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Framing Covid-19: An analysis of reactions to meaning-making frames during the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Netherlands
Nugteren, Sjoerd

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Leiden University

Sjoerd Nugteren

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1   Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis of unparalleled scale that has affected every aspect of society worldwide. As of March 2021, more than 2.5 million people have died as a result of the virus (World Health Organisation, 2021). In the Netherlands, the pandemic and the government's response to the resulting public health crisis has dominated the normal way of life and the messages in the media. Prime-Minister (PM) Rutte has called the COVID-19 crisis the biggest crisis since the Second World War (Den Hartog, 2020), and has profiled himself as public leader addressing the nation through tough times by addressing the nation in different press conferences and two speeches broadcasted live on national television.

Crises in general disrupt the normal way of life, threatening core values of societies in an urgent way. Societies are struck by uncertainty about what is happening, how it could have happened and what can be done to minimize the potential harmful consequences. As a result, citizens tend to look at public leaders to provide meaning to the current crisis situation (Boin, t' Hart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005). Public leaders are faced with many challenges during crises, whilst dealing with the same uncertainty about causes and consequences of the crisis at hand that is felt by the public. They need to engage in meaning-making, and provide a dominant narrative through which the ongoing events can be interpreted in order to restore trust in the government who have seem to have lost ground in areas of effectiveness, reliability and integrity (Ansell, Boin, & 't Hart, 2014). Political leaders compete with other political actors and non-political actors who are eager to share their view on the ongoing situation (Boin, Overdijk, & Kuipers, 2013; Ansell et al., 2014). The role of mass media cannot be overlooked in this context, as they critically evaluate crisis management strategies and public addresses from public leaders. The press conferences and the two speeches on television may be remarked as important meaning-making moments during the crisis, as PM Rutte touched upon the effect of the virus for all Dutch citizens and

explained how he envisioned the way to minimize the consequences of the crisis and how the government tends to get out of the crisis situation and restore the sense of normalcy.

This research focuses on the reactions on Twitter and in the traditional media to two speeches on national television, as well as press conferences introducing frames surrounding the introduction of different measures against the spread of Covid-19 in the Netherlands. The speeches and press conferences are important in terms of meaning-making, so analysing the reactions to those defining moments will give an insight into how the public and traditional media reacted to the sharing of information about the state of the crisis and the potential way out of the crisis. In other crisis situations involving a public address from a political or other public leaders the event that caused the crisis is often followed by a single press conference during which the public leader addresses its citizens and the concerns that are present among them. During the COVID-19 crisis, PM Rutte spoke to the public on numerous occasions through the means of press conferences and two speeches broadcast live on national television. The COVID-19 crisis and the way the Dutch government has communicated with its citizens allows me to research different moments of a public leader engaging in meaning-making during a crisis of unparalleled length and duration. The prolonged duration of the COVID-19 crisis leads to the context of the crisis in terms of the public's needs and sentiment shifting over time. The various moments of Prime-Minister Mark Rutte providing meaning to the crisis situation during a crisis in which the context shifts, make it possible to compare his meaning-making efforts and track them through time. By studying meaning-making moments and reactions to those moments in that way, this study will provide more insight into the workings of meaning-making and relate this to what public leaders should say and do according to literature.

This study highlights frames around three defining policy choices on the strategic level in terms of managing the spread of COVID-19. By the means of the reactions to those specific frames and the public addressed in general, this study aims to paint a clear picture of how the public reacts to meaning-making frames during a crisis and the way traditional media play a role in positively and negatively affecting the perception of these frames among the public. This leads to the following general research question: *How did people on Twitter and the traditional media react to frames presented by Mark Rutte during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Netherlands and what can we learn from it with regard to meaning-making?*

In order to get a complete answer to the research question, I will answer a set of sub-questions. For the sake of clarity, these sub-questions will be presented after essential information about meaning-making and the way it affects emotions online and the role of traditional media in this context is outlined.

An answer to the main research question will give more insight into the reactions among the public to public leaders engaging in meaning-making. The amount of research conducted with the goal of getting such insight is limited, as the possibility of proving any causal relationships between leaders engaging in meaning-making and people reacting in a certain, expected way is confined due to the existence of a multitude of factors. This study does not try and aim to prove such a causal relationship, but aims to paint a picture of how the public reacts to defining crisis communication moments during a crisis characterised by an impact and length not seen often. As I will go on further, the strategy of controlling the spread of COVID-19 in general benefits from people understanding what is asked of them and complying with the rules, but this is especially the case in the Netherlands.

Getting to grasp with how people reacted to frames about the necessity of measures, as the extent to which people knew what was being asked from them will give more clarity towards the effectiveness of certain choices that were made communication-wise during important moments for meaning-making, like the press conferences and speeches. An answer to my research question will provide more insight in the role of the media and how they negatively and positively affect the framing of certain measures as well.

2   Theoretical Framework

In the upcoming part, this study will address key characteristics of a crisis, the way it affects citizens and the challenges that leaders need to face during them. Special attention will be drawn to the task of meaning-making, as this study focuses on several critical crisis communication moments from Prime-Minister Rutte. I will elaborate on the role of social media and traditional media in a crisis, and how they may affect the emotions of the public.

2.1   Crises: threatening, urgent, and uncertain

Crises are events that are associated with undesirable and often unexpected situations. three core components of crises can be recognised: threat, urgency and uncertainty (Boin et al., 2005) The threat component of this characteristic refers to core values of a community being endangered. Consequently, the size and impact of a crisis depends on the amount of lives that are governed by those values.

This task of managing a crisis comes with a sense of urgency, as core values of a community are under threat. This key feature separates crises from other events that endanger core values, but do not pose immediate problems. They should perhaps attract an equal amount of attention, as the consequences could pose to be comparable to a more immediate problem, or even worse. These types of events that impose problems over an extensive longer period of time, like climate change, do not pose a sense of crisis which may be compared to crises that pose an immediate problem like terrorist attacks, earthquakes, floods, and pandemics (Boin et al., 2005, p 3). 'During crises events the usual way of operations of a system are disrupted, resulting in a feeling of need among policy-makers to make vital decisions' (Rosenthal, Charles, & 't Hart, 1989).

Crises are often associated with a sense of uncertainty about what is happening and how it will affect normal life as everybody is used to having. This uncertainty hits all levels of society, and as a result questions arise: What is happening? How did it happen? What can we do about it? (Ansell et al., 2014). Citizens will turn to their leaders in order to get answers to these questions. Public leaders are expected to come to an understanding about the crisis situation that is unfolding, and the possible consequences it may have (Rosenthal et al., 1989; Boin et al., 2005; Boin & 't Hart, 2010; Boin et al., 2013). Essentially, they have to pinpoint what values in society are under threat, or will be threatened and come up with adequate and timely responses in order to minimize threats. However, the uncertainty surrounding the exact details of current events are not always limited to the public, as essential information is often lacking. In the end, leaders are tasked with making vital decisions in order to manage the crisis, while often lacking essential information about consequences when it comes to making or deciding against making certain decisions (Boin et al., 2005)

Journalists and other actors in the media play an important role in these times as well, as they produce and tell stories that may help influence the perspectives of citizens towards the crisis (Boin et al., 2005, p 3). The role of the media is vital, as they can turn the search for answers to questions of accountability into a blame game (Rosenthal et al., 1989; Boin, McConnell, & 't Hart, 2010; Boin et al., 2013)

2.2   Leadership challenges during crises

The academic discourse (Boin et al., 2005; Boin & 't Hart, 2010; Boin et al., 2013; Stern, 2013). speaks of several key tasks that leaders need to take upon themselves, in order to minimize the negative consequences of a crisis. A leader needs to first *recognize* a threat, and then *make sense* of the details and potential impact it will have. Then, with the help of advisors and experts, the leader should *make decisions* on the strategic level.

As these decisions often need to be carried out and maintained by different organisations and agencies, the leader should focus on *coordinating* in order to enhance cooperation and communication between different actors. After the government has started its response to the crisis in the form of policy, the public leader should engage in *meaning-making*. As mentioned above, uncertainty about the effect of the crisis, and what needs to be done to minimize the risks hits both the public and those responsible for managing the crisis. For the sake of this research, the leader's challenge of engaging in meaning-making will be outlined further below. Finally, when decisions are made, policies are created and implemented, it is time to look back at the crisis. Because of its disruptive nature, crises result in a need for self-examination, and a strong urge to prevent it from ever happening again. *Learning* from a crisis is important, both during a crisis (what is working?), and once the normal way of life has returned (what did work?) (Boin et al., 2013)

2.3   Meaning-making: framing your narrative

The upcoming part will elaborate further on communication during crises and the task of meaning-making. This study aims to first assess the extent to which PM Rutte engaged in meaning-making whilst giving speeches and press conferences during the Covid-19 pandemic. The two speeches can be remarked as two of the most important moments in terms of communication about the Covid-19 crisis towards the Dutch public. During the crisis, the Dutch government has held a total of 70 press conferences. During these official moments, PM Rutte, accompanied by the responsible Minister of Public Health, has been introducing new measures in front of the press. These press conferences have been broadcast to national television every time, and an overview of the new measures and possible exceptions has been published soon after the press conference on government website rijksoverheid.nl.

Below, this research will set out literature from various sources on meaning-making and the role of public leaders in this process. From this overview, specifics on operationalisation in terms of what I will look for in the different public addresses will be touched upon.

Crisis communication can be broadly defined as 'the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation' (Coombs, 2010). A big part of research into crisis communication has focused on crisis response strategies focused on repairing the image or reputation of an organisation after a crisis has occurred. One of the more rich frameworks for crisis response strategies is image repair theory (IRT) developed by William Benoit (1995). This form of crisis response strategy is almost always associated with organisations trying to save face in the case of wrongdoing for which they carry responsibility to some degree. The main goal of getting in contact with stakeholders and other actors is to save face and restore trust in the organisation. However, the crisis in question may not be the result of a mistake by a company or organisation, like in the case of a terrorist attack, or a natural disaster like hurricanes and earthquakes. Or in the case of this research, a world-wide pandemic that initially surprised every national government. The goals of public addresses in these kinds of crisis situations differ from saving reputation and company's earnings (Griffin-Padgett & Allison, 2010). In these types of disasters and crises, the public leader is not merely tasked with restoring faith in the government. As people who were exposed to the disaster or crisis are often harmed psychosocially, the leader should go further than showing sympathy and apologizing in order to help people cope with the consequences of a crisis (Jong & Brataas, 2021).

