandom, a combination of two variables. This means that the arguments that were given were convincing, but most of the language hinted towards fandom. Clearly, not all reviews were geared towards giving an opinion.

Finally, we discuss the reviews written by the local journalists on festivals. Of these, 80% engaged critically with the performance they reviewed, while 20% was purely descriptive. Clearly, there is a different between amateur reviews written for local 3voor12 websites and
those that are written at festivals together with the professionals. There are two possible explanations for this that are in all probability interconnected. First of all, as we already explained, the structures of both reviews are different. Second, by being aid by professional journalists, the writers get a thoroughly check on what aspects should contain their review in order to be published on the festival website. These results clearly indicate while the professionals use a vocabulary of critics, the amateurs mostly describe and display their fandom. However, when the amateurs use the format of the professionals (writing a review and giving a grade), their critical skills get better.

3. **Personalization**

This was a category that proved to be less relevant for our sample than we had expected. In scanning through the reviews on the local websites, we found several where writers that brought themselves into the review, or mentioned a relationship between themselves and the artist. Consequently, we created this category since we deemed this was an important aspect of amateur reviews. However, none of the reviews we coded used this kind of language. Nonetheless, personalization came forward in another aspect, which did not resonate with the writer, but with the locality of review. For example, review 15, “Mikal Cronin and his band prove to be a ‘typical’ Vera-band,” the writer mentions that the artist suits the local venue (*Vera*). The writer also mentions the local scene (“A lot of the visitors are insiders who find themselves in the garage rock scene of Groningen”). 100% over the reviews had some mention of aspects of locality.

4. **Topic**

In this category, by using the variables international, national, or local artist, our goal was to find out whether there is any difference in coverage, and more specifically, if local journalists merely write about local artists. First of all, it should be mentioned that of these five reviews written for the local websites, three of them wrote about the support act of the band – that are all local artists that get extra attention this way. Second, of the five reviews we coded, only 20% covered a local act. However, it must be mentioned that we coded reviews, while there are also reports of band competitions that give attention to local acts. This means that the category topic needs further research.
5. Professional Technique

Another important aspect of music journalism is of course the ability to write well and entertaining. Also, as stated above, a danger of amateur journalism without professional supervision is that content is not edited. That means that content could consist of mistakes in spelling and grammar, but also of inaccurate information. Therefore, the following variables were used: edited well and poorly edited. Besides from editing well, a good popular music journalist also has to be able to present the gathered content in an engaging and professional manner: according to OOR editor-in-chief Erik van den Berg, a good popular music journalist: “has to write well, preferably in a sharp way. … There has to be some humor or perspective. … you shouldn’t take music journalism too serious.”

To check this sharp writing, we checked two variables: the use of metaphors and how creatively the review is written.

Let’s first start with perhaps the least expected: all reviews, professional and amateur were well edited. None of them had any spelling mistakes. Seemingly, although there is no direct supervision from the professional journalists on the reviews that are written for the local websites, the editing staff of the local websites does their job. It means that the editing system – reviews are checked by a final editor - that is employed by the amateur writers works very well.

However, there were more differences in the skill of writing. 60% of the professional reviews made use of metaphors and 90% were written creatively; the one that was not, was the same review that was deemed overtly negative. Coding the metaphors was challenging, because some of the expressions were typically Dutch, and did not translate well to English. The amateur journalists were less impressed by nice expressions and only 10% used metaphors and 10% was written creatively. This means that the professional journalists are better writers.
Figure 7.3. Professional Technique among Professional and Amateur Journalists

7.5. Conclusion

3voor12 has found an innovative way to work together with amateur journalists, which can be considered as an example for the broader journalistic landscape: with these help of these amateur journalists, they succeed in covering the entire country with regard to popular music. With this case study, we have identified the advantages and disadvantages of working with citizen journalists. While most existing research focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of amateur journalism for professional journalism, we believe that these are understudied. More studies are needed to see what exactly the best ways are that citizen journalists should be treated by their professional peers. We have shown that by working with citizens, 3voor12 is successfully building its own brand name. Criticism from these local journalists has indicated that the organization should probably invest more time in building a relationship with them, although further research should indicate how this has to be done.

We have also shown that there are slight differences between professional and amateur writing. It seems that overall professional journalists have a bigger toolbox when it comes to
knowledge and creative writing. Moreover, both journalists use different structures that also indicate that there are differences in how they perceive their job; the local journalists facilitate what actually happens on such an evening, while the professional journalists entertainingly grade the performance they witness. The local touch of the reviews indicates that they are clearly written for a local audience. While we found that amateur journalists have an editing system that works well – there were no grammar or spelling mistakes found in their reviews – they are less-skilled writers than the professional journalists.
Chapter 8

An End has a Start:
Concluding our Research

You came on your own, that's how you'll leave / With hope in your hands and air to breathe
- Editors

“Change or die.” The future of music journalism is captured in these three simple words. Today, the profession finds itself at a crossroad, because of the ever growing presence of the internet, influencing both the music and news industry. As a result, music journalism can head into two different directions: either it continues to value known working habits and principles and will most likely cease to exist, or the vocation tries to reform itself in order to secure its future. Music journalist Everett True summarizes the need and process of restructuring in the following way:

If you’re a writer – professional or amateur – discussing music online in 2010, you’d have to be crazy not to realise that your readers have the same access to information that you do. So you adapt. Your primary task now is no longer to criticise music but to lay a path through the myriad sounds and blogs for your reader to follow. You link. You write. And then you link some more. You cannot function unless you’re doing this. You are no longer a critic. You are a curator, and an unpaid one at that. People are reading you because they assume you have specialist knowledge, not because you can argue brilliantly.

According to True, music journalism has to adapt to the changing environment that surrounds the profession. With a rapidly developing society, the functions of music journalists also transform. This is in line with what the journalists argued during our interviews. One of the most important tasks of music journalists these days is to lay a clear path through the online ocean of opinions and babble. People need to be guided through the nonsense towards qualitative stories and popular music of their taste. Furthermore, because of the amount of opinions on the web, people are likely to turn to the ones with “specialist knowledge,” as True

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543 Everett True, “The Future of Music Journalism.”
calls the music journalists.\textsuperscript{544} Whereas most people are able to find daily news by themselves, these journalists can (and above all should) provide consumers with specialist and exclusive stories. Only in this way can music journalists remain valuable for their audience. Although this is not always easy – because, for example, a profitable business model for online news is still yet to be found – the digital age has provided the music journalist with a whole new toolbox to get the best out of music writing and reporting.

