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## How Do Media Portray Multiple Identity Organizations?

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Evaluation in the media is key for an organization's external legitimacy as well as for internal commitment. The media's portrayal of a multiple identity organization might be even more delicate. Multiple identity organizations generally have an identity in both the normative or ideological domain, and the utilitarian domain. These value systems are often not compatible. The research question is how news media portray multiple identity organizations. To answer this question a quantitative content analysis has been executed of media messages about a multiple identity organization, Sanquin Blood Supply Foundation, covering a span of 20 years. Newspaper coverage often showcases the toilsome reconcilability between antithetic identities, cultures, and values living together in 1 organization. We conclude that a more or less negative portrayal by the media can be added to the list of potential undesirable implications of having a multiple organizational identity.

*Keywords: multiple identity, media, content analysis, ideological identity, utilitarian identity*

Why bother about an organization's media portrayal? Visibility in the media can help an organization to get support from its constituents (Vliegenthart, Oegema, & Klandermans, 2005). Media reputation, the overall evaluation of an organization presented in the media, is key for external legitimacy and overall reputation (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990) as well as internal commitment. It is a strategic resource of an organization (Deephouse, 2000) and can even have a significant positive effect on share prices (Tong, 2013). The representation of organizations in the media thus constitutes a critical factor in the construction and deconstruction of organizational identity. Media produce "refracted images" that often have higher credibility than the organizations' own projections because they are created by third parties (Rindova, 1997). The focus of this article, theoretically and empirically, will be on how the multiple identity character of an organization affects its media portrayal. As such, this study is concerned with the inherent "character" of the organization rather than its stakeholders' judgments. This perspective is a key aspect in theory and practice of leadership (Pruzan, 2001).

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Media reputations of multiple identity organizations are probably more delicate. The identity of an organization is multiple when there is no single answer to the question of what the central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of the organization are. The normative or ideological system, on the one hand, emphasizes traditions and traditional symbols, the internalization of an ideology, and altruism. It is a nonmonetary focused identity (Pratt, 2016) like that of a church or family. The utilitarian system, on the other hand, is characterized by economic rationality, maximization of profits, and self-interest. It has a for-profit-focused self-definition like that of a business (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Pratt, 2016). Many authors use the terms "multiple identity" and "hybrid identity" interchangeably (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Here, we deliberately use "multiple" instead of "hybrid." The concept of "hybrid identity" differs from the concept of "multiple or dual organizational identity," as the latter considers the different identities existing independently next to each other. Hybrids systematically integrate both identities (Jäger & Schröer, 2014).

Academic literature on multiple identity organizations often refers to the inherent problematic issues of different identities within one organization that belong to incompatible value systems. The complexity of a multiple identity organization might have internal as well as external repercussions. Internally, issues of sense making and conflicting identities may come to the fore when the incongruence between different logics becomes unmanageable. Some scholars suggest managerial responses to solve potential problems, like aggregating identities or deleting an identity that does not fit in well with the organization's mission (e.g., Pratt & Foreman, 2000). This triggers questions and issues about identity, identification, and purpose of the organization (Heckert, 2019; Johansen, Olsen, Solstad, & Torsteinsen, 2015) and causes difficulties in identity management (Foreman & Whetten, 2002) and internal confusion (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Externally, there is a risk of overemphasizing the pragmatic business values or the idealistic values (Ashforth, Rogers, Pratt, & Pradies, 2014), and applying conflicting identity narratives (Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013), fostering confusion about the organization's core.

This study explores first of all whether a negative portrayal by the media can be added to the list of potentially undesirable consequences of having a multiple organizational identity. This is important because a positive media portrayal is key for an organization's reputation (Deephouse, 2000). We concentrate on how an organization is characterized and on the use of specific news factors. This implies that the study does not focus on organizational key messages and the quality of their media coverage (Carroll, Huang-Horowitz, McKeever, & Williams, 2014). Furthermore, we will formulate expectations of how journalists would portray such an organization, considering their role perceptions and negativity bias. A comparison will be made between the media portrayal and the identity as projected by the organization itself, making use of insights from an earlier conducted case study. Specifically, we assess whether it is possible to relate the prominence of organizational characteristics and news factors, and differences across outlets and over time to the multiple identity character of the organization.

### **Context of This Study**

This media portrayal study builds on previous studies in which the case was used of a multiple identity organization, the Dutch blood supply foundation Sanquin (Heckert, 2019; Heckert, Boumans, &

Vliegthart, 2020).<sup>1</sup> Potential organizational traits were identified (e.g., Foreman & Whetten, 2002) for both the ideological and the utilitarian identity. In-depth interviews with organizational members were used to refine the universal indicators for the identities and to add case-specific identity traits. The obtained insights were applied to identify a set of issues and questions for semistructured interviews and a quantitative survey. This led to the conclusion that Sanquin is a multiple identity organization. The inherent and legally grounded hybrid nature of the organization underlines Sanquin to be a most likely case and a representation of other multiple identity organizations (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). A subsequent study applied a quantitative content analysis of the annual reports of Sanquin to map its projected utilitarian and ideological identity over the years. *Social* and *human centered* were identified as ideological traits. *Commercial*, *process-oriented*, and *businesslike* were recognized as utilitarian identity characteristics.

We will again use the case of the Dutch blood supply organization to get insights in the specifics of media coverage of this type of organization. The earlier study demonstrated that the multi-identity organization communicates messages with characteristics of both identities to its stakeholders. During its existence of 20 years, the organization expanded its market activities and diminished its nonmarket activities. Nevertheless, the analysis showed that over time ideological characteristics were increasingly emphasized in the external communication, while the utilitarian traits became less prominent.