As Griffin-Padgett and Allison (2010) argued, a crisis for which a government cannot be held accountable benefits from communication focused on regaining public confidence and resilience of the affected community. Their analysis of meaning-making efforts by mayor Giuliani and mayor Nagin after the 9/11 attacks and hurricane Katrina found that appearance of authen-

ticity was an important factor in their public addresses, as well as speaking directly to citizens and nationals making clear that they cared about their well-being (Griffin-Padgett & Allison, 2010).

Thus, meaning-making involves public leaders trying to reduce both the political and public uncertainty that comes along with the disruptive nature of a crisis (Boin et al., 2005). When a crisis unfolds, the sense of normalcy among citizens disappears and they feel an urgent threat to their way of life. As 't Hart (1993) puts it, a crisis indicates that institutions have stopped providing meaning. It is upon public leaders to step in and fill this vacuum (Ansell et al., 2014). They are required to address the concerns of the public, and deliver a persuasive frame or narrative through which the current events can be interpreted (Boin et al., 2013). As a public leader engages in providing meaning to the threatening situation, he or she needs to focus on giving answers to questions from the public. People want to know what is going on, how it happened, who can be held responsible, and what is being done to minimize potential harmful consequences. Public leaders need to deliver a strategy on how they plan on restoring the sense of normalcy that was disrupted by the crisis (Boin et al., 2005, 2013). Citizens turn to their leaders when a crisis hits, as they want to get a grasp of what the urgent threat means for their personal way of life. Depending on the crisis, this request to the government and specifically those leading governments can be hard to deliver on.

Public leaders are not the only actors trying to get their interpretation of the crisis to be accepted by the public. Other political actors compete with leaders to shape the public's view of the crisis. The perception they present may affect the level of support of the ongoing crisis management strategy (Boin et al., 2005, 2013; Ansell et al., 2014). When it comes to actors stepping into the vacuum of a crisis and the insecurity it leaves behind, non-political actors like journalists and news agencies cannot be neglected.

Mass media are important when it comes to discovering, conveying and (de-)escalating crises. Journalists may do their civic duty of acting as a check and balance for political power by critically evaluating crisis management strategies (Boin et al., 2005).

Meaning-making during Covid-19
In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis situation it brought about in the Netherlands, responsibility about the crisis situation from occurring cannot be related to any failure from the Dutch government or state agency. Though, as the essential threat of the pandemic is aimed at the public health of the country, the government still holds responsibility of protecting its citizens and maintaining a sustainable level of people in need of medical treatment. Thus, a crisis communication approach in the case of the COVID-19 crisis in the Netherlands should not be solely focused on showing comfort and focusing on resilience. Public leaders should also focus on painting a narrative that puts emphasis on the seriousness of the situation and convinces people to take action when it comes it changing their behaviour along the guidelines put out by the government.

As the government is looked upon to protect its citizens, I argue the public addresses should also be focused on providing meaning to the current crisis situation in terms of how it will affect everyone's life as they know it. Especially because of the disruptive nature of the crisis, particular focus should be drawn to how the government is planning on how to return the sense of normalcy. This may be particularly tricky, as the disruptive nature of the crisis stems largely from measures and rules the government itself has imposed. As a result, the government should focus on painting a clear picture of the current crisis situation and explaining the necessity of the measures taken. Creating understanding of the situation is important, as it will result in more understanding, more support and eventually more compliance which in turn affects the effectiveness of the measures in terms of avoiding the spread of

the virus. As the crisis is unparalleled in terms of length and disruptiveness, focusing on the necessity of new impactful measures is important, as it will lead to more compliance among the public.

These characteristics of meaning-making and general expectations of public leaders in public addresses, as well as the expectations specifically applicable to the current case lead to the following three sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: How do the two speeches in March and December differ in overall message, related to the context of the crisis at that moment in time?

Sub-question 2: To what extent were components of meaning making in terms of taking responsibility, taking away uncertainty and presenting a strategy on ending the crisis present in the different public addresses? And what lessons can be drawn from that?

Sub-question 3: To what extent and how did PM Rutte address and render the necessity of the different measures imposed on the public? And what lessons can be drawn from that?

2.4   Social media and emotions during crises

Aforesaid, uncertainty about what is happening, how it will affect you, and what we can do about it is a key feature of a crisis. As a result, the appetite for information increases during a crisis. The use of social media increases during a crisis because of this hunger for more details on what is happening (Westerman, Spence, & Heide, 2014). Therefore, emergency managers have incorporated social media usage in their strategies, as it allows them to quickly reach a big number of individuals and provide them with information before, during and after a crisis situation (Palen & Liu, 2007; Lindsay, 2012). Graham, Avery and Park (2015) studied the use of social media in crisis communication by local government officials in the United States, and found that the use depends on the nature of the crisis. Local government officials used social media significantly more during public health crises compared to natural disasters, political, social or criminal crises.

As this study focuses on reactions to meaning-making frames on Twitter, a short introduction about the social media platform and its characteristics in general, and especially during crises is needed.

Twitter is a social media platform that is used internationally by its users to share their reactions and emotions in a short message, which is called a Tweet. The way Twitter and its mechanics are built affects the quickness in which information is shared by its users. It facilitates the dissemination of information or an opinionated emotion about events in real-time. Reason for this is first and foremost a characteristic of social media in general, it bodes the opportunity to quickly express your opinion about any topic or to react to another person's opinion. However, when you compare Twitter to another big social media platform like Facebook, the former offers a bigger potential when it comes to sharing information and emotions and interacting with other users in general. On Twitter, you can follow certain people and as a result only see the Tweets from those users in your timeline. However, However, when you compare Twitter to another big social media platform like Facebook, the former offers a bigger potential when it comes to sharing information and emotions and interacting with other users in general. On Twitter, you can follow certain people and as a result only see the Tweets from those users in your timeline. However, because of the 'retweet' function that exists, users can easily repost an original Tweet from a user, resulting in this Tweet reaching users that do not follow that user. Others have referred to this as a forwarding mechanism (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010; Starbird, Maddock, Orand, Achterman, & Mason, 2014)

Because of these characteristics, it is worth looking into the overall Twitter activity during and in the short aftermath of the two speeches. Those two moments are of high importance when it comes to the sharing of information on the state of the Covid-19 crisis and the envisioned strategy to get out of the crisis. As mentioned above, the appetite for information increases during a crisis as a result of the uncertainty surrounding the crisis and its disruptive

nature. Back, Küfner and Egloff (2010) studied the effect of information on the emotional state of people affected by a crisis. They analysed the use of emotional words in messages sent to text pagers within the United States on September 11. They divided messages in three different states of emotion; sadness, anxiety and anger. They related these feelings against different events during the crisis, like the initial plane crash, the collapse of the two towers and the first addresses to the public by New York mayor Rudy Giuliani and US President George Bush. They found that feelings of anxiety spiked shortly after certain events like the planes crashing into the building and information about the terrorist attacks coming out. However, anxiety levels dropped back to base level soon. They argue this may be the result of the spread of information, and therefore as the decline of uncertainty among the public (Back et al., 2010). This finding was further tested by (Jong & Dückers, 2016), as they analysed the online Twitter activity during a hijacking crisis in a broadcasting station. They found a spike in the use of emotional words when news broke that a man carrying a gun entered the broadcasting studio. The use dropped back down quickly after it was published that the man was arrested. Because of these findings, I expect to find a spike in the use of emotional words during the two speeches, as people are anticipating what the tone of the overall message would be. I expect the use of emotional words in Tweets to fall after PM Rutte has delivered his message and information on the current state and the crisis management strategy has reached the public. These earlier findings about the use of emotional words in online messages during and in the short aftermath of a crisis lead to the following sub-question:

Sub-question 4: To what extent did the use of emotional words first spike, and then drop after information about the COVID-19 crisis was spread during the speech in March 2020?

3   Method

This study will now turn to the research design and address the research methods chosen to provide answers to the aforementioned research question and sub-questions. Limitations of this research in terms of reliability and validity associated with the chosen research design and methods will be outlined.

3.1   Research design

This research will follow the research design of a case study. The goal of this study is to explore reactions on Twitter as well as in the traditional media to public addresses and specifically meaning-making efforts during a crisis. The COVID-19 crisis in general bodes for a unique crisis that has made an impact on societies everywhere around the world. In the specific case of the Netherlands, the crisis that occurred as a result of the worldwide spread of SARS-CoV-2 resulted in a sharp increase in public addresses between the government and the public in the form of press conferences and two speeches held on national television. These moments of interaction with the public and media are of vital importance during a long-lasting and disruptive crisis like the COVID-19 crisis, as spirits can be lifted and perspectives on short- and long-term strategies on how to return the state of normalcy can be framed.

3.2   Data

In order to find answers to my research question and subsequent sub-questions, I will first need to analyse the speeches and press conferences to establish the extent to which PM Rutte engaged in meaning making efforts. The full transcripts of these public addresses can be found online at rijksoverheid.nl in Dutch.

Secondly, to analyse the public reactions to Twitter to the public addresses, as well as the specific frames surrounding the introduced measures concerned with stopping the spread of SARS-CoV-2. Tweets sent during and in the short aftermath of three different public addresses during the COVID-19 pandemic will be collected using Obi4Wan, an online web tool for qualitative research. The software will enable me to capture a certain sample of Tweets by searching for keywords in any given period. Search queries containing specific combinations of keywords and commands can be used to retrieve Tweets. Obi4Wan is partnered with and used by various customer-focused companies in the field of customer engagement and data-analysis and is widely used as an online monitoring tool by safety regions and municipalities in times of crisis in the Netherlands.

Thirdly, to assess for the extent to which the traditional media were positive about the frames placed by PM Rutte, I will collect and analyse articles about the frames from five of the most-visited online news-sites in the Netherlands: nu.nl, nos.nl, ad.nl, and nrc.nl (Bakker, 2018) These articles can be found by searching for keywords on these websites.

