

# Journalism or marketing: how do Flemish public and commercial television channels Eén (VRT) and VTM (Medialaan) behave on Twitter?

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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between journalists and Twitter has been extensively researched. Both Twitter as a news source or news gathering tool and as a news distribution tool has inspired multiple studies. Next to the possibilities also the threats have gained attention. This study does not focus on *individual* journalists' use of Twitter but on the behavior of media *organizations* on Twitter. Next to the literature on *journalism* and Twitter therefore, also the handling of Twitter within the field of *marketing* adds to the relevant framework for this study.

*Media* organizations are traditionally considered to be not only profit seeking organizations but also cultural-societal institutions with a mission to inform, educate and/or entertain the audiences – consumers as well as citizens. This is especially true for public service media in distinction with commercial media companies. In Dutch-speaking Belgium (Flanders), the two main channels of public broadcaster VRT (Eén) and commercial broadcaster Medialaan (VTM) are the subject of numerous comparative studies. The 7 p.m. news bulletins of both channels are continuously monitored (Steunpunt Media) in order to discover differences and similarities. Most studies point out that the similarities are outnumbering the differences in their news bulletins. But what about twitter? What side of their identity (profit-seeking organization or information carrier) is dominant on the social media platform? And is there a noticeable difference between the public and commercial channel?

This study investigates the presence on the social network Twitter of public television channel Eén (VRT) and commercial television channel VTM (Medialaan). Both channels started operating on Twitter in the year 2010. Why do they twitter and how? How do they interact with their audience? What policy rules do they obey to?

A multi-method approach was adopted, combining content analysis with expert interviews and the analysis of channel's guidelines with regard to social media in general and Twitter in particular. By use of a quantitative content analysis we analyzed the tweet output of a one-month period (November 2012) of the accounts of both channels (N= 434). Tweets were collected with the program Snapbird, coded for 35 variables such as category of tweet (original tweet, retweet, reply), content of tweet (news facts, references to programs, events, calls to action,..), use of hashtags and links or multimedia materials, use of colored words,.. and analyzed with SPSS. In addition, we conducted five expert interviews with the heads of digital media and social media editors of VRT and Medialaan.

The findings show similarities but also differences between VTM and Eén. Both channels are in accord in using Twitter mainly for marketing reasons rather than news distribution. Only 9% of VTM's tweets contain news facts, in comparison to 20% of the public channel's tweets, with general news facts (eg. American elections) only present on public television channel Eén. VTM does not only limit its news output but also limits the definition of news to media related news. Both channels use Twitter predominantly in order to promote their own programming. 87% of tweets of VTM (97% of original tweets) and 97% of tweets of Eén (93% of original tweets) do mention a program name of the own channel. Hence, Twitter became the new program guide: teasing the audience, promoting the programs, and prolonging their lifetime. But the channels differ in approach: Eén predominantly retweets (73%) the messages of the separate program accounts of Eén (eg. Café Corsari, VOLTtv) with only 27% of original tweets while VTM prefers to send out 'own' original tweets (48%) and only to a much lower degree (16%) falls back on retweets. As a result, VTM presents itself more as a distinguished 'brand' than Eén. VTM takes the customer care seriously as well and tries to answer as many questions from the audience as possible. 34% of its tweets are 'replies', in comparison to only 0.4% 'replies' for VRT.

Our research is limited to the main twitter accounts of the main television channels Eén (public) and VTM (commercial) in Flanders. We cannot conclude anything about individual journalists working for these channels and their behavior on Twitter. As for the media organizations we can conclude that their tweets are the expression of a hybrid form of journalism and marketing in which marketing goals prevail: brand journalism. It also seems that commercial channel VTM is playing this game in a more successful way than public channel Eén.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Twitter, journalism, advertising, branding, marketing, television channels, public and commercial broadcasters, content analysis, expert interviews

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between journalists and Twitter has been extensively researched. Both Twitter as a news gathering tool and as a news dissemination tool has inspired multiple studies. Next to the possibilities also the challenges have gained attention. This study does not focus on *individual* journalists' use of Twitter but on the behavior of media *organizations* on Twitter. Next to the literature on *journalism* and Twitter therefore, also the handling of Twitter within the field of *marketing* adds to the relevant framework for this study.

Media organizations are traditionally considered to be not only profit seeking organizations but also cultural-societal institutions with a mission to inform, educate and/or entertain the audiences – consumers as well as citizens. This is especially true for public service media in distinction with commercial media companies. Comparative studies mainly concentrate on similarities and differences between public and commercial media on television, especially in news bulletins. We want to shift attention to similarities and differences in their behavior on twitter instead of on the screen. As television programs appear to be the most popular subject on Twitter in Flanders (Twitter statistics, 2014), the relevance of twitter behavior of television channel organizations is self-evident.

What side of the channels' identity (business or institution) is dominant on the social media platform? And is there a noticeable difference between the public and commercial channel? This study investigates the presence on social network Twitter of public television channel Eén (VRT) and commercial television channel VTM (Mediaaan). Why do they twitter and how? How do they interact with their audience? What policy rules do they obey to?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Twitter and Journalism

The relation between Twitter and journalism has been analyzed from different perspectives.

First, Twitter is a news gathering tool. While Ahmad (2010) called Twitter a *research tool*, Hermida (2010) defined the micro-blogging network as an *awareness system* to alert journalists to breaking news as well as trends and issues hovering under the news radar. Sourcing Twitter for stories adds to the traditional journalists' sources such as press releases and news agencies. Amateur videos and eyewitness accounts available on social media make 'the citizen' a more prominent news source than ever before. Next to the possibilities in this context such as constancy and speed (Hermida, 2009; Farhi, 2009) or facilitating collective wisdom (Howe, 2008; Surowiecki, 2004; Gillmor, 2004), analysts have pointed out some challenges such as the credibility of information (Castillo, Mendoza, & Poblete, 2011; Tremblay, 2010; Lysak, Cremedas, & Wolf, 2012), the threat of information overload

(Scheibehenne, Greifeneder, & Todd, 2010) or work overload (Bucher, Fieseler, & Suphan, 2013). Other authors have warned against too high expectations. Megan Knight (2012) found a disconnect between the extent to which journalists believe they are relying on social media and the extent to which this is obvious to the readers. In the coverage of the Iranian elections 2009, Knight (2012, p. 61) found that *'sourcing practices of journalists and the traditions of coverage ensure that traditional voices and sources are heard above the crowd'*.