The central question of this study is how is the identity of a multiple identity organization portrayed in the news media?

### Theoretical Framework

Each organization has a distinct character that embodies certain values (King, 2015). When the media cast an organization as a main character in their dramatic narratives, they engage in the "character development" of the organization: the provision of information about the dispositional, motivational, and behavioral attributes that characterize a protagonist. This also enables audiences to like, dislike, or identify with the protagonist. One way in which journalists can develop the character of a firm is by providing information about the firm's culture, identity, and leadership, because these organizational attributes reveal values, beliefs, and behaviors that are distinctive characteristics of the organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006).

Media coverage has been analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively in abundance, for social issues (e.g., mass killings; Lankford & Madfis, 2018) as well as for organizations (e.g., deviant organizations;

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<sup>1</sup> On its corporate website, Sanquin Blood Supply Foundation introduces itself as "responsible for safe and efficient blood supply in The Netherlands on a not-for-profit basis. Sanquin also develops and produces pharmaceutical products, conducts high-quality scientific research, and develops and performs a multitude of diagnostic services" (Sanquin, n.d.). The mandate carried out for the national not-for-profit blood supply and the provision of blood plasma-derived medicines is received from the Minister of Health on the basis of the Blood Supply Act. The pharmaceutical products are meant for Dutch patients in the first place, but are sold on an international competitive market. The pharmaceutical factory also performs contract manufacturing. This legally based hybridity makes Sanquin a most likely case of a multiple identity organization.

Benediktsson, 2010) and companies (e.g., Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006). But the portrayal by the media of multiple identity organizations has not been explicitly documented before. We realize that news media are not monolithic, either. They consist of different types (newspaper, radio, television, magazine, or the Internet) and have different sizes and characteristics of the audiences they serve (local, regional, national, or international; higher or lower education; Bakker & Scholten, 2014). Reporters are responsive to their audiences. For this study, we investigate only newspapers and compare national and regional, and quality and popular newspapers.

### ***What Affects the Media Portrayal of Multiple Identities?***

How media portray organizations is likely to be affected by the communication of the organization itself. The communicated messages of an organization impact the quantity as well as the quality, the content, of media coverage, though coverage cannot be fully controlled by corporations (Friedman & Miles, 2006). Organizations' communications are only one of the many sources that journalists use for their news production. They also use their own experience and other authoritative, official, and designated sources (Randall, 2000).

Important for our research is that news media do not only convey facts about an organization or about its performance. They also depict the organization's identity characteristics. The media's role in changing an organization's identity has been coined as the Media Boomerang (Morsing, 1999). The relationship between organizational identity and mediated communication is in fact a relation of mutual constitution (Chouliaraki & Morsing, 2010). When the identity of an organization is multiple, the portrayal of the organization's core could be complicated. In the journalistic production process, intentional or unintentional choices are made in how to describe the organization and its characteristics, possibly emphasizing one identity or the other. To explain possible outcomes of this study we discuss a few presuppositions.

### ***Difference Between the Projected and the Portrayed Identity***

It is obviously in the interest of the organization to communicate positive information that corroborates the desired identity. Corporate websites, for instance, press releases and annual reports, of which the content was analyzed in a previous study tend, to convey the positive message of the firm (Breton, 2009). Media, on the other hand, do not share this interest. Part of the journalistic role perception is the adoption of a critical attitude toward the established order, to "kick against the pricks" (Deuze, 2008, p. 21). An essential general attitude of journalists "is to be suspicious of all sources," as a journalistic handbook states (Randall, 2000, p. 6). The journalist wants that "the strongest . . . version of the story hits the streets and not the self-serving one they [the sources] would prefer" (Randall, 2000, p. 49).

Furthermore, media appear to be primarily interested in bad news (Friedman & Miles, 2006). Bad is stronger than good (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001), also in journalism. Humans, in general, are hardwired to watch out for threats in the interest of survival and respond more strongly to negative stimuli with greater attention and stronger emotional responses. Hence, negative news is generally thought to garner more attraction (Knobloch-Westerwick, Mothes, & Polavin, 2020). In other words, journalists' negativity bias can be shared by their readership.

The special position of an organization such as Sanquin could fuel journalistic critical attention. It is a monopolist with an important mission in healthcare and is a "high-reliability organization," an organization that cannot afford to fail (Belasen, 2008, p. 19). It is, in other words, a high-status organization and the "eliteness" of such an organization is considered to be a news factor (Caple & Bednarek, 2015; Schafraad, van Zoonen, & Verhoeven, 2016).

These observations bring us to the presupposition that the organizational identity portrayed by the media conveys a different and less positive image than the identity communicated by the organization itself.

*RQ1: To what extent and how does the media portrayal of a multiple identity organization differ from the projected identity of this organization?*

### ***Difference in Tone and Portrayal of Traits and Across Outlets***

The *tone* of media coverage is a key factor in shaping people's opinions (Damstra, 2020) and is associated with both the direction of the change in corporate reputation and the total movement of this change (Friedman & Miles, 2006; Jonkman, Boukes, Vliegthart, & Verhoeven, 2020). For this reason, we are interested in the tone of the news articles and differences in tone across outlets. Differences across outlets in tone and presence of news factors and characteristics (e.g., Boukes & Vliegthart, 2020) have been documented for various news genres and events, but not with respect to multiple identity organizations. The observed differences in this study might magnify the specific characteristics of such an organization, which could enhance the insights in multiple identity and give indications for its alleged vulnerability. These insights probably yield points of application for identity management.