This thesis had two, albeit connected, goals. First, we aimed to build a complete image of the profession of music journalism, since there basically is none. Therefore, we wanted to find out what characteristics make a good journalist, explain the music journalist’s place in journalism as a whole, and contextualize this in terms of broader society. Even though popular music is a very present commodity within our society, the profession of music journalism is an understudied subject. Dutch music journalism in particular is a neglected field of research. Therefore, one of the major aims was to perform a study with an inclusive reach in order to lay groundwork for further studies in music journalism. Our second goal for this thesis was to examine the viewpoints of music journalists on the future of their profession. Through literature review and interviews we were able to build a wide-ranging perspective on how music journalism is changing these days and how it needs to further adapt to stay valuable for the audience. Whereas much of the published research argues that music journalism has entered dark days because of the omnipresence of the internet and, consequently, the increasing amount of blogs, hardly any attention has been paid to the viewpoints of the experts in the field: the music journalists themselves. For that reason, we focused part of our research on questioning music journalists about their views on the future.

Thus, we tried to create a more complete academic picture of the landscape of Dutch music journalism; what the profession entails, and what changes the journalists (need to) go through right now. Our findings and discussion, in this respect, are not limited to music journalism only since the experiments, thoughts, and ideas of the music journalists apply to the larger sphere of journalism as a whole. Therefore, our findings can (partially) be connected to wider concerns and the greater field of journalism: all newspapers struggle with their business model, and whether there is still room for professional journalism is questioned by many. Because our focus was quite broad, we could claim that all categories discussed in chapters 5 and 6 represent possible avenues for further study. Before we move on to give

\textsuperscript{544} Ibid.
recommendations for further research, we wish to reemphasize the most interesting and valuable outcomes of our research.

### 8.1. Important Findings

The first aim of this thesis was to define the music journalist and its professional roles within journalism and society. As noticed, there was no set definition of what a music journalist is and what qualities one should possess. After interviewing twelve Dutch music journalists, it became clear that among them there is no absolute common ground on the exact qualities and characteristics that are needed for the profession. Perhaps it is just impossible to define a music journalist in one simple way, since the job description completely depends on what kind of outlet one is working for – some media require extensive historical knowledge while others focus on institutional and instant news.

However, there are certain characteristics and values all interviewees deemed important for a music journalist. For example inventiveness; this characteristic demands that journalists take initiative to produce their own unique (angles for) stories, that they go out and find stories instead of waiting for record labels to give them news. According to the interviewees, the more passive approach is practiced too often these days while inventiveness is a key aspect through which the music journalists can prove their value to the audience. Another aspect is that of knowledge and contextualization. Even though the interviewees do not agree on the importance of technical knowledge, they all share the opinion that music journalists need to have extensive historical knowledge. The capability to put music in context and frameworks – historical, technical, or zeitgeist – is vital and is what ultimately sets the professional apart from the amateur. The interviewees were more divided about the weight of institutional news. For example, traditional music journalists – writing for magazines and newspapers – solely consider popular music as an art form and therefore do not deem any other news of real significance. However, other music journalists (especially those who work for online outlets) state that since music is increasingly changing due to shifts in law, recording processes and technological advancements, stories about institutions also need to be covered.

Another important topic during the interviews was that of authority. On a media outlet level, it seems that authority shifts from print media to online and television platforms. The sacredness of certain traditional media – such as *OOR* and *Rolling Stone* – is slowly fading. Before the digital age a five star review in one of these respected magazines or newspapers meant a sold out record. These days, however, a one minute performance in talk shows like
De Wereld Draait Door most likely means that the music of that particular artist reaches the iTunes top five the day after. On a more personal level, the journalist’s authority is also experienced and built differently. New media such as Twitter have given journalists new means to build authority and establish relationships with readers. And while some academics argue that the journalists’ sense of authority is declining since people now are able to discover new music on their own instead of depending on music journalists, the interviewees argue that there is such a vast amount of popular music available that people need journalists to filter the best music. In this way, the journalists can serve as a gatekeeper, one of the roles we examined in this thesis.

The other roles we discussed with our interviewees are those of consumer guide, promoter and cultural intermediary. The consumer guide function comes close to that of gatekeeper, since both focus on a selection process. Nevertheless, the former focuses on the influence of sales while in the latter the journalists function as a porter between information and the audience. Even though it is hard these days – because of all the streaming and download possibilities – to determine whether or not music journalists directly influence sales, it is clear that they provide service to the audience by guiding them through all the babble by providing good stories and decent information. The role of promoter is a bit more controversial. Although several academics assigned the professional role of promoter to music journalists, the interviewees did not recognize themselves at all in this promoter role. As the term already implies, the professional role argues that music journalists overwhelmingly create content that is positive of tone. This is mainly done, according to academics, to keep the music industry satisfied. Although several interviewees stated that their outlet utilizes a positive approach – meaning that the employees will mostly pay attention to popular music that they deem good – they all stated that the music industry is never involved in such decisions. The last professional role we discussed is that of cultural intermediary. The focal point of this role is the cultural elevation of popular music. Back in the days, music journalists were able to make or break artists with their reviews since the audience automatically followed the opinions of the journalists. However, times have changed and with the internet this role has slowly faded away. Furthermore, the interviewees argued that today it is of less significance to consecrate popular music; most important is to inform and guide the audience toward the best stories and popular music.