Second, Twitter is a news dissemination tool *'for getting information out quickly'* (Armstrong & Fangfang, 2010, p. 210). The network facilitates the instant and constant dissemination of short fragments of information (Hermida, 2009). According to Waiske (2013, p. 7), the constant and sustained rate of communication - *'the ability to reach multitudes of dedicated readers in a short time and with pithy bursts of information'* – gives Twitter a clear edge over competing social media tools let alone traditional media. Not only original information (breaking news) can be found on Twitter but also 'echoes' of news stories from traditional media (Castillo, Mendoza, & Poblete, 2011) as well as 'advertisements' promoting these stories (see 2.2). Again some nuances are made. Peter Verweij (2010) looked into the Twitter news flows on the occasion of three plane crashes in 2009 and though he found evidence for the *awareness* function of Twitter, the leap to collective truth-finding was too big a step. The use of Twitter, therefore, does not result automatically and evidently in *ambient journalism* in the definition of Hermida (2009, p. 301): *'value is defined less by each individual fragment of information that may be insignificant on its own or of limited validity, but rather by the combined effect of communication'*. In reality, Twitter often remains limited to a collection of fragments of information.

Third, Twitter facilitates the interaction of journalists with their audiences (Lysak, Cremedas, & Wolf, 2012). According to Farhi (2009), Twitter can be used as a community organization tool for newsrooms. Often this possibility is hailed as the most important quality of Twitter for journalists, changing the one-way traditional news flow into a bidirectional communication enabling journalists to build bonds with readers, viewers or listeners. Transparency between journalists and their audiences has been suggested a treatment for the diagnosed problem that journalism has fallen out of touch with audiences (Lowrey & Woo, 2010). Coget, Yamanchi and Suman (2008) called the internet 'the ultimate connecting tool'. Again, Twitter might be the 'upper ultimate' due to speed and shortness (Waiske, 2013). But theoretical possibilities are not always realized in practice. One means to structure communication on Twitter is the use of hashtags. Page (2012) analyzed the frequency, types and grammatical context of hashtags posted by 'ordinary' Twitter senders as well as corporations and celebrities (among them journalists). She came to the conclusion that *'despite claims that hashtags are 'conversational', 'participatory culture' in Twitter is not evenly distributed'* (p. 199). In contrast, status

hierarchies in the offline world are reflected on Twitter. To a similar conclusion came Lee and Jang (2013) in their study of public figures communicating on Twitter with their followers: *'such interaction is most likely to be asymmetrical in nature'* (p. 47). Also Kwak, Lee, Park and Moon (2010) showed in their study that Twitter shows a low level of reciprocity.

## **2.2 Twitter and marketing**

The same angles reappear in the discussion of the relationship between marketing and Twitter: Twitter as a research source for companies, Twitter as a dissemination tool of information (advertisements) and Twitter as a tool for customer communication.

Corporate organizations do strategically monitor their markets and customers. They need to know who their customers are, how they respond to their products and how to adapt communication according to their needs. Twitter then adds a research tool to traditional marketing research instruments such as surveys or focus groups. Besides a research tool, Twitter acts as a new dissemination tool to reach out to their customers. According to Bhanot (2012), Twitter and social media in general are not only one new tool, but *'a genuine game changer for business'* (p. 47). Lis and Berz (2011) show that social media strategies behind publishing products increase purchase probability. First, social media help to market products in an unobtrusive way consumers do not even identify as advertising. Second, social media help build a brand personality and make the brand more approachable for customers (p. 203). Schultz & Sheffer (2012, p. 97) agree that brand awareness and association create loyal consumers. Brands need to be differentiated and communicated to audiences (Yan, 2011). Social media thus became tools for 'branding': to enable brand exposure, to build greater awareness of the brand, to influence the perceived quality of the brand and to create positive brand associations (satisfaction, trust, attachment, identification) in order to impact on purchase (Yan, 2011; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel & Chowdury, 2009).

One means to create exposure on Twitter is the use of hashtags. Hashtags can be used to make a term searchable and therefore enhances visibility. Corporations use their company names, slogans, and product names as hashtags, promoting their company name and field of expertise (Page, 2012). When a hashtag is used with significant frequency, it may be listed in the 'trending topics' sidebar of the Twitter site, which can be considered *'a signal of status and influence'* (Page, 2012, p. 185). Page (2012, p. 199) has called this form of branding a *'strategy of amplification'*. As the visual cue of the brand, however, is greatly lessened on platforms such as Twitter, it is therefore necessary for brands to build a connection with users and fostering a sense of belonging through the engagement itself (Yan, 2011, p. 690) or, in Engeseth's terms (2005), to feel 'one' with the brand. Twitter stimulates viral marketing campaigns and creates buzz (Lin & Peña, 2011). Customers and audiences take over part of

the communication initiated by the company. Jansen and colleagues (2009) described microblogging as *'a form of electronic word-of-mouth for sharing consumer opinions concerning brands'*. Light (2014) has called this use of (social) media and journalism skills to promote brands, 'brand journalism': *'Single, repetitive messages are replaced by multi-dimensional messages via multiple channels to multiple audiences'*. Notice the parallel with Hermida's definition of ambient journalism (2009).