Analogous to the concept of political parallelism, introduced in 1974, developed and criticized since then (De Albuquerque, 2013), there is some evidence for *organizational parallelism*: Certain newspapers prefer to report on a specific kind of organizations. Financial newspapers report most prominently on corporate organizations. Quality newspapers and popular newspapers report most prominently on public organizations, in terms of volume, placing, relevance, active role, and standing, but popular newspapers contribute less to the public sphere than quality newspapers (Königslöw, 2012). News articles in quality newspapers are likely to contain more identity attributions than are those in popular papers (e.g., Vliegthart, Baumgardner, van Aelst, & de Vreese, 2010), in general because the first category's articles are usually longer than the latter category's.

Popular news is often, as opposed to that of quality papers, regarded as being apolitical, trivial, simplified, emotionalized, and sensationalized (Jacobi, Kleinen-von Königslöw, & Ruigrok, 2016), while enhancing insights and knowledge of their audience is among the key goals of quality press journalists. National newspapers usually address broader reaching concerns (Dill & Wu, 2009) and engage in higher levels of policy discussion with greater frequency than do regional newspapers (Wu, 2017). This would suggest that issues like integrity get more coverage in national than in regional newspapers, and that the tone in national newspapers is more negative than in regional newspapers.

Based on the discussion above, we formulate the following hypotheses:

- H1: The media portrayal of a multiple identity organization differs across different outlets (quality and popular newspapers, national and regional newspapers) in terms of attributed identity characteristics and tone of the articles.*
- H1a: Quality newspaper articles about a multiple identity organization contain more identity characteristics than do popular newspapers.*
- H1b: The tone of quality newspaper articles about a multiple identity organization is less negative than that of popular newspapers.*
- H1c: National newspaper articles about a multiple identity organization contain more identity characteristics than do regional newspapers.*
- H1d: The tone of national newspaper articles about a multiple identity organization is less negative than that of regional newspapers.*

#### **Different Use of News Factors Across Outlets**

News factors are inherent characteristics of an event that determine whether and how extensively journalists will cover it (Boukes & Vliegenthart, 2020). To explore the role of news factors in the organizational portrayal, for this study we examine a selection of news factors that are often used by journalists (e.g., Boukes & Vliegenthart, 2020): proximity, controversy, impact, relevance, personification, and problematization. Beside these "classical" news factors, we suggest that the multiple identity organization may generate journalistic interest due to some more specific factors. These factors may resemble well-known news factors such as controversy or conflict, but we formulated them more geared to our research subject. They were identified in the more than 1,000 news articles used for this study (see Method). Since the ideological and the utilitarian identity are grounded on different value systems, the subdued *tension between the identities* may come to the surface. This tension could even evoke the discussion about the *(in)compatibility of the identities* or an organizational *identity change*, which in this case comprises a changing proportion of the two identities. In this discussion, the integrity of the organization or its leadership is a nearby issue when this *integrity is at risk*. We will treat the issues of tension between identities, compatibility of the identities, identity change, and integrity at risk as news factors alike.

Although journalists share an occupational ideology across different types of media (Deuze, 2005), the emphasis on certain news factors can be different for popular and quality newspapers. Popular and regional newspapers particularly rely on the news factors of negativity (and personification and geographical proximity), more than quality newspapers do (e.g., in economic news; Boukes & Vliegenthart, 2020).

When examining the presence of news factors across different outlets, we could expect that a negative tone is more prevalent in popular than in quality newspapers (Boukes & Vliegenthart, 2020). The prevalence of news factors could also be related to the prevalence of certain identity characteristics. We will

explore whether either utilitarian or ideological characteristics are related with news factors like controversy and tension between identities. Based on the differences in use of news factors across outlets, as ascribed above, we formulate the following hypotheses:

*H2a: Quality newspaper articles about a multiple identity organization contain more news factors than do popular newspapers.*

*H2b: National newspaper articles about a multiple identity organization contain more news factors than do regional newspapers.*

### **Newsworthiness of Identity Multiplicity**

How media portray multiple identity organizations might reflect the internal confusion in the organization, the overemphasizing of business or idealistic values, conflicting identity narratives, or even might contain a negative appreciation of the tension between competing value systems or identities, possibly caused by a low ambiguity tolerance. *Ambiguity tolerance* is a systematic tendency to react to perceived ambiguity with greater or lesser intensity (McLain, Kefallonitis, & Armani, 2015), theorized for persons as well as for organizations (Furnham & Marks, 2013; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999). A low tolerance for organizational ambiguity may explain the potential newsworthiness of the tension between organizational identities. Reporting about a supposed clash between (value systems underlying) identities might be a journalistic choice that is based on the ambiguity tolerance issue. This urges us to examine whether identity multiplicity is an issue in itself. Do media problematize the organizational multiple identity's situation or performance, or do they criticize its integrity?

*RQ2: To what extent is the multiple identity character of the organization judged newsworthy, and to what extent is it problematized in the media?*

### **Identity Change**

Although the founding organizational identity definition comprehends that this identity is portrayed as that which is core, distinctive, and *enduring* about the character of an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985), it has been argued that organizational identity, rather than enduring, is better viewed as a relatively fluid and unstable concept. This instability in identity is actually adaptive in accomplishing change (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). Previous studies (Heckert, 2019; Heckert et al., 2020) demonstrated a substantial discrepancy between the identity development as experienced by organizational members (growing less ideological and more utilitarian) and the identity projection by the organization (increased focus on the ideological identity) over time. The established image had a dominant and growing emphasis on the ideological identity, an identity that is socially better accepted than the utilitarian identity.<sup>2</sup> Would journalists follow the same pattern?