3.3   Research method

The speeches and press conferences collected from rijksoverheid.nl will be analysed by the means of a discourse analysis. Public leaders engaging in the effort of meaning-making do so to achieve a certain goal. The choice to use a specific word or put emphasis on a particular concept in addresses directed to the public may contribute to construct and frame a specific view on the current crisis events. By using discourse analysis, the contextual meaning of the language used by PM Rutte can be assessed to eventually place the total of his words in the context of meaning-making.

As previously mentioned, this study argues the meaning-making efforts by PM Rutte should consist of taking away uncertainty, showing that the government is taking responsibility of managing the crisis and protecting its citizens, and to present a plan on how the government intends to return the state of normalcy. Regarding the first objective, particular focus will be drawn to PM Rutte giving clear information about what is happening and what this will mean for society as a whole and for people on a personal level. He needs to answer the basic questions: 'What is happening?' and 'What does this mean for me?'.

Secondly, PM Rutte should be showing the Dutch government is taking responsibility of protecting the Dutch public. For this reason, particular attention will be turned towards him speaking directly to citizens, using language to restore their faith in the government willing and able to protect them against potentially deadly consequences of the virus. However, as it was already clear at the time of the speech in March that the virus would not pose a deadly threat to a majority of the people, the responsibility of stopping the spread of the virus may also be allocated towards the people as a whole. For this reason, language used by PM Rutte speaking to feelings of responsibility and solidarity will be highlighted.

Third and lastly, PM Rutte needs to provide an answer to the question: 'How are we going to get out of this?' It is important to be clear about how the government plans to protect its citizens from falling ill with potential deadly consequences in a health-crisis like the COVID-19 crisis. However, this plan may very well impact life as people know it in a disruptive way, raising the question when this strategy can be let go, the sense of normalcy can return and life as people know it may be continued. This study will highlight language focusing on painting clarity in regard to a situation which would allow the government to let go of its strategy or at least loosen it to some degree.

This situation may be painted by examples or more abstractly by presenting numbers on infection rates or the amount of people converted to intensive care departments per day.

After, to get insights into the most immediate reactions as well as the online activity surrounding the frames in the long term visual presentations of the amount of Tweets over time will be presented. To establish an understanding of the overall sentiment of these specific Tweets, tag-clouds and hashtag-clouds presenting the most-used words and hashtags in the Tweets containing one of the searched keywords will be presented. Following these visual presentations, specific words carrying an emotional message will be individually highlighted.

Lastly, the articles collected from the Dutch news sites will be analysed by the means of a content analysis. The articles will be categorised to either one of the three frames and then analysed, interpreted and eventually coded either positive, negative, or neutral regarding the article's overall sentiment regarding that frame.

Regarding the discourse and content analysis, some more in-depth explanation is needed about their characteristics as research methods in general, as well as their roles in this specific research. Both research methods are used to analyse communication pieces like speeches, news articles and interviews and are conducted to establish the message behind the overall communication. Where the two differ, is the specific focus of the methods. First, discourse analysis is a method of the more qualitative matter whereas content analysis should be regarded as a quantitative research method.

Secondly, discourse analysis focuses on specific language, both verbal and non-verbal, and the way it is used in specific contexts. Content analysis is concerned with the content as a whole, more focusing on the general message of the content in question. For this specific study, the clear difference between the two research methods can be allocated to the quantitative and qualitative nature.

The discourse analysis of the speeches and press conferences by PM Rutte will focus on the use of certain words, highlighting those words and placing those in the context of meaning-making, making it a qualitative method. The content analysis will focus on coding each news article either positive, negative or neutral concerning the specific frame it addresses. The articles will be read and the words used will be interpreted whether the overall message or tone of the article is either negative, positive or neutral. But no language and potential choices that preceded the decision to incorporate certain words in the article will be analysed, as it is not the goal of this study to place the discourse of the media in context of meaning-making during the COVID-19 crisis, but to establish to extent which the traditional media reacted positively towards different meaning-making frames.

3.4   Limitations

The upcoming part will go in on the limitations of this study that stem from the choice for the specific research design and methods mentioned above. As this study follows a single case design, implications towards theory on meaning-making and emotions during crises may be fully valid. The aforementioned uniqueness of the COVID-19 crisis as a case in the complete academic discourse on crises provides for a chance to check for assumptions about meaning-making and its workings. Though, this status of the case as an outlier in terms of the length and degree of impact on society, may result in possible difficulties to relate findings and interpretations to other crises and the academic discourse on crises in general.

Second, a content and discourse analysis almost always involves a level of subjectivity to some degree. The words spoken by PM Rutte are interpreted and placed within the context of meaning-making, but the author of this research can only form his own interpretation of the public addresses. This study does go into the specific considerations that led to decisions to incorporate certain words in his speech, but these remain interpretations rather than results from empirical evidence. The coding of the news articles also involves a degree of subjectivity and were executed by a single person, hurting the reliability of the study as another person could interpret and code the articles differently.

Third, by using Obi4Wan as a tool to collect and analyse Tweets this study depends on the software that drives the search engine that delivers a set amount of Tweets after a specific search query. The search engine collects all Tweets containing at least one keyword or a combination of keywords depending on the correlated search query, but it is unknown how the algorithms behind the search engine work specifically. Furthermore, tagclouds highlighting the most used words and hashtags in the specific sample of Tweets are also created by the means of an algorithm which specifics are unknown. However, the wide use of Obi4Wan as a software by various government agencies

like safety regions and municipalities, specifically in times of crises, show that the software is fit for a research like the current one.

Fourth and lastly, by using a discourse analysis the use of words and the meaning behind them in the context of the crisis are important. Just like most public leaders, Prime-Minister Rutte is consulted by a speech writer who influences the final product what will be read to the public to a substantial degree. However, Mark Rutte is the individual that speaks and is looked at by the public, being the public official with authority and the one expected to deliver information on the crisis situation. For this reason, the addresses in the speeches and press conferences should be regarded as his words and are fit to be analysed in the context of meaning-making as public leaders should stand up and provide meaning to the crisis.

4   Case

This study focuses on the speeches on the 16th of March and the 14th of December 2020, as well as the press conferences in January 2021. Before these public addresses and the reactions they drew on Twitter as well as in traditional media can be analysed, I will shortly set out the events in the Netherlands during the COVID-19 crisis to set the stage.

First cases in the Netherlands
The Covid-19 virus was first diagnosed in the Netherlands on the 27th of February, 2020. A man got infected with the virus during a work-visit in Italy, and brought the virus with him when he returned to the Netherlands (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020a). However, after the National Institute of Public Health (RIVM) investigated the first cases of Covid-19 infections in the Netherlands, they concluded that the virus had been present in the Netherlands since the 15th of February (Rosman, 2020). The RIVM argues that the people returning from vacation in the month of February, in addition to the official holiday of 'carnaval' in mostly the south of the Netherlands have contributed greatly to the spread of the virus (Rosman, 2020). As of February 6, 2021, a little short of a year later, more than one million people in the Netherlands have tested positive for the Covid-19 virus (NOS, 2021).

Policy-making during the crisis
The response from the Dutch government to the virus has been heavily influenced by advice from the so-called Outbreak Management Team (OMT). The OMT consists of specialists and experts who have a role in organisations that play an important role when it comes to controlling new infections of Covid-19. Most of them have positions in hospitals, universities and other organisations that oversee healthcare. The Dutch government has based its response to the crisis primarily on the capacity of healthcare in hospitals, and especially the capacity of intensive care departments in those hospitals.

5   Results

5.1   Meaning-making in the speeches

In the upcoming part, this study will first analyse the three public addresses of PM Rutte which were mentioned above: the speech in March 2020, the speech in December 2020, and the press conferences leading up to the decision to impose the curfew. This analysis will be conducted by the means of a discourse analysis, and will primarily focus on the use of words and the intent behind them in the context of meaning-making in the current crisis. For the sake of this research, these words will be highlighted and interpreted immediately after, standing out from the rest of the upcoming section in which results will be just presented and little to no interpretation will be made until the discussion. The relevance of words in discourse analysis in general led to this choice, as a quick interpretation of the words fits better in the structure of this study. The results of the more general analysis of what happens in the speech and how PM Rutte engages in the task of meaning-making and how this effort relates to existing literature will be presented separately.

Then, the results of the data-analysis of the online activity on Twitter surrounding the public addresses as well as the three different frames will be presented. Lastly, the results of the content analysis of the traditional media's reporting surrounding the frames will be outlined. After the analysis, the findings will be discussed and related and placed in the context of the literature.

5.1.1   March 16

Lead-up to the speech in March 2020
After the first cases of the Covid-19 virus appeared in the Netherlands, the government announced its first notable measure against the virus on the 9th of March. In a press conference, PM Rutte announced the cabinet's advice to avoid shaking hands to stop the spread of the virus among Dutch citizens. People of the province of Noord-Brabant were urged to work from home if possible (NOS, 2020a) Three days later, on the 12th of March, the government announced additional measures for all people, as the total number of people infected with the Covid-19 virus surpassed 500 (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2020a). People suffering from symptoms of a Covid-19 infection, like coughing, having a cold, and a fever, were urged to stay at home. The government decided to ban all gatherings with more than a 100 people, including theatres, sport clubs, museums, and sporting games. Colleges of higher education and universities cancelled their physical lectures and examinations, and switched over to a form of online education. Initially, the government decided to keep primary, secondary and secondary vocational education schools open, as numbers indicated that little infections occurred inside these schools, and among children (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2020). However, as a result of pressure from various organisations concerned with defending the interests of schools, primary, secondary, and secondary vocational education schools closed on the 15th. On that day, the government decided to close all restaurants, bars, gyms, sauna's, and sex-clubs as well (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020d).

The next day, PM Rutte addressed the whole country by appearing on national television, and delivering a speech on the current state of the Covid-19 crisis in the country and the envisioned strategy for the upcoming time. The speech attracted a live viewership of 7.6 million people (NOS, 2020b).