Inherent to social media marketing is the interaction with and between customers. More explicitly than in concepts such as social branding or brand journalism, the customer is brought to the forefront in concepts such as customer communication or customer care (Barnes, 2008). Customer care is about being of service to your audience and solving their problems. Customer care exists offline but increasingly online. Twitter, for example, enables companies to communicate with consumers efficiently and deepen relationships with them (Lin & Peña, 2011). The concept of 'relationship marketing' (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 1991) concerns the integration of customer service, quality-management and marketing activity (p. 264). Mini-connections with consumers created through social networking can yield positive effects on brand evaluations and purchase intentions (Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012). Not only one-to-one relationships with customers are beneficial to companies but also supportive are 'brand communities', groups of customers and admirers of a brand (Zaglia, 2013). Brand communities established on social media are found to enhance feelings of community among members and have positive effects on engagement, brand use and brand loyalty (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). Making use of customer feedback also increases customer involvement and builds customer loyalty (Lis & Berz, 2011, p. 204). Handbooks and guidelines (eg. Sysomos, 2012) point out that it is worth to identify the best customers and most important players in your social media circle and actively engage with them and reward them (with special content, deals, offers,...) as they do a great job in promoting your brand.

### **2.3 Twitter, journalism, marketing and media organizations**

Media organizations are, in the words of Lowry and Woo (2010), part business and part institution: they are *'not only businesses, responding to economic forces; they are also deeply rooted social and cultural institutions'* (p. 42). Tensions between the journalistic and business side of news production resulted in market-driven journalism, increasingly merging journalistic news making with marketing (Siegert, Gerth & Rademacher, 2011). Today's 'overcrowded' media marketplace (McDowell, 2011, p.38) doesn't help to strengthen the institution to the prejudice of the business. News organizations have to respond to increasing competition, say also Kim, Baek and Martin (2010): *'In an environment where different organizations often offer news that is similar, differentiating media brands is necessary for survival'* (p. 117). Branding thus is considered vital. Media organizations often

build brands on their well-known anchors. The 'brand personality' (a set of human characteristics associated with a brand - Kim, Baek, & Martin, 2010) is closely bound with the human characteristics of those who deliver the news, such as anchors, reporters and talk show hosts (p. 120). Schultz and Sheffer (2012) mention the 'celebrity culture' in which journalists and news anchors increasingly participate as celebrities. In their study they found that though many reporters are not actively trying to brand themselves, *'the conditions are ripe for personal branding to take place'* (Schultz & Sheffer, 2012, p. 93).

Branding of media organizations serves the same purpose as branding of organizations in general: making an impact on consumption. Media networks make use of social media to promote on-air programs and transmit program-related information to viewers or listeners to steer traffic to their programs and websites in order to increase audience share (Lin & Peña, 2011). *'Big media brands are learning that most readers are not coming through the "front door" anymore'*, states Cramer (2013, p. 20). Twitter provides viewers with *'an additional access point to the TV-show'* (Yan, 2011, p. 690). A Nielsen study (2013) showed that this additional access point works: "Using time series analysis, we saw a statistically significant causal influence indicating that a spike in TV ratings can increase the volume of tweets, and, conversely, a spike in tweets can increase tune-in." In line with this intention to steer traffic to their programs, Lin and Peña (2011) found in their study that 'giving "suggestions"' (type "Watch the show tonight") is the most frequent television networks' message content on Twitter. In addition, they found that television networks post more positive socioemotional tweets than negative socioemotional tweets as senders are interested in optimizing their self-representation on Twitter and positive emotional messages help brands generate positive attitudes among consumers and lead to more favorable branding outcomes (Lin & Peña, 2011). News, like all media content, is an experience good (Kim, Baek, & Martin, 2010, p. 118) and the experience strived for is 'good'. Media organizations also strive to a good relationship with their audience. Bruns (2012, p. 100) however believes that general organizational accounts are often unable or unwilling to respond effectively to comments and questions received as private or public replies from their followers on Twitter, acting instead as one-directional disseminators of news updates. But people do interact among themselves on the occasion of television programming, inducing the phenomenon of 'social television' (Nielsen, 2012, 2013) with people watching television and commenting simultaneously on twitter as a 'second screen'.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Television channels**

The two main players on the television (and radio) market in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, are public service broadcaster VRT (Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie) and commercial broadcaster Medialaan (before 2014: VMMA). Their two main television channels (Eén – VRT and VTM – Medialaan), and especially their 7 p.m. news bulletins, are the focus of numerous comparative studies.

The Decree on Radio and Television in Flanders (originally from 27 March 2009, but with numerous amendments up to 2004) (Vlaamse overheid, 2014) recognizes nationwide (that means: for the Flemish Community) and regional television broadcasting organizations. Both Eén and VTM are nationwide television channels. They both provide a wide range of programs from information to entertainment. Though the priority of the public service broadcaster is providing information and cultural programs, entertainment is recognized as an important task as well. At the same time, the commercial broadcaster does not solely focus on entertainment but offers daily news bulletins and actuality programs as well. The mission of public service broadcaster VRT is to reach a maximum number of media users (Art. 6 §2). Needless to say that commercial broadcaster Medialaan doesn't need a decree assignment to strive for the same goal. Public service broadcaster VRT implements a mixed financial system. Next to government financing, the VRT generates part of its resources from radio advertising, television sponsoring, exploitations of programs and derived products (e.g. merchandising). The management contract with the Flemish government imposes a limit on income from advertising and sponsoring.

Channel profiling is the rule both at VRT and Medialaan. Each channel has its own target audience and program emphasis. Eén (= channel 'One') is VRT's largest television channel that offers programs aimed at the entire population. In its own words, Eén "brings the Flemish people together" with a series of daily programs but also with big cultural and sports events. Eén "wants to be the daily mirror of Flanders" ([www.vrt.be/en/een](http://www.vrt.be/en/een)). The commercial counterpart of Eén is VTM. VTM presents itself as a "family channel" that maintains a strong relationship with the audience. VTM offers a range of entertainment and fiction but also information programs (<http://medialaan.be/merken>). Next to the 'general' channel Eén, public broadcaster VRT runs Canvas (aiming at people "in search of information, analysis and self-awareness", [www.vrt.be/en/canvas](http://www.vrt.be/en/canvas)), Ketnet (aiming at -12 years old) and Sporza (sport programs). Medialaan operates next to VTM a second channel 2BE (aiming at young couples with a mix of humor and fiction, series and films, as well as Champion League football), a children's channel KZOOM, a youth channel JIM and a special interest channel Vitaya. Inspired by the choice for the 'most similar systems design' we included in our study both first television channels of Medialaan (VTM) and VRT (Eén). These channels are the most watched channels in Flanders (market share for 2012, the year of the study: Eén – 31.6%, VTM – 18.6%, source: [cim.be](http://cim.be)).