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<sup>2</sup> Documented for the art world (e.g., Taylor & Littleton, 2008).



RQ3: *How much attention is paid to identity change in the media coverage about a multiple identity organization?*

### **Research Method**

For the current study, the portrayal of this organization in the news media was analyzed by a manual quantitative content analysis. The codebook contains four sets of variables: on (1) identity characteristics attributed to the organization, (2) possible tension between the identities, (3) tone toward the organization, and (4) the presence of news factors.

### **Sample and Units of Analysis**

A systematic search in the electronic Nexis Uni database for unique articles about the organization in nondigital Dutch news media was conducted, covering the years from the start of the organization, in 1998, until 2019, mentioning the organization's name at least twice. This yielded a census sample of 1,025 news articles.

#### *Quality and Popular, National and Regional Media*

In the Dutch media landscape, we consider *NRC Handelsblad* (and for a younger readership *Nrc.next*, combined  $n = 40$ ), *de Volkskrant* ( $n = 53$ ), and *Trouw* ( $n = 46$ ) as quality newspapers, and *Algemeen Dagblad* ( $n = 64$ ) and *De Telegraaf* ( $n = 37$ ) as popular newspapers, defined by their readers (Bakker & Scholten, 2014; Schaap & Pleijter, 2012). Readers of popular newspapers are a cross section of the population; within the quality newspaper group, readers' higher incomes and education are overrepresented. The only financial paper is the *Financieele Dagblad* (FD;  $n = 29$ ). The other newspapers in our corpus are two newspapers with a protestant signature and a limited circulation *Reformatorisch Dagblad* (RD;  $n = 23$ ) and *Nederlands Dagblad* (ND;  $n = 23$ ), and regional newspapers. We grouped FD, RD, and ND with the quality papers. The numerical distribution within the data set is Quality ( $n = 214$ ), Popular ( $n = 101$ ), National ( $n = 315$ ), and Regional ( $n = 710$ ).

### **Operationalization**

#### *Operationalization Identities*

The organization under study is a not-for-profit organization in healthcare, with normative identity characteristics (like social and human centered) and utilitarian characteristics (like commercial and process centered). To measure how media portray a multiple identity organization, the characteristics identified in the previous study were applied. These seven identity characteristics are shown in bold in Table 1. They were all coded by dichotomous questions: The characteristic was either present or not present in the news article. The attribution of characteristics to the organization and the applied tone can provide us information of how journalists judge the organization.

**Table 1. Frequencies Identity Characteristics.**

Identity characteristic	Projected identity ( <i>M</i> )	Media portrayal ( <i>M</i> )	<i>SD</i>
<b>Process centered<sup>u</sup></b>	1.9	.75	.43
Donor as supplier <sup>u</sup>	.09	.75	.44
Donor centered <sup>i</sup>	.23	.56	.50
<b>Human centered<sup>i</sup></b>	.46	.51	.50
<b>Social<sup>i</sup></b>	.75	.37	.48
<b>Healthcare<sup>i</sup></b>	.61	.33	.47
<b>Businesslike<sup>u</sup></b>	.36	.26	.44
<b>Commercial<sup>u</sup></b>	.08	.08	.26
<b>Patient centered<sup>i</sup></b>	.26	.07	.25

*Note.* Column 1 shows the main variables used in the Codebook (Heckert et al., 2020). Bold shows the characteristics of the utilitarian and the ideological identity constructs as identified in the previous study, and their prevalence (Column 2). Characteristics of the ideological identity constructs are marked *i*, and the utilitarian *u*. The units of analysis are aggregated to the chapters in annual reports of the organization. This explains values >1. Column 3 shows the mean frequency of the portrayed identity characteristics.

#### *Operationalization Tone*

Tone was measured both for the headline and the full article. Furthermore, evaluation on the specific identity traits was coded. All these variables on tone were measured on a 5-point scale (*very negative, negative, neutral, positive, very positive*). Neutral was coded in the absence of positive and negative. Mean tone scores (between -2 and +2) were compared across outlets.

#### *Operationalization News Factors and Newsworthiness*

Dichotomous questions were used for all news factors: the classical news factors *personification, impact and relevance, problematization* (of the situation or behavior of the organization), *controversy* and *geographical proximity* and the multiple identity case-specific issues *tension between the identities, compatibility of identities, integrity, and identity change*. References to tension between the identities were measured through the binary question about the prevalence of the issue. If the article discussed the compatibility of the identities, the two identities could either be judged "compatible" or "incompatible or "difficult to combine." If identity change was mentioned, the direction of the change was inquired: from utilitarian toward ideological or the other way around. The evaluation of integrity of the organization or its leadership being at risk is also dichotomous. The newsworthiness of the tension issue is in this context conceptualized as the prominence of the issue (dichotomous) and the centrality of the issue within the article. Centrality refers to the relative significance given to the issue in comparison with other issues mentioned by the author. We call the centrality low when the subject is only dealt with marginally, medium when it is more or less extensively dealt with, among other issues, and high when it constitutes an important aspect of the article (cf. Schmid-Petri et al., 2013.)