Taking away feelings of uncertainty

Rutte starts off his speech by stating that the coronavirus is clutching the Netherlands, as well as the world. He acknowledges the challenges that lie ahead, and specifically uses the word together[1] Rutte continues by presenting the current context of the crisis, acknowledging the great uncertainty that is felt by everyone in the country. Rutte wishes the families of those deceased as a result of a Covid-19 infection his condolences and empathy, as well as strength to those recovering from an infection at home, or in the hospital. Rutte continues by directly addressing the elderly and those with a weakened condition. He stresses that he understands them having big worries, and that is why the government is making it its priority to minimize the risks for them (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b).

In the preceding part of the speech, the use of words by PM Rutte can be linked to decisions made by him and his communication consultants with regard to the objective of meaning-making. To start off, by choosing to specifically use the word 'together' Rutte aims to present the crisis at hand as a battle in the context of 'us versus them'. By addressing the whole nation of the Netherlands and contextualizing the crisis as a challenge that 'we' need to overcome, PM Rutte tries to shift and almost spread out responsibility to every single individual. This idea of needing each other in this crisis is also prevalent in the future communication from the government, as a common catchphrase found on billboards in the Netherlands read; 'only together, we will control covid-19'.[2] PM Rutte also addresses the uncertainty of the current crisis situation and the looming threat, which are key features of crises as mentioned earlier.

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[1]'Samen staan we voor een opgave van enorme omvang' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[2]'Álleen samen krijgen we corona onder controle'

Concerning the virus and the potential threat it can pose for the health of Dutch citizens, PM Rutte specifically addresses elderly people and those with a weakened condition. He primarily takes responsibility of protecting the health of those that are threatened the most, but by specifically turning his attention to this group, other Dutch populations may feel less threatened when it comes to the deadliness of the virus itself.

PM Rutte continues his speech by stating that 'everyone has questions'[3], and follows up by stating several possible questions that people might have about the current situation. He stresses that he understands 'information travels quicker than light'[4] but the answers to the aforementioned questions should be based off the insights and experience of experts. Furthermore, PM Rutte names these individual experts or organisations, and underlines again that the measures that have been taken in the past were all based on their advice. He stresses once more that 'basing the response to the virus on scientific expertise and reliable facts is of vital importance'[5] After, PM Rutte switches to the main message of his address of that night, and explicitly mentions that his message is not easy. He paints the difficulty of the current situation by stating that the virus is among us, and that it will remain among us in the near future. Furthermore, reality is 'that in the near future, a big part of the Dutch population will become infected with the virus'[6].

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[3]'We zitten allemaal met vragen' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[4]'In de wereld van vandaag zijn nieuws en informatie sneller dan het licht' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[5]'En het is belangrijk dat we op dat kompas van wetenschappelijke kennis en betrouwbare feiten blijven varen' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[6]'De realiteit is ook dat de komende tijd een groot deel van de Nederlandse bevolking met het virus besmet zal raken' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

PM Rutte continues the contextualization of the situation by speaking about possible slowing down the spread of the virus, until a vaccine is available. Furthermore, he adds that while taking measures to slow down the spread of the virus, 'we can build up controlled herd immunity'[7]

PM Rutte follows up on his focus on the uncertainty of the crisis situation and the concerns that are present among all people in society. The prime-minister explicitly acknowledges people having questions about the current situation, and continues by naming various possible questions that people may have, and are seeking answers to. Questions like: 'What can I do to best protect myself and others around me?'[8] 'Can a children's party still continue? And what about a family weekend? A wedding?'[9].

The choice to include these questions in his speech, is mainly aimed towards showing Dutch citizens that the government understands their concerns. It may be the case that an individual or bigger group of people watching the speech was wondering this exact same question, or at least have a concern that draws similarities. Furthermore, by choosing to present questions about events that almost always occur in people's personal space, PM Rutte already starts to paint the potential of the effects of the crisis that may go as far as the personal life and space of every citizen. He does not turn to giving answers to those questions, but reaffirms the importance of the insights and experience of experts.

What the Prime Minister does address, is the harsh reality that the current crisis situation is here to stay for some time. Furthermore, PM Rutte adds that in the upcoming months, a big part of the Dutch citizens will become infected by the virus, as he was told by experts. By breaking this difficult

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[7]'... dat we in afwachting van een vaccin of medicijn de verspreiding van het virus kunnen afremmen en tegelijkertijd gecontroleerd groepsimmuniteit op kunnen bouwen' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[8]'Wat kan ik doen om mezelf en de mensen om me heen te beschermen?' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[9]'Kan een kinderfeestje nog doorgaan? Een familieweekend? Een bruiloft?' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

message, the government underlines the seriousness of the health crisis at hand, and furthermore, commits to the objective of giving information in order to take away feelings of uncertainty among the public.

Eyes on the solution: three scenarios
PM Rutte devoted the first part of his speech to speaking about the current situation of the crisis and providing meaning to the seriousness of the situation and the potential harm it can do to the general health of the public. He addresses what is being done about the virus briefly, by speaking directly to the elderly citizens and those with a weakened condition, and assuring them that 'it's the absolute priority to minimize the risks for them'[10]. More importantly, PM Rutte speaks about the long-term strategy to best protect the country's citizens, and mentions two vital elements of the government's long-term strategy: herd immunity and vaccinating. As it was the first time these two concepts were named in a public address, the Prime Minister follows up by stating 'that is something I need to explain'[11], showing that he is aware of the fact that these two concepts and its relevance for the crisis are relatively new for the general public.

PM Rutte continues by explaining the way immunity works, and how it could possibly help in the battle against the spread of the virus according to the experts that consulted him. He says that people are mostly immune after contracting an infection by the Covid-19 virus, and provides the measles as an example. He names a big group of people which are immune for the virus a 'wall protecting elderly and those with a weakened condition'[12].

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[10]'... dat het onze absolute prioriteit is de risico's voor u zo klein mogelijk te maken' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[11]'Dat moet ik uitleggen' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[12]'Met groepsimmuniteit bouw je als het ware een beschermende muur om hen heen' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

The prime minister continues on this idea of letting the virus run its course between people to whom the virus does not pose a serious danger considering their health. He states that 'all things considered, there are three possible scenarios'[13], and elaborates more on the government's preferred choice of controlling the virus and its spread among low-risk people. He underlines the main goal of this strategy; to keep the amount of people in the nursing homes, hospitals, and especially the intensive care departments to a level at which newly infected people still can get treatment. Two other strategy options are also explained: firstly letting the virus run its course, and secondly, 'locking up the country'[14]. The Prime-Minister explains why the government does not prefer those two strategy options, as in the first scenario hospitals and nursing homes would become overcrowded, and as a result people might not be able to get treatment for a Covid-19-infection, or even a treatment that is part of regular healthcare. The latter scenario is labelled as 'feasible at first sight'[15] by the Prime-Minister, but he stresses the opinions of experts that highlighted the potential duration of such a lockdown, that could come reach the length of a year or even longer. Furthermore, PM Rutte stresses that even if it would be possible to stay inside for such a long time, the virus will still have the opportunity to spread again once such a lockdown has been lifted.

PM Rutte continues by stressing that the measures which were imposed earlier, are all focused on the first strategy, with the goal of maximising the control on the virus. Furthermore, he does not present a deadline on the horizon in the form of a date at which the current measures end. Additionally, he emphasizes that the government and its consulting experts will keep monitoring the crisis situation and developments at the academic level in or-

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[13]'Alles overziend, zijn er 3 mogelijke scenario's' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[14]'Dat betekent dat het land helemaal op slot gaat' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[15]'Zo'n rigoureuze aanpak kan op het oog aantrekkelijk lijken. . . ' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

der to assess whether measures might be relaxed or even improved in amount or strength. The goal is to 'find a balance between taking much-needed measures and letting life continue as people know it'[16].

This search for a balance can be associated with the general crisis management strategy of maximising control of the virus that is preferred by the government. This in order to keep the amount of people needing medical treatment in hospitals and nursing homes at a manageable level. PM Rutte again relates to this strategy of balancing taking measures and letting the normal way of life continue as he emphasises that the government will not 'turn a blind eye for the economic consequences of this crisis'[17]. He acknowledges the concerns people have for their jobs or business, and names several examples of various entrepreneurs who may worry as a result of the measures that have been imposed by the government. To address these concerns, the Prime-Minister affirms stresses that the government will do what is needed to prevent business from failing or people losing their jobs. PM Rutte finishes off his speech by again touching upon the solidarity that is needed to overcome the challenges that lie ahead. For a last time, he speaks about the great uncertainty of the current situation and the near future, but put outs what we do know: 'we need to do this with all of the 17 million people in the Netherlands'[18], and concludes by saying 'I am counting on you'[19].

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[16]'Het blijft zoeken naar de balans tussen maatregelen nemen die nodig zijn en het gewone leven zo veel mogelijk door laten gaan' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[17]'Tegelijkertijd kunnen en zullen we onze ogen niet sluiten voor de economische gevolgen van deze crisis' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[18]'... we moeten dit echt met 17 miljoen mensen doen' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

[19]'Ik reken op u' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b)

5.1.2   Main takeaways from the March speech

As mentioned earlier in the method section of this study, I argue that the meaning-making effort by PM Rutte should consists of three core components: Reducing uncertainty surrounding the crisis situation, showing that the government is taking responsibility of managing the crisis; which in this case entails protecting its citizens for the potentially deadly consequences of the virus, and lastly, presenting a plan on how to get out the crisis situation and to return the sense of normalcy.

Uncertainty

It is not always easy to be truthful about the challenges that lie ahead and the way they will disrupt the normal way of life of every person. To add to that, the feelings of uncertainty that are felt among the public, are also shared by those responsible for managing the crisis. They often lack the essential information about the potential causes and consequences of the crisis that they are facing, but citizens turn to them for answers to their concerns (Boin et al., 2005). However, by presenting the public with a complete picture of the current situation and the expectations for the future, you can take away the most immediate concerns about the looming threat that live among people. PM Rutte does not try to minimize or 'sugar-coat' the seriousness of the current situation in his March speech by coming clear about the current crisis situation and the near future that involves the virus. He paints a clear picture of the difficulty in terms of both the decisions that have to be made by the government, as well as the potential effect of those decisions on the everyday life of Dutch citizens. The Prime-Minister shows his understanding of the uncertainty that is felt among the public, but puts emphasis on the importance of experts and their insights in order to manage this crisis in an adequate way.