As stated above, research implies that journalists write in a ‘positive’ tone in order to keep the music industry satisfied. As we explained, the music industry and music journalism are greatly intertwined. Acknowledged that PR and spin surround most of the journalism
landscape, nowhere but in music journalism is it that two industries work so closely together. According to Deuze, it is expected of journalists to be “be autonomous, free and independent in their work,” meaning that journalists are sovereign from other parties.\textsuperscript{545} However, former research suggests that the music industry is extremely powerful, and that music journalists are completely dependent on that industry. According to the interviews this was never the case. Moreover, due to enormous cutbacks in the industry, our interviewees believe that once mighty labels have become more humble and now must fight for the attention of music journalists. Of course, it depends on the size and influence of the outlet one works for who is granted access and consequently gets the interview if there is a big artist involved. Here, credibility and exposure of the media are important, and, as stated above, it seems that credibility is slowly shifting to online and television platforms.

Finally, we also discussed digital media. First of all, we examined the blogosphere, which takes on different forms. As the internet is reaching adulthood, blogs professionalize and some internet media have found business models to be profitable as well. An example of such an outlet is FaceCulture, studied in one of our case studies. Another (American) example is the online media platform Pitchfork. However, while these are professional agencies with paid journalists, a large part of the blogosphere is filled with amateurs. Our interviewees largely agreed on the fact that these are a welcome addition to the field of music journalism, since some have a strong signaling function. Other interviewees merely ignored blogs, and criticized time for a lack of writing skills. However, more journalists start to work together with amateurs. For example, in our case study at 3voor12, we examined how a professional organization incorporates local, amateur journalists to widen and improve its content. Another form of digitalization is that of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. These media are a great way to communicate with others (other journalists, readers, artists) and build authority, as stated earlier. Music journalists can use social media not only to make their outlet or their work visible, but also to create communities through which they produce news and promote stories.

Thus, a lot is changing for the profession of music journalism. Professional roles are changing or even slowly fading and the journalists increasingly have to focus on everything that is going on online. What we also found notable was that there was a marked difference in attitude toward these changes between the older and younger generations of the interviewees. Part of the older generation seems reluctant to fully take advantage of the opportunities the

\textsuperscript{545} Mark Deuze, “What is Journalism?” 447.
web is giving the journalists – by for example refusing to use social media – and rather hold on to established working habits and principles. The younger journalists, however, fully dip themselves into all the possibilities the internet has to offer. For example, they greatly use social media and try to create communities through which they can receive and share news. Furthermore, whereas the younger generation sees great opportunities for the future of the profession, the older journalists were more skeptical of it.

8.2. Further Areas of Research

As noted, this research aims to provide ground for further studies in music journalism, an understudied subject. Music journalism as a field deserves and merits more attention, in the least because it can serve as an example of journalism as a whole, since it is such a rigidly determined field. All eight categories that were explored in chapters 5 and 6, could facilitate further research, and in the remainder of this thesis we provide some suggestions that will hopefully inspire more academic projects on music journalism.

Twelve elaborate interviews with prominent Dutch music journalists provided much insight into the Dutch music journalism landscape. However, more research needs to be done and should use different methods – such as extensive ethnographic research and content analysis – to see how the claims that have been made by our interviewees work out in practice. With our case studies, we have tried to lay the groundwork for these types of studies, but needless to say, more work can and should be done. While extensive ethnographic research demands more time from the researchers and of course, the cooperation of the outlet, we believe that this is the best way to explore how the profession works. Furthermore, this would supplement earlier newsroom studies such as the volumes of Making Online News. The same goes for a wider focus of the studies. For example, the results of the category the popular music industry vs. the popular music industry merit more attention (since it crucially shows a site of conflict for journalism) for how the music industry shapes itself and how it views music journalism. Interviews with people working for labels could complement the research that is done in this thesis.

As stated above, because (Dutch) music journalism as field is pretty inclusive, it can serve as a playground where issues that play in the wider sphere of journalism can be tested. One such issue is the rise of citizen journalism. We did a case study at 3voor12, using interviews, surveys and textual analysis, but more – and preferably, ethnographic – research can lay bare how professional journalists interact with citizens journalists, and how these relationships can possibly be improved. Also, more research should focus on why and how
citizen (music) journalists do what they do. This way, a better image of this part of journalism could be mapped out which might improve journalism as a whole. In the end, this is (one of the) first research that examines the Dutch music journalism landscape to a great extent. Naturally, more research is necessary to further map out the ins and outs of the profession and all surrounding factors.

8.3. On the Road to the Future

Even though most of our interviewees were optimistic about the future of the profession, the journalists were (sometimes) critical of the medium they worked for. Some of them indicated what several sore points are and how these can be resolved to guarantee a better future for music journalism. We will briefly restate these points as a means of looking to the future of the profession. First of all, music journalists need to be more inventive, a criteria we also mentioned discussing what characteristics a music journalist should have. Our interviewees stated that many (other) music journalists wait until record labels offer them interviews instead of searching for own news, original stories and interviews. Simply put, much of music journalism is embedded in the promotional circus of music labels and the journalists often strictly follow the agenda of the record industry. This does not mean that they exactly do what labels say, as we explained in chapter 6, but it means that interviews are only conducted when new albums are coming out or when an artist gives a show in a particular country, creating the type of media coverage that historian Daniel Boorstin famously called the ‘pseudo-event’. As a result, similar interviews with the same musician flood the press. To turn that process around, music journalists need to reset their focus on original and more exclusive stories – like in the example Gijsbert Kamer told us – and not only work with what music labels offer them.

Second, journalists (and in extension, also the music industry) need to fully embrace the internet. Although traditional media now have their own websites, they (logically) keep their focus on the newspaper or magazine since that is where the money is. However, newspapers and magazines see their circulation steadily declining while reader numbers grow on online platforms. A major reason for this is that the internet has made the consumer much more knowledgeable and people are no longer satisfied with content that appears, in the case of traditional music media, once a week or even month. Journalists have to accept that people want to be kept posted 24/7 and need to act like it. Although enough time has to be taken to write qualitative content, one cannot wait a couple of days anymore to publish news since people would have found it out another way. No longer is it possible to ignore the
internet, and with that social media. Gaining (and maintaining) authority through social media is a clever way of attracting both an audience and establishing ground for popular music journalists. For example, if the internet is indeed a marketplace of opinions, then using Twitter in a smart way can show why your opinion is worth listening to. The same argument is used by Atze de Vrieze (3voor12) when arguing that Twitter enables the journalist to build communities where they can share news, receive news, and form dialogues. Today, it is vital for outlets to create tight communities of people that are interested in and trust the organization. This can be mainly through the means of social media and by building a decent website, as the journalists of 3voor12 argue. Although the industry is still trying to find a stable business model, it has to be recognized that the internet plays a major role in the daily consumption of news. Consequently, journalists that do not embrace certain aspects of digital media – such as Twitter – are immediately one step behind.