### ***Intercoder Reliability***

The coding team consisted of four experienced Dutch native communication science students. Before the content analysis took place, they were thoroughly trained by the principal investigators in two half-day instruction meetings.

We used Lotus ( $\lambda$ ) to assess intercoder reliability in accordance with an earlier study that we will use to compare the results of the analyses. Lotus defines the proportion of agreement with a reference value, which is the most common coded value per coding unit (Fretwurst, 2015). To determine the intercoder reliability, we used the standardized Lotus score (S-Lotus), which corrects for random agreements between coders. The intercoder reliability scores of a random sample of material that is coded by all coders ( $n = 50$ ) is more than sufficient. Standardized Lotus values of .67 and higher indicate good reliability (Fretwurst, 2015). All indicators scored an S-Lotus score  $\geq .7$ , except for social (.69), and most indicators even scored  $> .8$ . The latter also goes for questions that were considered to be "difficult" beforehand about the tone of an article, about news factors, and about a possible clash between the two identities.

### **Results**

Principle axis factoring analysis, forcing the indicators into two scales, has been performed on six distinctive variables<sup>3</sup> to assess whether the different traits indeed measure both identities. Oblique rotations (Oblimin with Kaiser normalization) are used because we expect the journalists to consider the two factors as separate, not correlated identities.

The exploratory factor analysis of the identity traits observed in the news articles does not produce two coherent, meaningful identity constructs (see Appendix 1). Also, other indicators (e.g., Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test) indicate a lack of fit. Evidently, the media do not clearly recognize the two identities, although they attribute numerous individual identity characteristics to the organization. Consequently, we will report on those individual characteristics, to be able to determine similarities and differences between the media portrayal of a multiple identity organization and its projected identity (RQ1).

### ***Projected Identity and Portrayed Identity***

Similarities between the identity projected by the organization and the media portrayal can be found in the use of identity traits like *commercial* and *businesslike* in both the organizational projection as in the media portrayal, and with a comparable relative prevalence (see Table 1). However, striking differences can be observed for the *focus* on the well-being of *patients* and on the characteristic *social*. Both are strongly emphasized by the organization compared with how often the media attribute these characterizations to the organization. The same goes for being part of *healthcare*. In contrast, the media often characterize the organization as being dependent on blood donors as a source of raw materials, which is not often done by the organization itself. The answer to RQ1 is that the media partially emphasize other

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<sup>3</sup> The same variables that were used in a previous study (see Table 1) with a mean prevalence  $>10\%$  per registration unit.

characteristics than the organization itself, especially where it concerns the organization's attitude toward its most prominent stakeholders: donors and patients.

### **Frequency of Identity Characteristics**

The mean frequencies of the individual identity characteristics (see Table 1, Column 3: Media portrayal) show that there is not one dominating set of characteristics, although there is an inclination to the utilitarian traits, like being *focused on processes* (75%,  $SD = .434$ ) and looking on the *blood donor as a supplier of raw material* (75%,  $SD = .435$ ). Normative characteristics like *focus on the importance of human beings* (51%,  $SD = .500$ ) and *social* (37%,  $SD = .482$ ) are also attributed to the organization.

### **Tone of the Coverage**

The *tone* of the articles is neutral in most cases (58.7%), positive for 17.7%, and negative for 23.6% of the articles. The tone that is used in the articles describing the characteristics of the organization is often coded as neutral. There is at least one characteristic that is judged noticeable negatively: The tone that is employed when attributing the characteristic *commercial* is three times more often negative than positive. The mean score is  $-.84$  (see Table 2). Focus on the patient as a characteristic of the organization is discussed in negative terms in more than two-thirds of the occasions. This can be explained by a massive press coverage of a contaminated blood transfusion around the turn of the century.

**Table 2. Tone of Identity Characteristics.**

Characteristic	Neg (%)	Pos (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>
Process centered <sup>u</sup>	20.1	23.3	.02	767
Businesslike <sup>u</sup>	34.1	43.2	.18	266
Commercial <sup>u</sup>	72.7	3.9	-.84	77
Social <sup>i</sup>	8.2	44.3	.37	377
Human centered <sup>i</sup>	34.2	43.5	.09	518
Patient centered <sup>i</sup>	68.6	18.6	-.61	70

*Note.* Shown are the characteristics of the utilitarian and the ideological identity constructs, and which contained an evaluation. The characteristics of the ideological identity are marked *i*, and the utilitarian *u*.

### **Comparing Characterization Across Outlets**

We expect that the coverage of the organization would differ across types of newspapers, partly because of the differences in article size. In this case, the quality articles are about twice the size of the popular ones and hold roughly twice the amount of identity traits attributed to the organization (H1a), and indeed, national newspaper articles contain more identity traits than regional papers (H1c). The exceptions are the focus on people, which is stronger in regional and popular newspapers, and the focus on the well-being of donors, which is stronger in regional newspapers (values and significance; Fischer's exact test, in Table 3 and Appendix 2), probably accounted for by the more human interest and personal focus in regional and popular newspapers.

The focus on processes is addressed significantly more often in quality newspapers (83.2%) than in popular newspapers (59.4%), although this difference is no longer significant when controlling for the size of the article (see Appendix 3). The difference for this characteristic in regional and national newspapers is not significant. The prevalence is substantially and significantly different for the characteristic *commercial* when we compare regional (3.5%) with national (16.5%; see Table 3 and Appendix 2) and popular (7.9%), with quality newspapers (20.6%; see Table 3 and Appendix 2). This emphasis on the commercial aspect of a not-for-profit organization could be explained by the quality papers being more “political” and less trivial than popular newspapers are supposed to be (Jacobi et al., 2016, p. 725), and their inclination to provide multiple (conflicting) perspectives on an issue (Boukes & Vliegenthart, 2020, pp. 283–284).