Even if the overall message of the information is on the negative side, it is important to present the public with information, in order to take away the uncertainty about the way the threat will affect their personal way of living (Ansell et al., 2014).

Responsibility

Taking responsibility and rendering accountability is important in crises, as it is vital in order to restore and keep the trust in the government handling the crisis (Boin et al., 2013). However, the way the COVID-19 crisis relates to crises in general terms, it is near impossible to render accountability for the threat at hand. This was especially the case in March 2020, when the amount of information on the virus itself and its origins was scarce. Though, as argued before, the Dutch government still holds responsibility for managing the crisis at hand and this responsibility primarily comes down to protecting its citizens for the virus by stopping or at least decreasing the spread of it. The government already showed it is taking the virus itself and the potential harm it could do to the country serious for several weeks as it has been imposing measures aimed towards stopping the spread of the virus. During the speech, PM Rutte invigorates this message by specifically turning his attention to those people to whom the virus poses a threat in a deadly way early in his address.

Dilemmalogica

A more important part of the March speech is the part presenting three possible ways of managing the health-crisis at hand strategy-wise. The choice made by PM Rutte to present these three strategies in his speech, is in line with 'dilemmalogica' (Rijnja, 2018). This idea on communication stresses the importance of already addressing the public about the problem at hand, rather than only communicating with them once a solution for the crisis at hand is set. Being transparent about the problem at hand, and the sometimes difficult considerations that have to be made in order to find a solution, will result in more understanding from citizens.

Rijnja (2018) argues that when people are informed about the considerations that preceded government decisions, they will take a positive stance towards efforts from the government that may go as far as affecting their personal lives. Dilemmalogica can be used in different forms of communication, and is especially useful when presenting your perspective on crisis events, and trying to convince the public of your ideas on how to get out of the crisis situation. PM Rutte applies the idea behind dilemmalogica to his speech when he speaks of a 'difficult message' that he needs to give to the public. Furthermore, he presents three possible ways of coping with the crisis and its effects, and continues to explain why the government has chosen this exact strategy, based on the insights of experts that were consulted. As mentioned above, the day before this speech was aired on live national television, the government headed by Mark Rutte introduced new measures which closed all schools, gyms, restaurants and bars. By coming clean about the considerations and decision-making process which took place prior to the moment of that ultimate decision, the government tries to get more understanding for these relatively radical measures.

5.1.3   December 14

Lead-up to the speech in December 2020
As in most European countries, the first wave of the Covid-19 virus started to fade out as the months of May and June came, and with that decline, the government saw fit to cancel some measures. The number of daily new confirmed cases per million people spiked as high as 65 in the Netherlands in the middle of the month of April, but quickly dropped down to 15 during May. The number of daily new confirmed cases per million people did not get above 10 in the weeks between June 16th and and July 25th. However, the number continuously grew during the months of September and October, reaching as high as a total of 568 new confirmed cases on the 31st of October (Our World in Data, March 4, 2021).

As a result of measures imposed by the government two weeks earlier on the 14th of October, the number dropped again in the month of November. However, the government needed to take additional measures, as the number of new confirmed cases per million people started rising quickly again in the month of December.

During a press conference about the measures taken against the spread of the Covid-19 virus on the 8th of December, PM Rutte said the country 'found itself at a crossroad'[20]. The amount of new people admitted to the intensive care departments was as high as 20 at that moment in time, while an amount of 10 was envisioned to be an amount at which measures could be relaxed. PM Rutte presented this moment in time as a choice between either everybody committing to behave in line with the current measures in order to lower that number. Or if that number would keep on rising, the government would be forced to introduce new measures quickly, which would be even more difficult as Christmas was right around the corner (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020e).

On the 14th of December, PM Rutte addressed the nation from his office for a second time during the crisis. In this speech, PM Rutte announced the start of a 'hard lockdown', starting the 15th of December until at least the 19th of January. Under these new measures, the government forced all non-essential shops to close their doors. Gyms closed again, and sporting activities outside for people over the age of 17 were limited to a maximum of two people. Furthermore, all forms of education were forced to switch to a form of online education; primary and secondary schools closed again (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020e). The second speech from Mark Rutte beat the one back in March in terms of live viewers, as 8.4 million people watched the speech live (NOS, 2020c).

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[20]'... de realiteit is dat we op een tweesprong staan' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020e)

PM Rutte starts off his second speech during the Covid-19 crisis by referring
back to his speech back in March, as well as to his comments on the 'cross-
road' the country was at during his press conference on the 8th of December,
only six days ago. He relates back to the difficult message that he had to
deliver during his speech in March, and again tells the public he has got
a radical message for them. As was addressed by the government six days
ago, if the amount of new people admitted to the intensive care departments
did not decrease, new measures would be needed. PM Rutte does not speak
about the numbers in that detail, but refers back to this promise by speaking
about 'infection numbers that are increasing in rapid fashion'[21]. Because of
this, the country will be going into a lockdown for at least the upcoming five
weeks. As the Prime-Minister adds more dramatically: 'The Netherlands
will be locked up'[22]. As it might not be entirely clear what this entails, the
Prime-Minister continues by explaining what is going to happen and how
this will affect the everyday life of Dutch citizens. He presents the plan to
close all places where people may meet each other, and outlines the overall
strategy behind this lockdown: to minimize personal contact between people
to the greatest extent. To fortify his explanation of the envisioned lockdown,
PM Rutte refers back to the situation back in spring. He states that 'we
all remember the sights back in spring. Empty highways, empty trains and
busses, empty offices and classes, empty shopping streets. We need to go
back to that'[23].

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[21]'... als de besmettingscijfers zouden stijgen. En dat is helaas precies wat we sindsdien
in sneltreinvaart zien gebeuren' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020e)

[22]'Nederland gaat op slot' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020e)

[23]'We herinneren ons allemaal nog de beelden van dit voorjaar. Lege snelwegen, lege
treinen en bussen, lege kantoren en schoolklassen, lege winkelstraten. Daar moeten we
naar terug' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020e)

Immediately after PM Rutte speaks about the decision to impose a lockdown, he starts clarifying what this will entail. Even though his first speech on national television was nine months ago, people may still remember well that a 'lockdown' had been one of the strategy options that was not regarded as a feasible option in the long-run at that moment in time (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b). This may raise concern among the public, as the announced lockdown does not come with a yet set date on which it will end. Back in March of that year, the government imposed even stricter measures a week after Rutte's speech on the 16th. These measures were mainly focused on preventing personal contact between people and the enforcement of a distance of 1.5 meters between them, once they go outside. At the press conference PM Rutte clarified these new measures, and explicitly stressed that the government did not want to impose a lockdown, forcing everybody to stay inside. Instead, the government focused on people that contracted a fever, which is a symptom of a possible covid-19 infection. They asked them and all other family members and roommates to stay home and only to get outside again once the individual that contracted the fever tested negative for a Covid-19 infection. The focus on 'sick people' was deemed an 'intelligent lockdown' by PM Rutte, and the one and only strategy that could be applied before a full lockdown would be needed (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020c).

The Prime-Minister continues his speech by addressing the impact of the crisis thus far, and names several examples like 'losing a relative to the virus, losing your job or losing your business to bankruptcy, and stress and loneliness throughout all layers of society.'[24]. He acknowledges the need to come together during Christmas is felt by everybody, especially after a difficult year like this. Because of this, the Prime-Minister asks everybody to keep

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[24]'Omdat ze een geliefde aan corona hebben verloren ... Omdat ze hun baan kwijtraken of hun bedrijf over de kop zien gaan ... we zien stress en eenzaamheid als grote ... problemen door alle generaties heen' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020f)

an eye on those around you who are going through some tough times. He stresses that he has no doubts about if we will get through these difficult times, partly due to the vaccine that is coming, but 'even more because of the resilience that we have shown together before'[25]

Again, the Prime-Minister chooses to refer back to earlier times, to touch upon the sentiment of conquering the virus and taking upon the challenge of living and changing your behaviour in accordance with rules imposed by the government. He illustrates that the government at least tries to have an eye for all concerns in society and the impact of the crisis, but especially the effect of measures that have been taken by the government itself. PM Rutte decides to speak to the overwhelming part of Dutch citizens which 'still realises that we need to protect ourselves and others by changing our behaviour'[26], and praises them for their perseverance.

Protest during the speech

The Prime-Minister finishes the first half of his speech addressing the current numbers of new infections that occur daily, as well as the amount of people that die every day as a result of a Covid-19 infection. His decision to present these numbers may be regarded as part of his justification for imposing the lockdown at this moment. Furthermore, PM Rutte decides to turn his attention to a group of protesters that have been making noise since the start of the speech. The management of the health crisis that had been going on for nine months at the time of December 2020 resulted in several people from different backgrounds getting critical of the way the government handled the crisis. Criticism against the crisis management became more organised during the summer of 2020, when a group named Viruswaarheid attracted followers, media attention and even engaged in filing lawsuits against the government in order to try to stop all measures against the virus.

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[25]'Meer nog vanwege de veerkracht die we met elkaar hebben laten zien' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020f)

[26]'... realiseert dat we onszelf en elkaar moeten beschermen door ons gedrag aan te passen' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020f)

The biggest and most known criticism of the group against the measures taken by the government is the opinion that Covid-19 is just a tough flu-virus that can only be a threat to elderly people and those already suffering from another illness. During the month of August, Viruswaarheid started to organise protests during which the measures imposed by the government were often ignored and on occasions, the protests were not announced beforehand, resulting in the police breaking them up. The protest during the speech by PM Rutte on the 14th of December cannot be directly linked to the group, as no official announcement or call to followers for the demonstration from the group can be found (Riem, 2020). However, two individuals associated with several protests against the government organised by Viruswaarheid were present at the protest during Rutte's speech (Riem, 2020). The Prime-Minister seems to break up his pre-written speech, and decides to address the protests that have been loudly hearable up until that moment, saying 'reality is that we are not encountering an innocent flue, as some –like the protesters outside still think, but a virus that can damage anyone'[27].