Both Eén and VTM started to operate on Twitter in 2010. Both channels run multiple twitter accounts with next to the main organization account also several program-accounts. At the moment of the study in November 2012, the main account Eén (@een) had 18.282 followers on Twitter and posted in total 2.852 tweets since its launch on Twitter on February 3, 2010. VTM (@VTM) had 26.590 followers and posted since the beginning on July 14, 2010 in total 5.826 tweets. How do these channels make use of Twitter: to inform the public about newsworthy events (news dissemination tool) or to inform them about their own brand and products (marketing tool)? Do they, in the words of Lowry and Woo (2012), behave more as 'institutions' or as 'businesses'?

### 3.2 Method

A multi-method approach was adopted to find an answer to these questions, combining content analysis with expert interviews and the analysis of channels' guidelines with regard to social media in general and Twitter in particular. The bulk of the research consists of a quantitative content analysis of the tweet output of the general organizational accounts of the two television channels Eén and VTM during a one-month period (November 2012) (N= 434). To get an idea of the number of tweets posted by the channels per month, the program Tweetstats ([www.tweetstats.com](http://www.tweetstats.com)) was used. Tweets were collected with the program Snapbird ([www.snapbird.org](http://www.snapbird.org)). Only the general organizational accounts of the two channels were studied. Eén posted 248 tweets between November, 1 and November, 30 or on average 8 tweets a day. VTM posted 186 tweets, or on average 6 tweets a day. The one-month period in November can be considered a typical sub-universe, not disturbed by any special events.

The unit of analysis was each individual tweet posted by the network's main twitter account. We analyzed each tweet on the basis of its descriptive information (i.e. date, time, channel) as well as variables such as type of tweet (original tweet, retweet, modified retweet, reply), content of tweet (news facts, promotion of programs, events, contests, calls to action), actors referred to in the tweet (anchors, celebrities, program guests,...), the presence or absence of hashtags, links and multimedia materials, the use of colored words, emoticons, capitals and punctuation, the number of retweets and favorites. The codebook contained 36 variables and was loosely inspired by the coding instrument of Castillo, Mendoza and Poblete (2011) and Verweij (2010). The results were analyzed using SPSS version 21.

By definition, content analysis quantifies and analyzes the presence or absence of elements, based on a predetermined set of categories (Krippendorff, 2004). In addition, we conducted five open interviews with the heads of the digital media departments and the social media editors - "*the newsroom liaisons to the digital world*" (Waiske, 2013) – of VRT and Mediaaan. VRT was represented by Jeroen Lagrou, conversation starter at Eén (August-December 2012, July-October 2013), Jan

Sulmont, advisor Digital Media since 2009, and Stijn Lehaen, head Digital Media. For Medialaan spoke Annick Sterckx, head Online Communication and Kirsten Sokol, social media editor at the Press Office. The interviews were transcribed and coded via the phases of open, axial and selective coding. In addition, the channel's written guidelines with regard to social media in general and Twitter in particular were coded and analyzed.

In this paper, the section 'results' is largely confined to the content analysis' results. The findings of the interviews and policy analysis are discussed in confrontation with these results in the 'discussion' section.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Type of tweets

For every tweet we encoded de categories 'original tweet', 'retweet', 'modified retweet' and 'reply'. Retweets occur when a tweet of someone else is forwarded by the main accounts to their follower list. Modified retweets are retweets with an additional comment added. A reply is an answer to a message, not necessarily a question, of someone else, directed to the television channel or to a third party.

**Table 1: type of tweets posted by public channel Eén and commercial channel VTM (N= 434)**

	EÉN	VTM	TOTAL
<b>ORIGINAL TWEET</b>	26.6%	48.4%	35.9%
<b>(MODIFIED) RETWEET</b>	73%	17.2%	49.1%%
<b>REPLY</b>	0.4%	34.4%	15.0%

( $\chi^2= 163.463$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0$ )

Of the 434 tweets, 156 (35.9%) were original posts, 209 (48.2%) were retweets, 4 (0.9%) were modified retweets and 65 (15%) were replies. The relatively small amount of original tweets is surprising. There are however huge differences between the two channels. While almost half of all tweets (48.4%) posted by commercial channel VTM is 'original', only one to four tweets (26.6%) posted by public channel Eén is an original tweet (see Table 1). In general, retweets outweigh original tweets. This is especially true for Eén where 73% of all tweets fall under this category in contrast to only 17.2% of VTM's tweets. Modified retweets are only a marginal subcategory of retweets as they only appear twice, both on the twitter account of Eén and VTM. Replies are seldom seen on the twitter account of Eén (0.4%) whereas one to three tweets (34.4%) on the twitter account of VTM is a reply. There is a significant relationship between the (type of) channel and the type of tweets. Commercial broadcaster

VTM clearly prefers original tweets, and replies above retweets while public broadcaster Eén prefers retweets above original tweets let alone replies.

#### 4.2 Content of tweets

Tweets were coded for the presence or absence of stating own programs (on the own channel), programs on other channels, news facts (hard and soft news), self-contained amusement (not related to the channels' programs), events and contests organized by the channel or with participation of the channel, and calls to action.

Among all tweets (N= 434), references to the channels' own programs was by far the most frequent category (see Table 2). In 92.4% of all tweets a television program of the own channel was referred to. Public channel Eén refers to one of its programs in almost 97% of all tweets, while commercial channel VTM keeps stabbing at less than 87%. The difference is significant. However, when we consider only the original tweets of both channels (N= 156), the difference between the channels disappears and VTM takes the lead with 97% of its own tweets referring to a program of its own against 93.3% at Eén ( $X^2= 1.035$ ,  $df= 1$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). References to programs on other channels in contrast are hardly seen (0.7%) on any channel. Only VTM refers three times to a program on 2BE, which is the second channel of Mediaaan.