**Table 3. Frequencies Identity Characteristics Across Outlets.**

Identity characteristic	Reg. %	Nat. %	Pop. %	Qual. %
<b>Process centered<sup>u</sup></b>	74.5	75.6	59.4	83.2*
Donor as supplier <sup>i</sup>	73.7	77.1	74.0	77.8
Donor central <sup>i</sup>	75.1	61.0*	65.3	58.9
<b>Human centered<sup>i</sup></b>	52.4	46.3*	54.5	42.5*
<b>Social<sup>i</sup></b>	35.9	38.7	39.6	38.3
<b>Healthcare<sup>i</sup></b>	27.7	42.2*	28.6	49.1*
<b>Businesslike<sup>u</sup></b>	25.8	26.3	15.8	31.3*
<b>Commercial<sup>u</sup></b>	3.5	16.5*	7.9	20.6*
Patient central <sup>i</sup>	4.6	11.7*	7.9	13.6

*Note.* Utilitarian characteristics are marked *u*, and ideological *i*. Bold shows the variables of previously construed utilitarian and ideological constructs. \* = significant differences of regional vs. national and popular vs. quality newspapers.  $p < .05$ ; one-sided Fisher’s exact test.

### Comparing Tone Across Outlets

Independent-samples *t* tests were conducted to compare the tone of the articles in national and regional newspapers (H1d) and to compare the tone in quality and popular newspapers (H1b). The mean tone of the articles in national newspapers ( $M = -.15$ ,  $SD = .873$ ) is slightly more negative than in regional newspapers ( $M = -.07$ ,  $SD = .726$ );  $t(1023) = 1,294$ , but this difference is not significant ( $p = .196$ ). The mean tone of the articles in quality papers ( $M = -.20$ ,  $SD = .887$ ) is more negative than in popular newspapers ( $M = .07$ ,  $SD = .740$ );  $t(1023) = -1,927$ ,  $p = .055$ , which is (just) not significant. Hypotheses 1b and 1d are rejected.

### Comparing News Factors Across Outlets

The classical news factors are omnipresent in the articles about this multi-identity organization (see Table 4). This also holds true for references to the organization’s integrity and to the tension between the identities.

**Table 4. Prevalence of News Factors.**

Factor	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Proximity (only regional np)	.55	.498	659
Controversy	.34	.473	1,025
Problematization	.33	.471	1,025
Impact and Relevance	.25	.431	1,025
Personification	.21	.407	1,025
<b>Integrity at Risk</b>	.21	.405	1,025
<b>Tension between identities</b>	.13	.334	1,021
<b>Incompatibility identities</b>	.12	.815	1,025
<b>Identity change</b>	.04	.449	1,025

Note. Classical news factors in light type and multiple identity issues in bold.

News factors like *proximity* (in our case, in 55% of the local and regional newspaper articles) and *impact and relevance* (25% of all articles) are prevalent in the articles. More noticeable is that in 34% of the articles, a *controversy* is described, meaning a clash of interests or insights between the organization and individuals, groups, or government.

In 13% ( $n = 130$ ) of the articles, the *tension* between the two identities is discussed. In almost all of those articles, the two identities are judged incompatible by the author (95%; i.e., 12% of all articles). One-third of the articles evaluates the organization's performance or the organization's situation as problematic (33%). To understand what "problematic" means, we analyzed the main subjects of the articles. The most popular subject is blood collection and donor recruitment (34%), but some more sensitive issues are next in line. Closure of outlets and other restructurings are second (21.1%), the exclusion of people as donors, especially of homosexuals (16.1%), and the remuneration of the executive board (10.6%) are third and fourth on the list. The trustworthiness or the integrity of the organization or its leadership is assessed negatively in 21% of the articles.

### **The Newsworthiness of Multiple Identity**

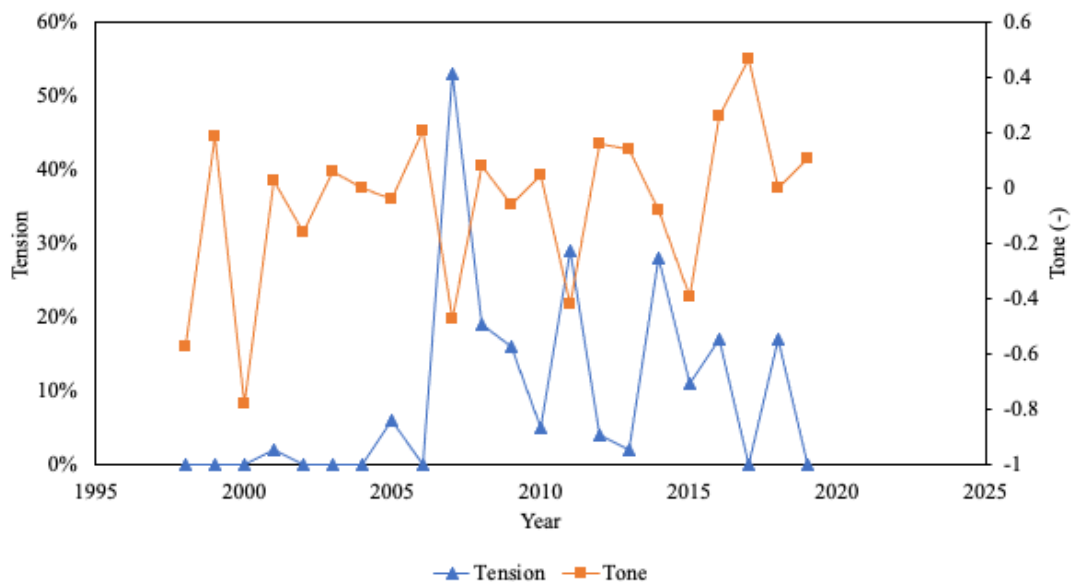
We consider relative prominence and centrality of the issue as indicators of newsworthiness of an issue. Of the articles, 12.7% address the tension between the normative and the utilitarian identity, twice as much in quality newspapers (21.1%) as in popular newspapers (10.5%,  $p < .001$ ; H2a is confirmed for this news issue). In one-third of those articles ( $n = 130$ , 33.8%) the two identities are called incompatible or at least difficult to combine. In the articles that mention the tension between the identities (12.7%) the centrality of this issue is high or medium in 63.9% ( $SD = .879$ ) of the articles.