Third, music journalists should focus on expanding formats. According to music journalist Inge Janse, Dutch music journalism is “predictable, outdated, conventional, and therefore virtually not surprising or innovative.” According to him, this should not at all be the case, and journalists should embrace the internet. “Journalistic possibilities are countless on the web. Everything is possible and nothing costs anything. However, what is everyone doing? Writing album reviews. Writing interviews. Writing live-reviews. Consequently, Janse proclaims that his own mission is to invent a new format for every item he makes; a review that the reader can fill in herself and send to a friend, a video-interview turned into a gameshow, etc. Of course, when translated to an entire media organization, this is not something that happens overnight and it even seems a bit far-fetched. But still, Janse’s argument is valuable: in order to stand out in the crowd, journalists have to be more innovative and inventive.

The fourth and foremost reason to guarantee a future for the profession is the concept of passion. Popular music journalists should do what they have done from the beginning: write the first draft of musical history, create stories, share music and give insights to the wondrous world of popular music. “Of course,” as Tariq Goddard argues, “music cannot stand comparison to the collapse of empires, child malnourishment or environmental Armageddon, and musicians are not [always] generals, philosophers or scientists.” Although we fully agree with that, it also needs to be said that:

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Musical sounds are a powerful human resource, often at the heart of our most profound social occasions and experiences. People in societies around the world use music to create and express their emotional inner lives, to span the chasm between themselves and the divine, to woo lovers, to celebrate weddings, to sustain friendship and communities, to inspire mass political, and to help babies fall asleep… It is also a constant of everyday life, wafting through the dentist’s office like sonic wallpaper… Some anthropologists have suggested that the arts are central to human evolution and human survival.  

This quote expresses the deep feelings people have about music. Music and, therefore, music journalism matters. Even though the vocation probably won’t get the journalists laid or rich as Lester Bang famously stated, it is all about love for popular music; passion being the most important ingredient for the profession.

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Appendix A. Endnotes

1 Personal communication
2 Personal communication with all artists mentioned above on Noorderslag, January 2012.
3 ... as het om serieuze popmuziek gaat, we de grootste en belangrijkste krant van Nederland zijn.
4 Vind ik wel, absoluut, anders kun je geen kaders plaatsen
5 Uiteindelijk draait alles keihard om smaak. Wij krijgen soms ook het commentaar, dit is geen objectieve recensie. Nee, dat is waar, maar uiteindelijk gaat het gewoon om smaak. Alles draait uiteindelijk om smaak.
6 Dan kunnen zij de lokale acts doen die onderbelicht worden, en dat is vaak onterecht want over 2 jaar staan zij wel op het hoofdpodium.
7 ...hij moet kunnen schrijven en het liefst op een beetje puntige, relativerende manier. ... Er moet wel een soort van humor of relativeringsvermogen inzitten ... Je moet popjournalistiek ook weer niet te serieus nemen.
8 ... dat mensen er toch iets goeds over willen lezen, een goed verhaal van een journalist die ze hebben leren kennen in de loop der jaren en die ze zekerder deskundigheid toedicht.
9 Ik ben soms bij een concert en dan lees ik een recensie terug en dan merk je gewoon dat de journalist volledig de plank misslaat ... hij heeft niet gezien wat er nou gebeurd is op het podium.
10 ...dat hij out of the box moet denken...
11 Een goede journalist voelt aan wanneer hij die ene afslag in kan slaan, om dat te weten wat hij wil weten en wat de artiest eigenlijk niet wil vertellen.
12 ...ik vind uw haar zo fantastisch.
13 Jja dat heb ik te danken aan god, want god is mijn kapper.
14 Dan kun je er bijna een soort van computer programma op loslaten om die recensies te genereren.
15 Ze laten alles van de platenmaatschappij afhangen
16 ...dat vind ik volstrekt oninteressant ... die gaan bij mij direct de vuilnisbak in.
17 Dat is ook wel prettig: want als je nu een idee hebt van, die wil ik spreken, en je zegt, ik betaal het zelf. Dan ben je snel exclusief.
18 Ik vind dat een journalist niet uit zijn luie stoel moet recenseren, maar hij moet naar shows gaan.
19 Je hebt geen feeling van wat er speelt op dit momenten, je leest alleen de Amerikaanse en Engelse blogs, je gaat niet kijken in de clubs.
20 jonge blanke jochies die afrobeat spelen.
21 Andere journalisten, ik zal geen namen noemen, zaten echt zo van, huh, afrobeat, huh, Amsterdam. Terwijl bij die concerten zag ik dat het echt wat ging worden, dat het een festivalband zou gaan worden.
22 Ik denk dat je best een heel goed 3voor12 medewerker kan zijn zonder dat je heel goed weet wie The Beatles waren.
23 Ik vind het zelf altijd een meerwaarde...
24 Je moet tijdens het interview verbanden kunnen leggen en tijdens het interview kunnen anticiperen, dat kun je alleen als je weet waar je over praat en je cataloguskennis groot genoeg is.
25 De bouwstenen vind ik heel belangrijk, ik merk vaak aan muziekjournalisten dat ze niet kijken naar de 60 jaar popmuziek die we hiervoor hebben gehad. Mensen die zeggen, Led Zeppelin, dat interesseert me geen reet. Maar ik vind dat je paralellen moet trekken.

Instrumentale complexiteit is niet waar het om draait … Mensen die zeggen dat ze zo van Led Zeppelin houden omdat Jimmy Page een briljante gitarist is, dan kan je iemand uit een conservatorium trekken die het nog veel beter kan.