Rutte devotes the second half of his speech to setting out and running through every measure that will be imposed for at least the upcoming five weeks. He finishes his address by once again acknowledging the difficulty of his message, but stresses that times will get better and touches upon the arrival of vaccines against the virus in the upcoming year. He ends his speech with the words 'We will get through this. With each other. For each other'[28], relating to feelings of solidarity with one another for the last time.

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[27]'De realiteit is dat we niet te maken hebben met een onschuldig virus, wat sommigen –zoals de demonstranten hier buiten nog steeds denken, maar met een virus dat iedereen hard kan raken' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020f)

[28]'We komen hier doorheen. Met elkaar. Voor elkaar' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020f)

5.1.4   Main takeaways from the December speech

The speech in December of 2020 may be characterised as a meaning-making effort in terms of lifting spirits and restoring trust in the government and its envisioned strategy rather than reducing uncertainty, taking responsibility of protecting its citizens and presenting a plan on how to return a sense of normalcy. As the crisis had been going on for almost nine months at the moment of the second speech, the urge for information about what is happening had been decreased. This decrease is explainable as more information on the virus and its workings is now out there. Furthermore, the ways of managing its spread that have proven to be most successful can be recognised by analysing and discussing numbers on infections from other countries.

Taking on the challenge again, together
For PM Rutte to announce a lockdown nine months later, might result in increased feelings of concern among citizens, as he explicitly outlined that he wishes to avoid a situation in which 'healthy people who live along the guidelines of keeping a distance of 1.5 meters to other people are forced to stay inside'. The Prime-Minister tries to take away this uncertainty by explaining what a lockdown will entail for at least the upcoming five weeks, and furthermore, he refers back to an earlier situation that might be relatable for the public, and expresses his wish to return to similar circumstances. By referring back, PM Rutte tries to paint a picture inside the heads of the public of where society as a whole need to go. The use of the word lockdown along with the length of the crisis at that moment in time may affect the willingness as well as the perception of the degree of difficulty to again take on this challenge. By referring back to the earlier situation in March and painting a situation like that as a desirable one, it may positively affect the way the public looks at the newly announced measures.

The people know they managed to get it done back in March, and now they are asked to do the same more or less, PM Rutte tries to again appeal to that feeling of solidarity and positively affect the perception on the lock-down.

Focus on solidarity
The prime-minister emphasizes during his speech that people need each other and should look out for each other's physical and mental health during these tough times. As in his first speech in March of that year, PM Rutte again uses dilemmalogica (Rijnja, 2018) to show the public the government tried to acknowledge the interests of all citizens during the decision-making process. He wishes to reinforce the government did not turn a blind eye to the effects of the measures that have been and will be taken, especially on those people to whom the virus does not pose an immediate threat should they contract an infection. Even though he admits that 2020 was a year of 'mourning, loss, and sadness' for most people, he stresses that we will get through it, together. This focus on needing each other and taking on the challenge against the virus together aligns with feelings that the overwhelming bulk of the public may have, as their health is not immediately threatened should they contract a COVID-19 infection.

5.1.5 Press conferences that led to the introduction of the curfew

On the 12th of January, Prime-Minister Rutte and Minister de Jonge of the Ministry of Health, Wellfare, and Sport held a press conference, in which they addressed the extension of the lockdown that started on the 15th of December and was supposed to end on the 19th of January. Furthermore, due to the introduction of a new Covid-19 mutation from the United Kingdom which seemed to be more easily transmissible compared to the mutation that got the overhand in terms of infections in the month of January. Mainly due to new cases of that new Covid-19 mutation, the government issued a statement in which the possible introduction of a curfew was laid down. This possible measure was immediately remarked as 'a radical measure that nobody is waiting for'[29].

However, PM Rutte does point out that the 'OMT' , the group of experts from various fields that is consulting the government, included a curfew in their report as a potential measure that could be imposed in order to reduce group forming, especially among young people. The Prime-Minister states that 'we need to take this advice seriously due to the numbers and uncertainty surrounding the new mutation'. Relating back to his earlier comment about the seriousness of a potential curfew , the Prime-Minister presents the plan to first consult the 'OMT' in order to get insight into the specifics of what a curfew would bring about in terms of reducing personal contact between people.

Only 8 days later, PM Rutte and Minister de Jonge addressed the nation in a press conference again. During this press conference, the Prime-Minister announced a proposition for a curfew that is supported by his cabinet, and would be presented to parliament for review and eventually a vote. He continues by explaining the details of this curfew and again states preventing

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[29]'Dat is natuurlijk een heel ingrijpende maatregel waar niemand op zit te wachten' (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2021a)

and reducing group forming as well as mobility as the main reason for a measure like this. The introduction of the curfew was accompanied by a change in the amount of people that you may invite into your home, as this amount went from two people to just one person (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2021b)

5.2   Initial reactions to the frames

This part of the analysis will focus on the immediate reactions to the meaning-making frames on Twitter. Firstly, different graphs presenting the online activity surrounding the frames will be presented to paint a picture of the volume of online chatter about the frames. The three frames will be talked about in chronological order. Secondly, in-versed hashtagclouds and tagclouds will be presented. These synopses present the most used words in Tweets containing the keywords used in the search query. The bigger the word, the more often it was used in the period of time that was set.

After, the most important and significant elements of the reactions will be highlighted and related to the theory and expectations surrounding the process of meaning-making that were mentioned earlier.

Twitter activity during the speech in March
To look for Tweets talking about Covid-19 in the Netherlands, I used an extensive search query containing different words referring to the Covid-19 virus, from both the Dutch and English language. To make sure I would end up with Tweets sent by Dutch citizens, as the scope of this research is the Netherlands, I added a separate command that would filter out non-Dutch Tweets. Furthermore, as I was interested in the amount and overall sentiment of online chatter about the speech itself, I put in a different search query in order to check for Tweets talking about the speech. All search queries and the amount of Tweets that were found by conducting the specific searches in designated time frames can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 1 presents both the amount of Tweets talking about Covid-19, as well as the speech over time. A total of 304.243 were found in the set time sample.Figure 1 presents both the amount of Tweets talking about Covid-19, as well as the speech. Tweets using the word speech only spiked for a brief moment at night, while Tweets talking about Covid took a big part of the online activity on Dutch Twitter, with a specific spike during the speech. Figure 2 shows a tagcloud containing the most used words in Tweets talking about Covid-19 or the speech. In this tagcloud, herd immunity is present as it is one of the more important frames in terms of short-term solutions so it is expected for people to talk about it online. I will turn more attention towards the frame of herd immunity and its related activity on Twitter later.

As literature argues, the dissemination of information after a crisis just has occurred will result in a decrease in anxiety. To test for this claim, I searched for Tweets sent during and in the short aftermath of the speech containing emotional words, like 'wtf' and 'omg' and other Dutch variants of these words. The results of this search are shown in figures 3 and 4. A total amount of 2378 Tweets using either 'wtf' or 'omg' were found, but Tweets containing the word 'omg' were relatively limited when compared to Tweets containing 'wtf', as only 7 Tweets contained 'omg', whereas 2308 Tweets contained 'wtf'. Figure 3 shows two spikes in the use of the word 'wtf'. Specifically, the first spike occurs during the speech of PM Rutte which started at 19:00. The left tagcloud in figure 4 presents the most-used words in the Tweets sent at that period of time, between 19:00 and 20:00. As figure 3 shows another spike, two days from the day of speech, the right tagcloud in figure 4 presents the most-used words in Tweets sent at the time of the spike; between 11:00 and 12:00 on the 18th of March.

Twitter activity during the speech in December

The search query used to collect Tweets talking about Covid-19 and the speech in March was used in the same way for the speech in December. No search for emotional words was conducted, as the crisis had been going on for 8 months at the moment of the speech in December. As mentioned above, the dissemination of information in the beginning of a crisis when there is a great amount of uncertainty leads to a drop in anxiety. As in the case of the speech in December, the government had had numerous of press conferences during which they informed the public about the current crisis situation and possible introduction of new measures against the spread of Covid-19. I regard the speech in December as a wake-up call rather than a moment during which PM Rutte provides meaning to the crisis situation or focuses on clarifying how the government is intending to return a state of normalcy. For this reason, I did not check for an emotional effect in terms of a possible reduction in feelings of anxiety during and in the short aftermath of the speech.

Figure 5 presents the amount of Tweets talking about Covid-19 and the speech between 12:00 on the 14th of December and 22:00 on the 15th, highlighting a specific spike during the speech. A total amount of 185.445 were found and in the set time frame. Figure 6 presents the most used words in these Tweets, highlighting the use of the word lockdown. As the hard lockdown is the main reason for PM Rutte to give a public address from his office rather than a regular press conference which had been the norm for several months at that time, it is no surprise to see it come up as one the most-used words on Twitter that night.

Going further, specific attention will be drawn towards the three frames that were presented in the public addresses by PM Rutte: herd immunity, the hard lockdown and the curfew.