### **Identity Change Over Time and the Media**

When we plot the presence of the identity traits in media coverage over time, numerous fluctuations can be observed. No clear-cut trend is discernible. Still, the following observation is worth mentioning. The projected utilitarian identity (previous study) reaches an all-time high in 2014 and is present in 67% of the organizational content inquired, while the average for the other years (1998–2016) is 22%. This peak seemed

to cohere with the temporary leadership of an entrepreneurial president of the organization's executive board. Interestingly, the organization's portrayal in the media in that same year shows peaks in the characteristics *businesslike* (51%,  $SD = .507$ ; mean percentage for all years is 26%) and *commercial* (32%,  $SD = .475$ ; mean for all years is 8%), and relatively few references to *focus on the interest of human beings* (30%,  $SD = .463$ ; mean for all years is 51%).

References in the media to *tension* between the identities is almost absent in the period 1998–2007. In 2007, however, there is an abrupt spike in attention for this issue (53%,  $SD = .503$ ), and the alleged tension remains on the agenda in the subsequent years (2008–19), gradually diminishing (see Figure 1). The two "tension peaks" (2007: 53% and 2011: 29%; see Figure 1) correspond with a relatively negative evaluation of the organization (mean tone in 2007:  $-.47$  and 2011:  $-.42$ ; see Figure 1), mainly caused by a dispute on the compensation of the executive board. Mean for all years is  $-.015$ .<sup>4</sup> In 2007, the organization, that so far was publicly known as a not-for-profit blood bank by most people, started to produce an expensive medicine for the American pharmaceutical industry. This activity is obviously associated with the utilitarian domain. In the same year, an association of blood donors was founded whose main spearhead of movement was the compensation of the executive board of Sanquin. They denounced the discrepancy between the high wages of the board members and the voluntary nonremunerated blood donorship. The donor association brought about an easy access to the local, regional, and national press. In the first years of its existence, the association managed to put a substantial mark on the news coverage. The 109 news articles that show the compensation of the executive board as the main topic are almost all (94%) published in the years 2007–11.



**Figure 1. Course of the tone of newspaper articles and references to tension.**

<sup>4</sup> The first author of this article has been working as a communication manager at Sanquin for more than a decade. Most of the "circumstantial evidence" can be retrieved in the newspaper articles used for this study.

Identity *change* (RQ3) is referred to in the media only in the years 2007–9 (42%,  $n = 70$ ; overall: 3.5%,  $N = 1,025$ ). The direction of the identity change that is reported in these three years in the media is without exception one-way traffic—from ideological toward utilitarian.

The sudden peak of media attention for identity tension can be explained by more than case-specific issues. We know that the amount of media attention for (semi) public organizations is already generally high, especially when they operate in relatively close contact with citizens, like train companies, police, hospitals, and social housing corporations—organizations fulfilling public tasks that touch on the daily lives of citizens (Jacobs & Schillemans, 2016). But in the same time frame in which the critical attention for the national blood supply peaked, an ongoing debate started about tasks and goals of other semipublic organizations, like housing associations. This debate was held not only by politicians (Boelhouwer & Priemus, 2014; Elsinga & Wassenberg, 2014) but also in the media. The discursive opportunity structure at the time allowed for critical media attention of an organization like the national blood supply.

### Conclusions and Discussion

The media portrayal of a multiple identity organization has not been documented quantitatively before. Since media reputation is an important asset for every organization, it is relevant to get an insight in how news media portray such an organization and to determine whether they treat the multiple identity character of the organization as a potential news factor. This not only informs the academic discussion on organizational identity but is also relevant for communication practitioners given the potential impact on the *organization*.

We contribute to research on multiple identity organizations by offering a method to map their portrayal in news media over time. Measurements over 20 years of media coverage show developments in the use of news factors and of issues specific for multiple identity, like the tension between ideological and utilitarian identity and their incompatibility. When media mentioned this tension, the issue was given a central position in the news articles. For the interpretation of this state of flux, contextual knowledge is needed. Altogether, it lays open the reputational vulnerability of a multi-identity, as far as the media reputation is concerned.

The tone when applying identity characteristics is more often positive than negative, with two exceptions. The tone of “commercial” is predominantly negative, especially in national and quality newspapers. This utilitarian trait pur sang is evidently seen as negative when attributed to the multiple identity organization.