Popmuziek is bij uitstek geschikt om de tijdsgeest te verklanken. Misschien vindt de artiest het dan heel cool dat ik heb ontdekt dat dat loopje een C-minor is, maar mijn publiek heeft geen idee wat ik daar zeg. Als iemand bijvoorbeeld heel nadrukkelijk afwijkende maatsoorten gebruikt of er is een heel sterk contrast tussen hogen en lage tonen, hoe die dat dan doet, is dat natuurlijk van heel groot belang bij de duiding van die muziek.

… kun je gewoon termen laten vallen en namen laten vallen en kun je er vanuit gaan dat de lezer het wel kent.

… de in de jaren 60 zeer populair geworden Amerikaanse liedjeszanger Elvis Presley.’ Dan denkt iedereen ‘wat is dit voor een onzin.’ Maar bij andere mensen moet er wel zo’n inleidinjje … waar je die grens gaat trekken dat is lastig.

Je moet ook niet al te obscure gaan en ook niet al te makkelijk.

Elke artiest is uniek, elk nummer is uniek, hoe kan ik dan lijken op iets?

… het hoogst haalbare is op een manier te schrijven dat je in woorden iets kunt overbrengen van hoe het klinkt. En dat is natuurlijk eigenlijk iets onmogelijks, want je kunt die muziek niet echt beschrijven, dus heel veel mensen grijpen naar van die vergelijkingen als ‘een kruising tussen de White Stripes en dat en dat’.

Het kan een lelijk technisch verhaal worden als je The Black Keys gaat duiden als je niet verwijst naar Blues helden of stromingen, zonder rock n roll en zonder de productie van Danger Mouse te duiden. Voor mij is dat geen zwaktebod.

Een goede muziekjournalist moet vooral informeren en vooral niet gaan afkraken.

… wie heeft het recht om binnen een uur, 2/3 keer luisteren en dan even in een paar 100 woorden neer te sabelen…

Je moet heel veel van muziek afweten en je moet het zo kunnen schrijven dat het voor de mensen voor wie je het maakt … dat ze er een binding mee hebben en dat ze het begrijpen.

Nu kun je gaan roepen dat je het oneens bent en dat die journalisten er niets van weten, waarmee je in feite de autoriteit van de journalist ondervindt…

Omdat het zoveel is, er is behoefte aan mensen die dat aan elkaar weten te knopen en er iets zinnigs van weten te maken.

… een naam hebben opgebouwd en een beetje bekend zijn geworden bij de lezers, dat daar toch naar geluisterd wordt.

… was de OOR de Bijbel.

ik denk dat dat voor gedeelte weg is via het Internet.

Maar ook al is alles beschikbaar, je moet wel weten waar je naar moet luisteren. Dus er blijft altijd wel een soort van gatekeeper functie over.

Wat we eigenlijk nooit doen is debutanten en kleine bandjes afkraken, want als je dat niets vindt dan bespreek je het gewoon niet. Want als je dat wel gaat afzien in de krant, dan schrijf je eigenlijk een stukje waar de boodschap van uitgaat ‘mensen u kent dit niet en houden zo want het is ook niets.’ Daar informeer je niemand mee.
Die muziekindustrie is niet zo machtig meer.

Toen de biografie van Keith Richards verscheen, kregen we een interview aangeboden met Keith alleen moesten we wel plechtig beloven dat we op geen enkele manier over het boek zouden schrijven voor het interview. Gijsbert wist toevallig via een bevriende boekhandelaar heel vroeg een exemplaar in handen te krijgen en toen dachten we als hij het de komende twee dagen gewoon gaat lezen dan hebben we eerder dan wie ook een uitgebreide bespreking van dit boek. Dat hebben we gewoon gedaan, waren we ons interview kwijt voor straf. Nou ja dan maar. Die afweging hebben we van te voren gemaakt, wat vinden we belangrijker? Nou we vonden het belangrijkste om die boekbespreking vroeg te hebben. Pak er een OOR van 10-15 jaar geleden bij, daar werden platen afgeklaard. Stel dat Universal zegt, we willen graag een advertentie voor de nieuwe Pink en jij kraakt die Pink helemaal af. Dan heb je een probleem met Universal. Maar we bedrijven natuurlijk wel onafhankelijke, eerlijke en integere journalistiek en daar zullen ze toch ook respect voor moeten hebben. … als jij ons in de gelegenheid stelt om zo en zo lang met die artiest te praten dan wijden wij daar wel 4 of 5 pagina’s aan. Het gaat nooit over de inhoud. … dat journalisten meer de rechtstreekse verkoop konden aanjagen. Dat is nu veel minder het geval. …poortwachter van de smaak … was de OOR de Bijbel. … ik ben bijvoorbeeld nog nooit door een platenmaatschappij gebeld dat ze boos waren over een negatieve recensie van mij of zo, echt nog nooit. Wat dat betreft is de bemoeienis ook helemaal niet zo groot als gedacht. We zijn geen reclameblaadje … ‘Ok als jij ons in de gelegenheid stelt om zo en zo lang met die artiest te praten dan wijden wij daar wel 4 of 5 pagina’s aan.’ Het gebeurt echt nooit dat platenmaatschappen zeggen van ‘ok je mag een interview met die en die doen maar dan moet je wel een beetje positief die plaat recenseren.’ Ze zeggen van niet, maar ze beperken zich wel tot de platen die ze dan wel zelf goed vinden. Vroeger mochten wij gewoon exclusief naar Amerika voor wat dan ook. Tegenwoordig … komen wij niet meer aan bod. … ze hebben hun volledige perspromotie afdeling, een man of 6/7, ontslagen dit jaar. Niet meer nodig. … zo beetje aan het einde van de jaren 90, toen was die industrie nog heel groot en heel machtig. En die konden ook vrij veel flikken. En nu is dat zeker in Nederland een stuk kleiner en bescheidener geworden. Ik zou dat misschien wel kunnen, als ik daar m’n best voor deed, maar het ligt me niet, nee. … ik liever schrijf over dingen waar je echt emotioneel door geraakt bent. … als we het leuk vinden om te doen, er tijd voor hebben, er enthousiast over zijn. Het wordt niet gezien als een onderdeel van muziekjournalistiek… Er zijn heel veel blogs die heel korte stukjes schrijven en een heel erg signalerende functie hebben en dat is één aspect van muziekjournalistiek, maar de diepere duiding zie je toch vaak beter gebeuren in The Guardian of in The New York Times of De Volkskrant. Als ik een interview voorbereid ga ik toch allemaal internationale blogs af … staat een hoop flauwekul en allemaal dingen die je niet wilt lezen. … Hoe is het in godsnaam mogelijk dat ik elke keer weer van die interviews lees waarvan de eerste zes vragen van die interviews
gewoon geschrapt hadden moeten worden: Ja he, hoe gaat het met de tour? Ja goed, we komen net uit San Francisco. Oh SF is dat een goede plek voor jullie? Dat zijn de dingen die je vraagt aan de artiest en daarna ga je pas het interview doen. Je komt er een beetje in, ik hoorde dat je een nieuwe band hebt, helemaal niet interessant maar een beetje laten wennen en al die blogs schrijven dat gewoon allemaal op.