Figure 1: Graph presenting the amount of Tweets talking about Covid-19 and the speech in March
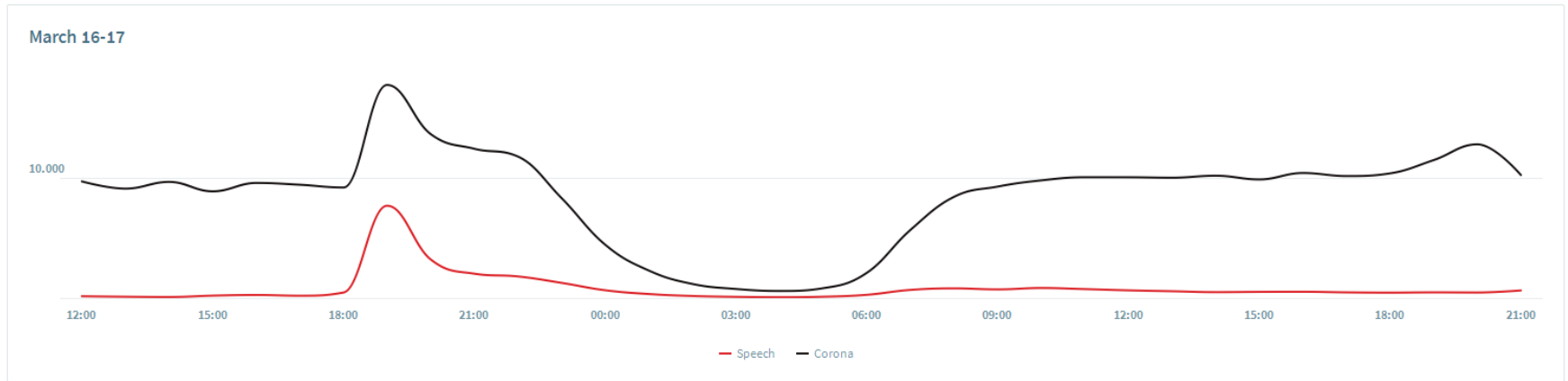

Figure 2: Tagcloud presenting the most used words in Tweets talking about Covid-19 or the speech in March

Figure 3: Graph presenting the amount of Tweets containing emotional words during and in the short aftermath of the March speech

Figure 4: Tagcloud presenting the most used words in Tweets containing 'wtf'

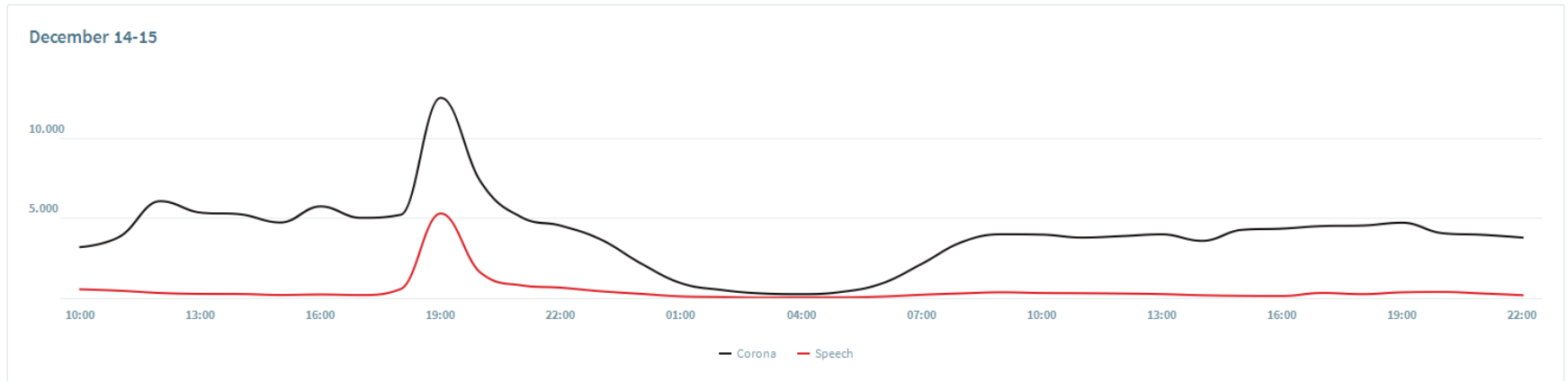Figure 5: Graph presenting the amount of Tweets talking about Covid-19 and the speech in December

Figure 6: Tagcloud presenting the most used words in Tweets talking about Covid-19 or the speech in December

5.2.1 Herd immunity

To check for Tweets talking about herd immunity, I used a search query containing the Dutch word 'groepsimmuniteit', including different variants and wrong ways of spelling of the word. Result for this search can be found in figure 7. As the figure shows, the amount of Tweets talking about herd immunity spikes significantly when the speech starts. Up until that moment in time, PM Rutte had never mentioned it before, making the sudden surge of interests in the concept explainable. The amount of Tweets talking about herd immunity spikes during the speech itself and drops down only for a couple hours as people are sleeping. When morning comes, online talk picks it up again on the same level as during the speech. Figure 8 shows a tagcloud and hashtagcloud of the Twitter activity around herd immunity, which contain some strong words carrying a strong message, like #genocide and 'roulette' and 'catastrofaal' (catastrophic).

5.2.2 Lockdown

The main objective of the speech in December was to announce the hard lockdown and to convey the seriousness of the situation. To make sure to search for Tweets talking about the lockdown, I searched for Tweets containing the word lockdown or any other (wrong) way of spelling the word. I found 2478 Tweets talking about the lockdown, which is relatively low when compared with Tweets about herd immunity (32.513 Tweets) and the curfew (343.047 Tweets). This may be the result of the news about the upcoming lockdown going to be announced by PM Rutte leaking earlier that day. Moreover, the total amount of Tweets about Covdid-19 and the speech during and in the short aftermath of the speech in March 2020 was higher (305.243) than the amount during and in the short aftermath of the speech in December (185.445), even tough the time period that was set as well as the search query were identical.

Again, as is the case with the frame surrounding herd immunity, the biggest spike in activity can be found during the speech itself, as figure 9 shows. Figure 10 again presents the most used words, containing some negative-loaded hashtags like #stemzeweg (vote them out).

5.2.3 Curfew

Lastly, I checked for Tweets talking about the curfew. This measure was introduced after the lockdown had already been imposed for a couple of weeks, mainly because of the worries for the new Covid-19 mutation during in the United Kingdom. As this measure was firstly mentioned on the 12th of January, my search for Tweets start at that date. The government consulted the OMT, and finally let the policy proposal run through parliament before it was imposed on the 23d of January, the curfew started, so that is where my time sample ends. Figure 11 shows the amount of Tweets talking about the curfew increasing as the day it started drew closer. Figure 12 first shows a hashtagcloud containing the most used hashtags in the Tweets presented above. One of the more-used hashtags is FvD, a political party that started to make a big name for itself during the Covid-19 crisis as one of the only parties to plead for an immediate stop to all measures taken against Covid-19. The tagcloud on the right shows the most used words in Tweets using FvD, highlighted by some strong words like 'oorlog' (war) and 'wegsturen' (to send away), indicating a more negative tone.

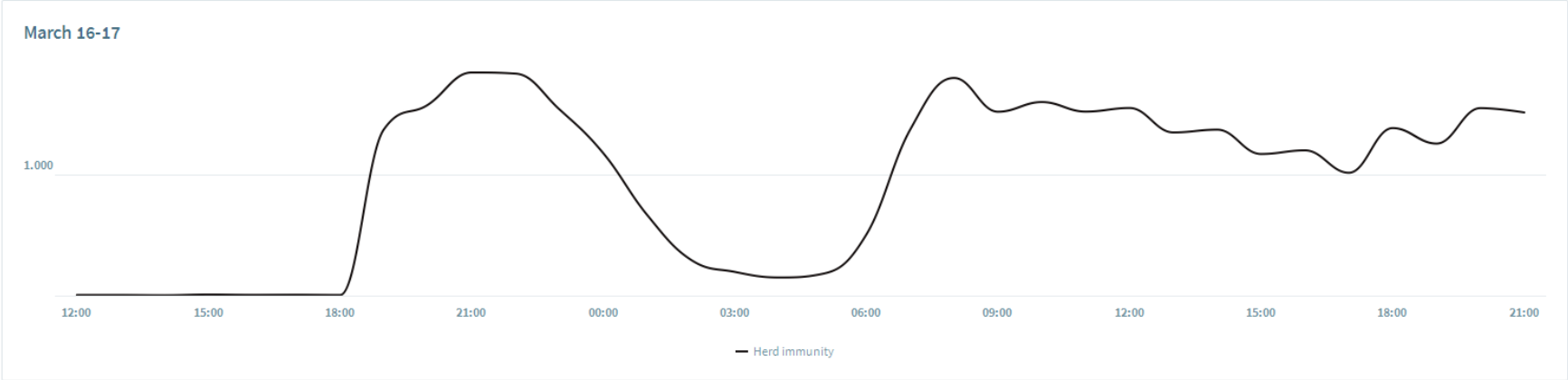Figure 7: Graph presenting the amount of Tweets talking about herd immunity

Figure 8: Hashtagcloud and tagcloud presenting the most used words in Tweets talking about herd immunity

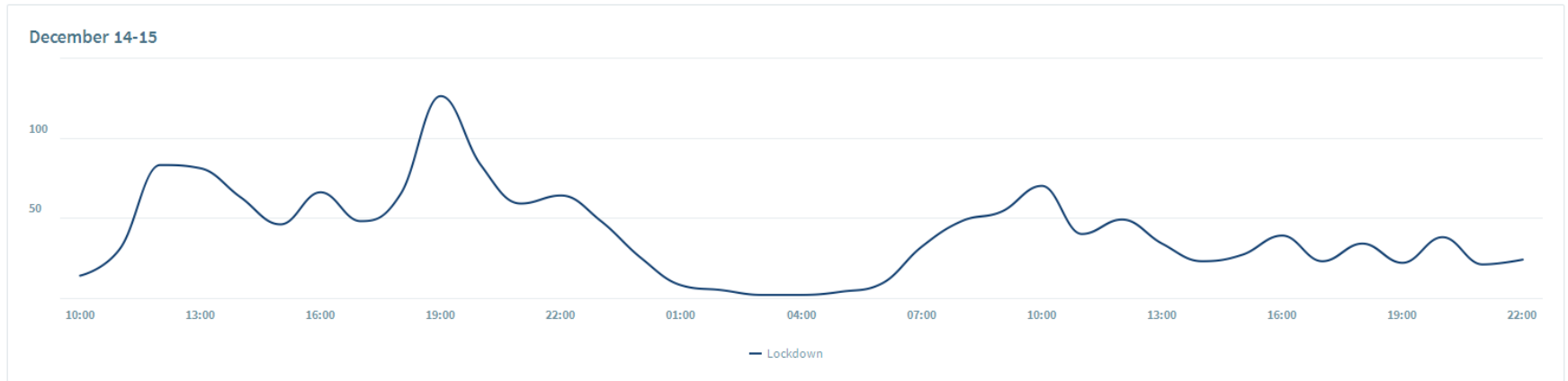Figure 9: Graph presenting the amount of Tweets talking about the lockdown

Figure 10: Hashtagcloud presenting the most used hashtags in Tweets talking about the lockdown