There is a substantial difference between the way the organization projects its own identity and the way the media portray it. The organizations mission, “to ensure a better life for patients, together with the donor” is mirrored in its strong projection of the characteristics “social,” “caring for the well-being of patients,” and “playing a role in healthcare.” The media on the other hand portray the organization treating blood donors as suppliers of raw material. A temporary intensification of the use in the media of the utilitarian characteristics *businesslike* and *commercial* coincides with a spike in the projected utilitarian identity. Mean tone is slightly negative.



Our results about the tone across outlets are partially similar to earlier findings in literature. A difference is that the tone in quality and national newspapers is not significantly different from the tone in popular and regional newspapers. In line with expectations is that controversy between the organization and individuals, groups or the government is observed substantially more often in national than in regional newspapers.

The utilitarian characteristics' frequency is significantly higher in quality and national newspapers. The explanation could be found in the power of the unexpected, cherished by quality media. The unusual is more likely to be considered interesting (Byrne & Hunter, 2004) and newsworthy (Nimark, 2014) than what is commonplace. National and quality newspapers tend to put more effort in this man-bites-dog principle and have a broader orientation, whereas popular media focus on "soft" local news (Königslöw, 2012). Our findings seem to confirm that the utilitarian identity of a semipublic organization belongs to the domain of the unexpected.

This unexpectedness and the media's critical attitude toward identity multiplicity, and our finding that the media do not adopt the organization's desired identity indiscriminately, totals up to a defiant overall picture. This picture suggests that the multiple identity organization should be more transparent about the organization combining social activities, usually associated with the ideological identity, with commercial activities and interests, associated with the utilitarian identity. This could ameliorate the media portrayal of such an organization. Investing in media relations would be an appropriate step in this process.

Tension between the identities seems to be a newsworthy subject for the media. Problematization of the organization, doubts about the integrity of the organization or its leadership and controversies between the organization and others are quite common in the news articles included. They come to a head in a period when the organization's "utilitarian actions" and stakeholders' involvement reach a relatively high level, against a background of social upheaval. This observation shows that contextual knowledge is needed to interpret the quantitative findings.

To consider the two identities as incompatible is possibly caused by a low ambiguity tolerance of the journalists or their readership. This could explain the importance that the media attach to this issue. Here, the two journalistic logics that are as a rule considered to be adversary, come together in an interesting equilibrium. The media are inclined to produce content that sells (Damstra, 2020)—the utilitarian logic—and they foster their role as a watchdog of society—the ideological logic.

A limitation of this research is that the empirical findings are based on one single case. Applying the same method to several other multiple identity organizations' news coverage could strengthen the insights. The approach can be replicated in other multiple identity settings, replacing characteristics like healthcare and donors by, for instance, education and students or social housing and house hunters, maintaining traits as social and businesslike. A second valuable route for future research would be to explore the journalistic perspective more in depth. Since the explanation of the research results for a substantial part can be associated with journalists' logics, biases, and role perceptions, it could be revealing to qualitatively assess these presuppositions with journalistic professionals.

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## Appendix

**Table A1. Pattern Matrix Factor Analysis, Two Components.**

Characteristic	Component	
	1	2
Healthcare <sup>i</sup>	.706	
Social <sup>i</sup>	.669	
Process centered <sup>u</sup>	.605	-.354
Businesslike <sup>u</sup>	.424	
Voluntary donation <sup>i</sup>		.789
Human centered <sup>i</sup>		.650

Note. Principle component analysis, Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization for distinguishing characteristics; marked *i* for the ideological, and *u* for the utilitarian identity.

**Table A2. Logistic Regression Identity Characteristics Regional and National Newspapers and Article Size.**

Identity characteristic	Exp(B) Reg-Nat	Exp(B) Size	Nagelkerke's $R^2$
<b>Process centered<sup>u</sup></b>	1.192	1.002*	.052
Donor as supplier <sup>u</sup>	.896	1.001*	.012
Donor central <sup>i</sup>	1.914*	1.000	.028
<b>Human centered<sup>i</sup></b>	1.473*	1.001*	.023
<b>Social<sup>i</sup></b>	1.135	1.002*	.053
<b>Healthcare<sup>i</sup></b>	.803	1.003*	.164
<b>Businesslike<sup>u</sup></b>	1.229	1.001*	.039
<b>Commercial<sup>u</sup></b>	.276*	1.002*	.206
<b>Patient central<sup>i</sup></b>	.349*	1.000	.041

**Table A3. Logistic Regression Identity Characteristics Popular and Quality Newspapers.**

Identity characteristic	Exp(B) Pop-Qual	Exp(B) Size	Nagelkerke's $R^2$
<b>Process centered<sup>u</sup></b>	.733	1.002	.051
Donor as supplier <sup>u</sup>	.913	1.001	.012
Donor central <sup>i</sup>	1.978*	1.000	.024
<b>Human centered<sup>i</sup></b>	1.949*	1.001*	.034
<b>Social<sup>i</sup></b>	1.362	1.002*	.057
<b>Healthcare<sup>i</sup></b>	.700*	1.003*	.166
<b>Businesslike<sup>u</sup></b>	.957	1.001*	.037
<b>Commercial<sup>u</sup></b>	.272*	1.002*	.204
<b>Patient central<sup>i</sup></b>	.304*	.999	.044

Note. Utilitarian characteristics are marked *u*, and ideological *i*. In bold the variables of previously construed utilitarian and ideological identity constructs. \* = significant  $p < .05$ . Omnibus Test of Model Coefficients significant for all models with significant results.