Minimaal de helft van ons nieuws komt via social media bij ons.

Wat dat betreft is Twitter een heel leuk medium, omdat het volkomen democratisch is. Als je iets begint te doen op Twitter dan bepalen de mensen hoe goed je het doet door jou al dan niet te volgen en als je na twee jaar nog steeds op 23 volgers hangt dan heb je blijkbaar geen gezag opgebouwd. Als je dat gezag wel uitstraalt dan wordt dat aantal steeds hoger.

Ik mis die behoefte en ik heb niet zoveel tijd, ik ben redelijk anti-Twitter eigenlijk.

…we kunnen het nu toch allemaal zelf downloaden en beluisteren…

Ze hebben geen geld, dus er wordt ook niet geïnvesteerd, maar omdat het een bedrijf is en niet gerund wordt door mensen die zelf aandeel houden zijn, nemen ze ook minder risico’s.

Een goede muziekjournalist moet vooral informeren en vooral niet gaan afkraken.

Mensen weten mij makkelijk te vinden en Atze ook. Komt ook omdat we op eigen titel op Twitter zitten.

Ik heb nu ruim 4000 video’s online staan. Dat is 1/3 van het archief, laten we zeggen dat als alles er op staat zitten we op een kleine 7.500-10.000 video’s. Elk jaar komen er 1000 video’s bij.

Dat vinden ze te cheap denk ik.

Ja, sommige journalisten, als je ze vaak leest, weet je ongeveer waar ze van houden, dan kun je er op varen.
Dus als er dan een vergadering is over de geplande nieuwbouw van Doornroosje in Nijmegen, dan kan 3voor12 landelijk daar niet bij zijn. Maar dankzij de vrijwilliger van de popzaal die ook voor 3voor12 schrijft, hebben we wel informatie uit eerste hand. Als er dan een nieuw bandje lijkt te ontstaan uit de afsplitsing van een regionale groothed, dan weet niemand dat eerder dan de jongen die in de oefenruimte bier tapt, en schrijft voor 3voor12 lokaal.

Ten eerste is het goed voor je netwerk, en je ontmoet aardige mensen met dezelfde interesses als jij. Het staat goed op je CV. Ten tweede mag je gratis naar concerten en zo kan ik een portfolio opbouwen.

De gratis concerten zijn uiteraard een voordeel, bovendien doe je behoorlijk wat ervaring op

Daarnaast halen wij anno nu 70% van onze stagiairs uit de lokale redacties. Niet alleen uit loyaliteit, maar omdat er feeling is met wat wij doen en een vergelijkbaar discours wordt gebezigd. Hier blijven weer mensen van hangen zoals Tomas Delsing (Dansen met Delsing) en Chris Walraven (die nu de landelijke live coördinator is)

Ik studeer dus niet, ik heb een redelijk saaie kantoorbaan :-) Dat is dan ook een van de redenen dat ik me inzet voor 3voor12 lokaal. Ik doe het vooral omdat ik veel energie krijg van het werken met mensen die dezelfde muzikale passie hebben. Daarnaast ook het kleine radartje kunnen zijn in het eventuele succes van een band/artiest. Als we er vanuit Gelderland aan kunnen bijdragen dat er een platform is voor acts als de Staat, Automatic Sam, Shaking Godspeed, Zo Moeilijk etc. dan word ik daar blij van. Ik hoef er zelf niets uit te halen, het is wel grappig dat je er een bepaalde soort van status door krijgt maar ik zal daar niet voor eigen eer en glorie gebruik van maken. Ik zet die dan liever in voor een zaal, festival of artiest. het scheelt daarbij dat ik al wat ouder ben en een goede (maar saaie) baan heb.

Vaak filtert men dit intern

Natuurlijk ontstaat er wel eens een vreemde schisma wanneer een lokale act de lucht in wordt geschreven en dOOR ons op een festival wordt neergesabeld. Of wanneer een act op verkeerde gronden wordt besproken (uitoerlijk, samenstelling van het publiek, het zaalgeluid whatever) maar dat hou je toch en is iets dat de lezer en professional vaak goed weet te duiden.

Verwarring, omdat lokaalsites zich soms zo voorstelden dat niet duidelijk was dat ze van een lokale redactie waren. Met boze telefoontjes richting Hilversum over die onprofessionele houding van 3voor12. Of de klachten over slechte stukken.

Juist die benadering zorgde voor een nog grotere eigenwaarde bij de vrijwilligers, waardoor zij nog harder werkten.

Dan is er nog de relatie tijdens grote evenementen. Bij evenementen is het de (ongeschreven?) regel dat er lokaalmensen meedraaien in de verslaggeving van het evenement.

Zo overnacht landelijk in een duur hotel aan het Noordzeestrand, terwijl de lokaalcollega's op de vrijwilligerscamping mogen plaatsnemen.

Daarnaast worden we afgescheep met verslaggeving van de randprogrammering en tweederangs' acts.

Wij rennen het hele eiland af om in ons tentje op het hoofdpodium en duiken 's nachts een comfortabel bed in

Zet maar iemand fulltime op de coördinatie van lokaal.