**Table 2: content of tweets posted by public channel Eén and commercial channel VTM (N= 434)**

	EÉN	VTM	TOTAL	CHI-SQUARE
<b>OWN PROGRAMS</b>	96.8%	86.6%	92.4%	$X^2= 15.786$ , $df=1$ , $p=0$
<b>NEWS FACTS</b>	19.8%	9.1%	15.2%	$X^2= 9.293$ , $df=1$ , $p<0.01$
<b>OTHER PROGRAMS</b>	0.0%	1.6%	0.7%	-
<b>AMUSEMENT</b>	23.8%	0.0%	13.6%	$X^2= 51.212$ , $df=1$ , $p=0$
<b>EVENTS</b>	12.9%	0.5%	7.6%	$X^2= 23.133$ , $df=1$ , $p=0$
<b>CONTESTS</b>	21.8%	22.6%	22.1%	$X^2= 0.04$ , $df=1$ , $p>0.05$
<b>CALLS TO ACTION</b>	20.6%	23.1%	21.7%	$X^2= 0.409$ , $df=1$ , $p>0.05$

The second most important categories are contests and calls to action. One in five tweets either or both contained a call to action (Eén 20.6%, VTM 23.1%) and/or a reference to a contest (Eén 21.8%, VTM 22.6%), mostly organized by the channel itself (e.g. Belgiums Got Talent, Sterren op de Dansvloer). VTM and Eén are each other's equals in these areas.

News facts were found to be present in only 15.2% of tweets. Public channel Eén pays significantly more attention to news dissemination (19.8%) than commercial channel VTM (9.1%) ( $X^2= 9.293$ ,  $df= 1$ ,  $p< 0.0$ ). This difference holds true when only the original tweets (N= 156) are considered.

News facts are the subject of 27.3% of Eén’s original tweets and 11.1% of VTM’s original tweets ( $X^2= 6.753$ ,  $df= 1$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Strikingly, the channels does not only limit their news output but also their definition of “news”. News is largely equated with television related news. VTM focuses solely on television related news (e.g. announcement of a new program on television, news about a production company) while the public channel Eén brings both television related news and general news facts (e.g. American elections).

The dissemination of self-contained amusement such as funny videos and pictures not connected to its programs is absent on the twitter account of VTM but surprisingly important on the account of Eén (23.8%) though not as the subject of an original tweet (1.5%). News about events (e.g. Boekenbeurs, Mia’s, but also self-organized events) is equally more important to Eén (12.9%) than to VTM (0.5%). Both categories (amusement and events) could be considered ‘news’ in a broad sense, adding to the difference between Eén and VTM in their use of Twitter as a news dissemination tool.

**Table 3: the presence of actors in the tweets of public channel Eén and commercial channel VTM (N= 175)**

	EÉN	VTM	TOTAL
<b>GUESTS IN PROGRAMS</b>	19.3%	5.4%	14.9%
<b>ACTORS/ACTRICES</b>	7.6%	17.9%	10.9%
<b>FAMOUS PEOPLE</b>	25.2%	17.9%	22.9%
<b>PRESENTERS, ANCHORS</b>	16.8%	23.2%	18.9%
<b>PARTICIPANTS PROGRAMS</b>	10.9%	12.5%	11.4%
<b>COMBINATIONS</b>	20.2%	23.2%	21.1%

( $X^2= 10.699$ ,  $df= 5$ ,  $p= 0,058$ )

Tweets were also coded for the presence or absence of ‘actors’. In four to ten tweets (40.3%) a person (actor) is referred to. Public channel Eén mentions an actor in almost half of the tweets (48%) while commercial channel VTM refers to persons in 30.1% of tweets. The difference between the channels is significant ( $X^2= 23.621$ ,  $df= 6$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ). As is evident in Table 3, there are however only few differences between the twitter accounts in which type of persons they prefer. Both channel accounts have a preference for mentioning several types of actors in one tweet (21.1% of all tweets, N= 175). When only one type of actor is referred to, the preference goes to ‘famous people’ (25.2% on Eén, 17.9% on VTM) on the one hand and the own television presenters and anchors (16.8% on Eén, 23.2% on VTM) on the other hand. Both channels also resemble each other with regard to the reference of participants in their own programs (11.4% on average). More significant differences are present with regard to guests and actors/actresses. While ‘guests’ are referred to in 19.3% of the tweets with an

actor on the twitter account of Eén, these are only a minor actor mentioned in VTM's tweets (5.4%). The opposite goes for actors and actresses, who count for 17.9% of VTM's references to persons but only 7.6% of Eén's references.

#### 4.3 Constituents of tweets

The tweets were coded for the presence or absence of hashtags, links to the own website or other websites, (links to) videos and pictures, references to other Twitter accounts. Hashtags are frequently used on both twitter accounts but significantly more on the account of commercial channel VTM (78.5%) than on the account of public channel Eén (66.1%) ( $\chi^2= 7.963$ ,  $df= 1$ ,  $p= 0.005$ ). The correlation between the type of channel and the use of hashtags however, is rather a weak one ( $V= 0.135$ ). The majority of hashtags on both accounts refer to the own channel and their programs. Frequently used hashtags on both Twitter account are the names of programs (e.g. #7dag, #koppentv – Eén, #Eeuwigerom, #cafecorsari - VTM). A combination of hashtags (e.g. program name and one or more key words) is widely used. On top, VTM tends to conclude its tweets with the hashtag #VTM, something that is not done by counterpart Eén.