Niets! Simpelweg omdat ze dat nooit zien. Althans, bij Friesland heb ik dat nog niet ervaren.
En voor zover ik weet is er ook geen beleidsplan voor lokaalsites met concrete richtlijnen dus tja... het is in die zin toch best wel een beetje vrijblijvend ipv vrijwilliger...precies het tegenovergestelde van wat ik mijn vrijwilligers probeer mee te geven.

Ja, soms lees ik wel eens interviews en dan denk ik; Het is net een soort schoolkrant, weet je wel?

anders kun je geen kaders plaatsen

Uiteindelijk draait alles keihard om smaak. Wij krijgen soms ook het commentaar, dit is geen objectieve recensie. Nee, dat is waar, maar uiteindelijk gaat het gewoon om smaak. Alles draait uiteindelijk om smaak

...hij moet kunnen schrijven en het liefst op een beetje puntige, relativerende manier. ...

Er moet wel een soort van humor of relativeringsvermogen inzitten ... Je moet popjournalistiek ook weer niet te serieus nemen.

Personal communication

Personal communication
Appendix B. Interviews

Because of the great length of the interviews – our transcripts encompass some 500 pages of text – we have decided to exclude these texts from our thesis. Furthermore, this is also done to harbor the privacy of our interviewees. Those who are interested in seeing these interviews for a solid reason can contact us.
Appendix C. E-mails Frank Hoffman and Menno Pot

2011/11/18 Hoffmann, Frank <LIS_FWH@shsu.edu>

Hi Judith,

What a great field for research! I wish you were closer to Bloomington, Indiana (home of Indiana University), where I now reside, and we could take frequent coffee breaks to share popular music interests. Regarding your inquiry, Crawdaddy! and Rolling Stone are indeed considered the ground floor for serious, intelligent pop music journalism in the U.S. However, there were two branches of pop music specialty periodicals that served as antecedents prior to the mid-1960s:

(1) trade weeklies, most notably Billboard (1894-), Cash Box (1942-1996), Record World, and Variety (190?) (though the latter was spread over many other entertainment forms as well, such as circuses and television). While the writing tended to promote record company releases rather than provide objective criticism, these publications offered considerable factual information and a modicum of aesthetic insights from the artists themselves.

(2) teen fan magazines such as Hit Parader, Tiger Beat and Country & Western Roundup. The articles here tended to be geared to younger teenagers (e.g., identifying what kind of girls, cars, or desserts a teen idol such as Frankie Avalon or Peter Noone of Herman's Hermits preferred). One big plus: each issue reprinted the lyrics to the top hits of that time.

Hope this helps! Frank

From: Judith Katz [judith.i.m.katz@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, November 15, 2011 5:42 AM
To: Hoffmann, Frank
Subject: question from dutch student

Dear Dr. Hoffman,
I stumbled upon your expertise online and I was hoping you could help me out with the following question. Currently, I am working on my MA thesis about American and Dutch Music Journalism (past, present and future) and there is a question I cannot seem to find the answer to. I am now doing some research into the 'early' years of the specialist music press and it seems that every history of the American popular music press starts with Crawdaddy! and Rolling Stone. I am trying to find out what attention there was given to pop music BEFORE those magazines, so between roughly between 1925 and 1960 - in The Netherlands, there were magazines such as Tuney Tunes and Muziek Parade from 1942 onwards. Do you know if there is some literature on this subject?

Very much thanks in advance and I hope to hear from you.
Best, Judith Katz

Van: postmaster <postmaster@mennopot.com>
Datum: 20 februari 2012 10:38
Onderwerp: RE: vraagje
Aan: Judith Katz <judith.i.m.katz@gmail.com>

Ha Judith,

Daar ben ik dan. Wegens drukte moest ik je mail even 'parkeren'. Excuus daarvoor.

Het klopt dat de pure popjournalisten (zoals Gijsbert en ik dat zijn) niet vaak over de onderwerpen schrijven die je opsomt. Dat heeft vooral te maken met het feit dat we freelancers zijn, aan de krant verbonden als muziekspecialisten. Pop-onderwerpen die niet over de muziek zelf gaan, maar zich meer in de periferie afspelen en richting onderzoeksjournalistiek gaan, worden meestal opgepikt door algemene verslaggevers die vast in dienst van de krant zijn. Die kunnen beter worden vrijgemaakt voor klussen die heel arbeidsintensief zijn (veel bellen, met mensen praten, 'speuren').

Je noemt Buma/Stemra: dat is inderdaad een 'dossier' waar de krant niet veel aandacht aan besteed heeft. Waarom weet ik niet. Misschien keken we er een beetje overheen, misschien vond de krant het te 'specialistisch', te veel een niche. Feit is, in elk geval, dat 3voor12 dat onderwerp veel beter heeft uitgeplozen dan de Volkskrant. Waar onze verslaggevers (van input voorzien door Gijsbert en mij) weer wél goede stukken over schreven, was het onderwerp ticketing: de stijgende kaartprijzen voor concerten, het vage gedoe met administratiekosten, de 'secundaire' aanbieders en het monopolie van Ticketmaster, etc.

Het komt (soms) wel voor dat Gijsbert of ik ons zelf op zo'n onderwerp storten: als we het leuk vinden om te doen, er tijd voor hebben, er enthousiast over zijn. Ik geef toe: gebeurt niet vaak. Maar het komt voor. Ik heb wel eens een groot stuk geschreven over hitlijsten: welke zijn er, hoe worden ze samengesteld, waarom meten ze zoals ze meten, welke belangen spelen daarbij en welke partijen hebben er invloed op?

Wat technologie betreft: we hebben de digitale revolutie van de voorbije tien, vijftien jaar op zich wel aardig in de krant gevolgd. Van MP3 en Napster tot de iPod, iTunes en later de smartphones enzo; we hebben er wel verhalen gehad (net als over fenomenen als Spotify en Last.fm), soms van Gijsbert of mij, soms van internetspecialisten, soms van economieredacteuren (die hebben Apple altijd goed gevolgd). Laat ik zeggen: we besteden selectief aandacht aan technologie waar die van wetenschappelijk, cultureel of economisch belang is (en daarmee is ook meteen aangegeven welke redactie het vermoedelijk op zal pikken), maar de Volkskrant heeft geen speciale pagina's voor nieuwe apparaatjes, zoals we ook geen autokatern hebben. We bespreken niet structureel 'nieuwe apparaatjes omdat ze er zijn'.