**Table 4: use of hashtags, links to websites, videos and photos, and twitter accounts in tweets posted by public channel Eén and commercial channel VTM (N= 434)**

	EÉN	VTM	TOTAL	CHI-SQUARE
<b>HASHTAGS</b>	66.1%	78.5%	71.4%	$P<0.01$
<b>OWN WEBSITE</b>	13.3%	10.8%	12.2%	$p>0.05$
<b>OTHER WEBSITES</b>	13.3%	7.5%	10.8%	$p>0.05$
<b>VIDEOS</b>	4.8%	7.5%	6%	$p>0.05$
<b>PICTURES</b>	18.5%	3.8%	12.2%	$P=0$
<b>COMBINATIONS</b>	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%	$p>0.05$
<b>TWITTER ACCOUNTS</b>	52%	52.7%	52.3%	$p>0.05$

Twitter accounts are also frequently included in tweets of both channels, with no difference between commercial VTM and public Eén (52.3% on average). Hence, the practice on Twitter is to refer to presenters, anchors, famous and even ordinary people on Twitter with their twitter accounts rather than their full names. Maybe surprisingly little is linked to the own website (12.2% of all tweets), only a little more than there is linked to other websites (10.8% of all tweets) with no difference between Eén and VTM. The inclusion of photos (12.2% of all tweets) is more widespread than the inclusion of videos (6% of all tweets) with no difference between Eén and VTM with regard to videos ( $\chi^2= 1.364$ ,

df= 1, p= 0.243) but with a significant difference with regard to photos (18.5% of tweets on Eén against only 3.8% of tweets on VTM,  $X^2= 21.672$ , df= 1, p= 0).

#### 4.4 'Tone of voice' of tweets

We counted the number of 'positive' (e.g. 'wonderful', 'Hurray!') and 'negative' (e.g. 'merciless', 'hate') words in the tweets as well as the presence and absence of positive (e.g. '😊') and negative (e.g. '😞') emoticons, the use of punctuation (?, !), capitals (e.g. 'WOEHOE'), quotation marks and metaphors, and the mention of criticism.

**Table 5: number of 'positive' words in tweets posted by public channel Eén and commercial channel VTM (N= 434)**

	MEAN	SD	MAX	N
EÉN	0.68	0.969	5	248
VTM	0.57	0.887	4	186

**Table 6: number of 'positive' words in original tweets posted by public channel Eén and commercial channel VTM (N= 156)**

	MEAN	SD	MAX	N
EÉN	0.41	0.803	4	66
VTM	0.77	0.949	3	90

Public television channel Eén (M= 0.68) and commercial television channel VTM (M= 0.57) do not differ from one another in the use of positive words ( $t= -1.230$ , df= 432, p= 0.219) (see Table 5). When we look to original tweets only (see Table 6), however, a difference is noticed in that the commercial VTM (M= 0.77) uses positive words more frequently in its tweets than does public channel Eén (M= 0.41) ( $t= 2.542$ , df= 150.756, p= 0.012). Both channels however use predominantly a neutral language without too many positively colored words let alone negative words (see Table 7).

**Table 7: number of 'negative words in tweets posted by public channel Eén and commercial channel VTM (N= 434)**

	MEAN	SD	MAX	N
EÉN	0.05	0.257	2	248
VTM	0.03	0.162	1	186

There is no significant difference between Eén (M= 0.05) and VTM (M= 0.03) concerning the use of negative words ( $t = -1.265$ ,  $df = 420$ ,  $p = 0.207$ ). Both Eén and VTM do not make use of negative words in their tweets. This does not differ when we look to only the original tweets of both channels (see Table 8).

**Table 8: number of ‘negative words in original tweets posted by public channel Eén and commercial channel VTM (N= 156)**

	MEAN	SD	MAX	N
EÉN	0.03	0.173	1	66
VTM	0.01	0.105	1	90

The preference for positive language and aversion for negative language is confirmed by other data on language use in tweets (see Table 9). Negative emoticons are not used at all in tweets, not by public channel Eén nor by commercial channel VTM. Traces of criticism were not or hardly retrieved. Positive emoticons, however, are not used a lot either. VTM (4.3%) uses them not significantly more than Eén (2%) ( $\chi^2 = 1.910$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.167$ ). Figurative language is not the standard language used in tweets. Public channel Eén (6.9%) and commercial channel VTM (5.4%) do not differ in their use of metaphors and comparisons ( $\chi^2 = 0.398$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.528$ ) or quotation marks (5.6% for Eén, 2.2% for VTM,  $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 9: use of positive and negative emoticons, punctuation, capitals, metaphors, criticism in tweets of public channel Eén and commercial channel VTM (N= 434)**

	EÉN	VTM	TOTAL	CHI-SQUARE
POSITIVE EMOTICONS	2%	4.3%	3.0%	$p > 0.05$
NEGATIVE EMOTICONS	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	-
“?”	12.1%	22.6%	16.6%	$p < 0.01$
“!”	28.6%	18.3%	24.2%	$p < 0.05$
CAPITALS	0.4%	2.2%	1.2%	-
METAPHOR	6.9%	5.4%	6.2%	$p > 0.05$
“ “	5.6%	2.2%	4.1%	$p > 0.05$
CRITICISM	0.4%	0.0%	0.2%	-

Punctuation is more widely used with exclamation marks (24.2% on average) more common than question marks (16.6% on average). Both question marks and exclamation marks are used in calls to action (e.g. ‘Take part!’, ‘You want to take part?’); exclamation marks are also used to express enthusiasm (e.g. ‘Yes!’). The difference between type of channel and use of the exclamation mark or question mark is statistically significant. Public channel Eén uses the exclamation mark (28.6%) more often than commercial channel VTM (18.3%) ( $X^2= 6.207$ ,  $df= 1$ ,  $p= 0.013$ ) while VTM uses the question mark (22.6%) more often than Eén (12.1%) ( $X^2= 8.442$ ,  $df= 1$ ,  $p= 0.004$ ).

#### 4.5 Popularity of tweets

We counted the number of times a tweet was retweeted and the number of times a tweet has been designated as a favorite. Tweets of public channel Eén were retweeted on average 3.77 times in comparison to tweets of commercial television channel VTM which were retweeted on average 1.77 times (see Table 10). An independent samples t-test ( $t= -2.374$ ,  $df= 432$ ,  $p= 0.018$ ) revealed that the mean difference is statistically significant. The highest number of retweets for a tweet of Eén was 118 times against 49 times for VTM.