Geef dit antwoord op je vragen?

Groet,
Beste Menno,

Een tijdje geleden hebben Liselotte en ik jou geinterviewd. Nu zijn we de interviews aan het analyseren en was er één vraag die we je nog wilde stellen, namelijk: hoe komt het dat popjournalisten bij de Volkskrant geen aandacht besteden aan muziek-randzaken? Denk daarbij aan Buma/Stemra (institutioneel nieuws) of verhalen over technologie?

Zou heel fijn zijn als je die nog wilde beantwoorden!

Vriendelijke groet,

Judith Katz
Appendix D. Interview Guide and Questions

De muziekjournalist

• Wat houdt muziekjournalistiek precies in?
• Wat is een muziekjournalist?
• Welke taken heeft een muziekjournalist?
• Wat is de rol van de muziekjournalist in de samenleving?
• Wat maakt een goede muziekjournalist? Moet deze bijvoorbeeld ook beschikken over de technische aspecten van het vak? Wat vind jij slechte muziekjournalisten?
• In de academische wereld is muziekjournalistiek zwaar onderbelicht, hoe komt dat?
• Objectiviteit en muziekjournalistiek: gaan deze twee samen?
• Heb je voor ogen wat je doelgroep wil lezen en welke artiesten?
• Wat is de precieze relatie tussen de muziekindustrie en de muziekjournalist?
• Soms krijgen muziekjournalisten de stempel van promotors; geclaimd wordt dat ze afhankelijk zijn van de muziekindustrie en hierdoor vooral positieve stukken schrijven over artiesten, om zo toegang te houden. Hoe zie jij dat?
• Beïnvloedt de muziekjournalist de consument in het kopen en bezoeken van muziek? Fungeren jullie als een soort consumenten gids?
• Wat is volgens jou het verschil tussen een muziekjournalist die voor een krant werkt en een krant die voor een magazine of online werkt?
• Hoe is volgens jou het beeld ontstaan van het vak als spannend en ‘glamerous’?
• Denk je dat er een relaties tussen muziek en politieke cultuur?
• Hoe bereid je je voor op een concert of op een interview?

Persoonlijk en Werk

• Hoe ben je in dit vak terecht gekomen? Ervoor gestudeerd of erin gerold?
• Wat is precies je functie en wat houdt deze in?
• Wat is het mooiste aspect van dit vak? En het minste?
• Hoe gaat het met de OOR / kunstpag in VK / etc
• Schrijven jullie vooral over grote artiesten omdat deze bij groot publiek geliefd zijn en zo geld in het laatje wordt gebracht?
• Hoe gaat volgens jou de selectie van over welke artiesten er geschreven wordt?
• Ben je soms bang de plank mis te slaan als het over een next big thing gaat?
• Waar baseer je de keus op welke artiest je interviewt of recenseert?

Nu en de Toekomst

• Is het vak veranderd door de komst van het Internet?
• Wat vind je van de blogosphere?
• Wat is het verschil tussen een blogger en een muziekjournalist?

• Heeft de muziekjournalist nog autoriteit?
• Iedereen kan albums downloaden en recensies lezen op blogs. Hebben we nog wel muziekjournalisten nodig? En zo ja, waarvoor?
• Vroeger fungeerden muziekjournalisten als stap tussen consument en muzikant. Dankzij Internet kunnen muzikanten het publiek direct bereiken. Waar staat de muziekjournalist nu?
• Is er nog toekomst voor het vak muziekjournalistiek (betaald)?
• Wat voor rol moet de muziekjournalist innemen om waardevol te blijven voor het publiek?
• Moet het vak rigoureus veranderen of bepaalde aanpassingen maken om een toekomst te kunnen garanderen? Moet het zich bijvoorbeeld meer op achtergrond richten of op aspecten waar de burger / blogger geen toegang tot heeft?
## Appendix E. Coding Schemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of criticism</th>
<th>Engages critically</th>
<th>Purely descriptive</th>
<th>Fandom/celebratory</th>
<th>Overtly negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge/context</td>
<td>Historical or social framework</td>
<td>References to other bands</td>
<td>References to musical genres</td>
<td>Biographical framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization/distance</td>
<td>Mentions the writer</td>
<td>Mentions relation with the artist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Local artist</td>
<td>National artist</td>
<td>International artist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional technique</td>
<td>Edited well</td>
<td>Edited poorly</td>
<td>Makes use of metaphors</td>
<td>Written creatively</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F. Discography

- Head Full Of Doubt/Road Full Of Promise – The Avett Brothers
- Casanova, Baby! – The Gaslight Anthem
- The Cover of the Rolling Stone – Dr. Hook & the Medicine Show
- Man at the Top – Bruce Springsteen
- Cousins – Vampire Weekend
- 21st Century Digital Boy – Bad Religion
- The Method – We Are Scientists
- The Road – Frank Turner
- Sledgehammer – Peter Gabriel
- To Be Counted Among Men – Villagers
- An End has a Start - Editors
Appendix G. Planning at FaceCulture

Example of a weekly planning

From: tom@faceculture.nl
To: jasper@faceculture.nl; bas@faceculture.nl; lisette@faceculture.nl; lucas@faceculture.nl
Subject: planning week 16/4
Date: Fri, 13 Apr 2012 17:56:29 +0200

Hoi allemaal,

Een nieuwe (voorlopige) planning voor volgende week:

Bas: Only Seven Left (vrijdag naar OOR)
Jasper: Guido Belcanto, Nits
Lisette: Minus The Tiger, Ruben Hein, The Scene
Lucas: Kris Berry (woensdag naar NU.nl/OOR), Gemma Ray, Shearwater

Groeten,
Tom

Z.s.m. doen: ED, LPG, Dawes, Anathema, The Scene