When we focus on original tweets only, the picture looks a bit different. Now, VTM appears as more popular than Eén with 2.26 retweets on average against only 1 retweet for Eén (see Table 11). The high figure of maximum retweets for Eén falls back to seven against 49 for VTM. An independent samples t-test ( $t= 1.840$ ,  $df= 154$ ,  $p= 0.068$ ), however, revealed that the mean difference is not statistically significant.

**Table 10: mean and maximum number of retweets per channel (N= 434)**

	MEAN	SD	MAX	N
EÉN	3.77	8.325	118	248
VTM	1.77	4.468	49	186

**Table 11: mean and maximum number of retweets per channel for original tweets (N= 156)**

	MEAN	SD	MAX	N
EÉN	1.00	1.499	7	66
VTM	2.26	5.389	49	90

Tweets of public television channel Eén are not significantly more designated as favorite ( $M= 1.46$ ) (see Table 12) than tweets of commercial television channel VTM ( $M= 0.45$ ) ( $t= -1.116$ ,  $df= 432$ ,  $p= 0.265$ ). There is a remarkable difference in the number of designations though. A tweet of Eén was designated as favorite up to 193 times against only 10 times for VTM. The mean difference between



Eén and VTM (see Table 13) is even less when we focus on original tweets only ( $t= 1.294$ ,  $df= 152.182$ ,  $p= 0.198$ ). However, the high number of tweets designated as favorite at Eén falls back to only two of its original tweets against five times for an original tweet of VTM.

**Table 12: mean and maximum number of favorites per channel (N= 434)**

	MEAN	SD	MAX	N
EÉN	1.46	12.297	193	248
VTM	0.45	1.153	10	186

**Table 13: mean and maximum number of favorites per channel for original tweets (N= 156)**

	MEAN	SD	MAX	N
EÉN	0.30	0.581	2	66
VTM	0.46	0.889	5	90

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Why do the television channels tweet?

Both channels in the study present themselves on Twitter more as “businesses” than as “institutions” (Lowry and Woo, 2010). Branding and marketing goals outweigh news dissemination: in 92.4% of all tweets a television program of the own channel was referred to while news facts were found to be present in only 15.2% of all tweets. Public service broadcasting lives up to its reputation as paying more attention to news than its commercial counterpart. One to five tweets of Eén contained a news fact against not one to ten of VTM. In addition, the commercial channel limits its news definition to television related news only while Eén also pays attention to general news facts (e.g. election news) as well as broad amusement and events.

The focus on the ‘business’ side of the organization to the prejudice of the ‘institution’ is not hidden but openly admitted in all interviews. “Predominantly promotional messages” is the answer of VRT on the question of what kind of tweets are posted on @een. VTM states clearly: “We are a commercial company, our business model is largely based on videoviews. So marketing is the first goal”. It is telling also that social media are managed by the department of Online Communication which is part of the Marketing department and not of the news floor. The Twitter account of VTM is managed by the Press office of VTM.

Both channels use Twitter predominantly to promote their own programs but they differ in strategy. Public channel Eén relies heavily on the Twitter accounts of individual programs (e.g. @dezevendedag, @CafeCorsari) and Twitter accounts of television presenters (e.g. @EvaDaeleman,

@Kevin\_Major) whose tweets are retweeted by the main account @een. This strategy was confirmed to be a conscious one by the interviewees of Eén. VTM in contrast chooses a more centralized strategy in which the main account @VTM posts original tweets referring to divergent VTM programs indicated by hashtags and accompanied by the hour of broadcasting (e.g. “Vanavond deel 1 vd langverwachte ontknoping van #code37! Komt Hannah ondanks de waarschuwingen van Truelens achter de waarheid? 21.45 #VTM”).

The use of hashtags is widespread among both channels as 71.4% of all tweets contain a hashtag. But commercial channel VTM makes use of it significantly more often than public channel Eén. The twitter strategy described above provides the explanation. Hashtags used are predominantly a program name (e.g. #aspe, #telefacts – VTM, #thuisopeen, #quizmequick - Eén). Hashtags promote the visibility of the programs and by implication the visibility of the transmitter (Page, 2012, p. 181). Both Eén and VTM reach with their program hashtags easily the list of *trending topics* in Belgium which can be considered a signal of status and influence (Page, 2012, p. 185). As Page (2012, p. 199) states: *‘This form of branding [use of hashtags] is clearly in line with the discourse of marketing, which use strategies of amplification to promote commodities.’* VTM also uses the hashtag #VTM next to the hashtags for program names to promote its brand. Another tool for branding is the use of presenters and anchors (Kim, Baek & Martin, 2010) which is rather widespread in tweets of both Eén (16.8%) and VTM (23.2%). Both channels play their personalities into their tweets.

In linking to the own website, public channel Eén and commercial channel VTM are each other’s equals: 12.2% of all tweets contain a link to the own website. This figure seems modest in light of the literature on Twitter behavior of media organizations. The interviewees, however, are convinced that Twitter indeed generates traffic to the website. Both VTM and Eén see higher numbers of visitors of the site through Twitter. VTM estimates a 15% flow from social media to its websites. But in general, the priority is to lead the audience to the television programming. Twitter then serves as *“an additional access point to the tv-show”* by analogy with the concept of Yan (2011). Or, in other words, Twitter became the new program guide: teasing the audience, promoting the programs, and extending their lifespan. Kirsten Sokol (VTM) literally uses the word ‘program guide tweet’ (meaning “Look, this program is on television tonight!”).

## **5.2 How do the television channels tweet?**

In line with the aim of using Twitter for branding, the tone of voice of tweets is optimistic. Media products are experience goods (Lis & Berz, 2011) and the experience pursued is evidently a positive one. “Je beleeft het hier” (*You experience it here*) is the slogan of commercial channel VTM. And “we want to extend the experience [of the screen] to Twitter” says Sterckx (VTM). Sterckx adds: “We do our best to make every post as entertaining as possible”. The results of the analysis are in line

with earlier studies on television (e.g. Lin & Peña, 2011). The channels keep away from negativism and criticism (e.g. absence of negative emoticons, absence of criticism, absence of negative words). Outspoken positive words are not used very often either, but the commercial channel VTM makes use of them more often than public channel Eén in the own, original tweets. Exclamation marks to express enthusiasm are used more often by Eén, while VTM prefers question marks to address the audience. In general, the language used is quite straightforward. Metaphors and figurative language are avoided because it might cause confusion or misunderstanding. Videos and pictures are used to increase the attractiveness of tweets. All interviewees agree that the 'social media voice' has to equal the 'television voice'.

Written policy documents (guidelines) do exist both within VRT and Medialaan, but the documents differ in approach. We could summarize this different approach as the choice of VTM for "do's" and of VRT for "don'ts". VRT formulates a series of warnings such as don't argue, don't publish confidential or personal information about the VRT, don't slander or insult, don't criticize other media, don't behave on Twitter otherwise than on television. The guidelines of VTM are more positively worded as tips and tricks to ensure Twitter to be a successful marketing tool: keep it personal, celebrate, share, give away. Quite a few tips point to interaction with the audience: ask for likes, ask questions, let them fill in the blanks, ask for retweets. VTM also works with 'ambassadors' (e.g. Sysomos, 2012): prominent players in the social media network are rewarded with seats and tickets as they do a great job in promoting the brand.

### **5.3 How do the television channels interact with their audience on Twitter?**

The 'call to action' is an important category for both channels with no significant difference between Eén and VTM. On average one to five of all tweets falls into this category. Often these calls to action are related to the activities and programs of the own channel (e.g. ask viewers for their opinion, incite them to watch a program or encourage participation in a contest) but sometimes they are isolated calls to induce engagement (e.g. "How do you find cooling?" during a heat wave).

Six to ten tweets fall into the categories of (modified) retweet or reply which might be considered two ways to communicate with the audience. There is a clear link between the preference for one or the other and the (type of) channel. Commercial broadcaster VTM clearly prefers replies above retweets while public broadcaster Eén prefers retweets above replies. One reason for the high number of retweets on the twitter account of Eén is the strategy of relying on single program accounts whose tweets are retweeted by the main account. Another reason, however, is the retweeting of tweets of followers. VTM does do that only to a lesser degree. "If viewers have a relevant question, we like to help them" say Lagrou and Sulmont (VRT) but at the same time they suggest Twitter can appear as a "box of Pandora" with lots of irrelevant questions and remarks. This reminds us of Bruns (2012, p.

100) who states that general organizational accounts are often unable or unwilling to respond effectively to comments and questions received from their followers on Twitter. Retweeting, then, is a less time-consuming alternative to replying, giving the followers the feeling that they are appreciated. Commercial channel VTM makes a positive choice for replying instead of retweeting. VTM advertises itself as a family channel in close contact with the audience. At the launch of VTM in 1989, also a 'viewers line' was launched to enable viewers to ask questions, make comments, report news. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter have gradually replaced the telephone as the main communication channel. Conversation management and customer care (Barnes, 2008) are thus more taken to heart by commercial broadcaster VTM than by public broadcaster Eén. As Sokol (VTM) explains: "We make a distinction between questions and remarks. Questions are answered, both via direct messages and public messages, so that people know 'someone is taking care of me'." Entertaining remarks are designated as favorite from time to time. Retweeting followers is only done occasionally, for example "If someone from the competition says something positive about us". VTM retweets mainly its own single program accounts and screen personalities (e.g. Kurt Rogiers). None of the channels opt for the 'modified retweet'. In the terminology of Boyd, Golder and Lotan (2010), Eén and VTM are both "preservers". "Preservers" maintain the original intent, context, and content when retweeting in contrast to "adapters" who are willing to remove various parts of the tweet to suit their own purposes.

#### **5.4 How are the television channels' tweets appreciated by the audience?**

At the moment of the study in November 2012, the main account Eén (@een) had 18.282 followers on Twitter. VTM (@VTM) had 26.590 followers. According to the number of followers, VTM appears as the most popular network. Visibility on Twitter, however, depends not only on the number of followers. An important factor is also the further dissemination (retweeting) of the messages originating from the account (Bruns, 2012, p. 100). Retweets are driven by the content value of the tweet, say Lin and Peña (2011), and retweeting can be considered an indicator of popularity and influence (p. 25). In this area, public channel Eén appears as more successful than commercial channel VTM. Tweets of Eén are retweeted on average 3.77 times in comparison to tweets of VTM which were retweeted on average 1.77 times. One element of explanation for this popularity is the own 'retweet-behavior' of the channels. The commercial channel VTM does not retweet often itself, but the public channel Eén posts more retweets than original tweets. Among them are retweets from 'famous people' or popular television personalities, provoking new retweeting. An example: Eén retweets a tweet from singer Ellie Goulding. The tweet was retweeted 118 times. This way, Eén benefits from the notoriety of the singer. The picture looks different when we focus on original tweets of the channel only. Now, VTM appears as the most popular channel though the difference is not statistically

significant. Neither tweets of public channel Eén or commercial channel VTM are frequently designated as favorite.

## 6. Concluding note

The findings of the content analysis and interviews show similarities but also differences between the two television channels. Both channels are in accord in using Twitter mainly for marketing reasons (e.g. promoting own programs, linking to own website, calls to action, positive tone of voice) rather than news dissemination. Some findings (e.g. audience interaction, amount of news distribution, use of hashtags) give proof to a fault line between public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting but as often this line is crossed by similarities or individual accents and profiling.

Our research is limited to the main twitter accounts of the two main television channels Eén (public) and VTM (commercial) in Flanders. We cannot conclude anything about individual journalists working for these channels and their behavior on Twitter nor about individual program accounts of the channels discussed. As for the main media organization accounts we can conclude that their tweets are the expression of a hybrid form of journalism and marketing in which marketing goals prevail: brand journalism. It also seems that commercial channel VTM is playing this game in a more successful way than public channel Eén.

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