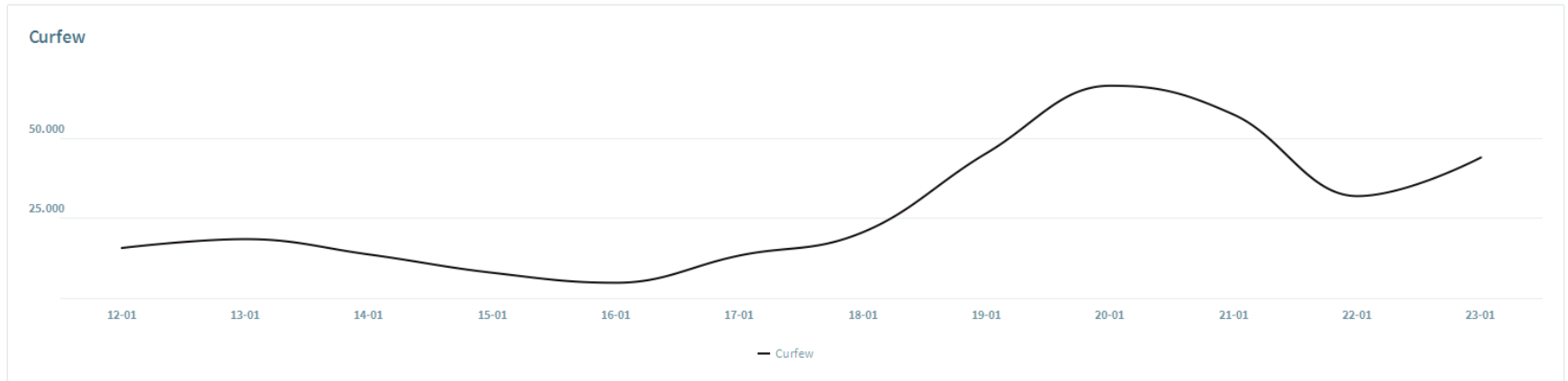Figure 11: Graph presenting the amount of Tweets talking about the curfew

Figure 12: Hashtagcloud and tagcloud presenting the most used words in Tweets talking about the curfew and FvD

5.3   Reactions in the media

As public leaders and other politicans are not the only actors trying the paint the narrative on a crisis, it is worth taking a look at articles written about the specific frames (herd immunity, lockdown, curfew) and assess whether these carried a negative, neutral, or positive message about the measure and the frame surrounding it. As the government benefits from conveying the necessity of the measures as part of their framing, the media could repeat this explanation for the measure, or could raise questions regarding its necessity and the effect it has on society. This may lead to effects on the compliance with measures as well. For my analysis, I have analysed a total 71 articles on NRC.nl, AD.nl, NU.nl and NOS.nl, and coded them either positive, negative or neutral in terms of their overall sentiment regarding the frame they were about. Out of the 71, 31 articles were coded as negative, 32 were coded positive and 8 were coded neutral. The codebook containing a full overview of the articles, quotes and my interpretation of these quotes leading to one of the three codes can be found in Appendix B.

6   Discussion

6.1   Sub-questions

In the upcoming part, the findings and visual results from the discourse analysis, data-analysis and content analysis will be discussed and related to the literature. The aforementioned sub-questions will be addressed individually and answered before turning towards the overall research question of this study and the way the findings relate to the practice of meaning-making.

SQ1: How do the two speeches in March and December 2020 differ in overall message, related to the context of the crisis at that moment in time?
The main intent behind the speech in March was to first reduce uncertainty about the current situation that came into existence as SARS-CoV-2 started to spread around the world. The context of the crisis at the moment in time was coming to an understanding of what is happening and what is eventually at stake. As the virus first started to spread in China and other Asian countries and eventually came up in Europe for the first time when infections in Italy started to surge, the problem was regarded as a problem that was originating far from the country of the Netherlands. As mentioned above the first infection on the 27th of February got a lot of media attention, making the threat much more close-hitting. However, as has also been recognised by the National Institute of Public Health and Environment (RIVM), the biggest influx of the virus that eventually increased the crisis situation quickly is the travel from Dutch citizens back to the country from infected areas as well as the national holiday of carnival which was celebrated widely in the southern provinces (Rosman, 2020). The government focused measures on those southern provinces first, but realisation about the potential threat of the virus on a national level quickly hit, as the virus does not always result in clear symptoms, contributing to the already relatively high contagiousness of SARS-CoV-2.

The government and those responsible for managing crises had to make sense of a threat that was evolving quickly and surprising national governments worldwide. Advice like avoiding shaking hands and working from home were upgraded to national levels, but radical measures affecting society were imposed soon after only three days, indicating the seriousness of the situation. Again, only three days later the biggest impact on society was made as all bars, restaurants and gyms as well as all public schools were forced to close their doors for the time being, leaving the public with a sense of seriousness and uncertainty about this new way of living as well. At that moment, it was time to not just inform the public via a press conference, but to speak to them about what this crisis will mean for society as a whole.

PM Rutte engages in meaning-making, attempting to reduce the uncertainty surrounding the crisis situation by coming clear about reality; the virus is going to stay for some time, and a substantial amount of people will get infected. This may sound frightening, but as argued before, coming clean about the details of the situation and provide the public with clear, actionable information is important to get people to accept your perspective of the crisis and what needs to be done to minimize the consequences (Boin et al., 2005, 2013; Ansell et al., 2014).

Comparing that with the situation in December 2020 when PM Rutte delivered his second speech, the context and main intent behind the speech differs. The main objective of the speech in December 2020 was to convey the seriousness of the current situation at that moment in time and to almost remind the country of what is stake. Since the month of March, the government chose to hold press conferences when announcing changes relating to measures taken against the spread of Covid-19. The decision to announce the start of a full lockdown affected society in a way that is only comparable to the effect of the measures that were imposed back in March when the crisis had just started. Furthermore, the past choices and nature of the policy related to managing the crisis plays a vital role as well, as the decision

to impose a full lockdown may be regarded as a break with earlier strategy. For these reasons, the communication consultants inside the government may have decided to hold a second speech, also to invigorate the main message from PM Rutte: We need to do something, as a continuation of current circumstances will result in a collapse of the healthcare system.

As this study argued before, up until December 2020 the crisis management strategy in the Netherlands is focused more on personal responsibility and confidence in the compliance of citizens. A full lockdown was deemed unfeasible by the Prime-Minister, and shortly after his speech in March the term 'intelligent lockdown' was born. The central idea behind the intelligent lockdown was finding a balance between imposing measures and letting normal life as people know and enjoy it continue. This faith in the self-sustainability of the Dutch people may have resulted in a less effective management of the infection-rate, as infections kept on rising near the end of 2020. The decision to impose a hard lockdown may be perceived as a break with this ideology, as society was forced to return to a state which is comparable to March 2020, even though the amount of new daily infections per million people at the moment of speech on the 14th of December (486) is far from comparable with the amount in March (9), when the intelligent lockdown was imposed (Our World in Data, 2021). However, this big difference may very well be the result of the low and near-no availability of Covid-19 tests back in March. Unfortunately, numbers on the amount of Covid-19 tests took have only been tracked by Municipial Health Services (GGD) since June 2020 (GGD-GHOR, 2020), so there is now way to get a full picture of the test capacity back in March. On the 31st of March, the Ministry of Health, Wellfare, and Sport did report an amount of roughly 4000 tests for SARS-CoV-2 being carried out every day (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2020b), which is substantial lower than the amount of tests carried out in the week of the second speech on December the 14th 2020, namely 476.671 (Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu, 2020).

To keep spirits up, PM Rutte focuses on that period back in March and presents it as an achievement that has been accomplished before. Moreover, he decides to focus on those trying their hardest to keep their behaviour in check. Thus, even though the message the Prime-Minister has to deliver is hard, he decides to keep it light-hearted and presents the lockdown as a challenge that society as a whole can overcome again. Instead of addressing the nation in a pompous, pedantic tone and in turn framing the need of a lockdown as a result of a failure of compliance, PM Rutte tries to keep the spirits high and resonates with the people as he mentions his understanding of people not being perfect humans and keeping their behaviour in check all the time (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020f)

SQ2: To what extent were components of meaning making in terms of taking responsibility, taking away uncertainty and presenting a strategy on ending the crisis present in the different public addresses? And what lessons can be drawn from that?

As argued before, the Covid-19 crisis in the Netherlands should not be regarded as a crisis in which the Dutch government or any government agency bears any responsibility in terms of the cause behind the crisis. However, the government is responsible for managing the consequences of a crisis in general, making sure the potential harm for citizens is minimized. The responsibility of the Dutch government in the case of the Covid-19 crisis is first and foremost protecting its citizens, economy and overall welfare of the country. Second, as the crisis' nature is disruptive in the sense of disrupting life as people know it, the government should present a strategy on how they plan on how to return the sense of normalcy that will allow people to continue their life as they know it. As the government already decided to take several measures, it showed its dedication to the responsibility to protect its citizens. Furthermore, in his speech PM Rutte dedicates particular attention to those who are threatened the most by the virus; the elderly and those with a weakened condition as a result of an underlying disease.

The focus of the government on this particular group stems from knowledge about SARS-CoV-2 and the potential damage it can do to healthy, young people which is reasonable but will not lead to deadly consequences on average. This is partly the reason why PM Rutte devotes a reasonable amount of attention to adhere to feelings of solidarity among the people. By presenting the difficult times that lie ahead as a job that can only be fulfilled together, Rutte tries to speak to the people's sense of responsibility. He essentially asks them to do their part, in order to protect those around them.

Regarding the second responsibility of constructing and presenting a plan on how to get out of the crisis, PM Rutte does not explicitly turn great attention towards a so-called 'exit strategy' in his speech in March 2020. He does address the importance of vaccines, but then turns his attention towards a more short-term strategy focused on keeping the virus under control until a vaccine is available. Another reason to particularly speak about the need of everybody doing their part in the fight against the virus is the specific crisis management strategy that has been chosen and is presented in the same speech. The government presents its decision to not impose a full lockdown on the Netherlands, but rather control the spread of the virus over time as a balance between impacting society in a disruptive way and protecting Dutch citizens by making sure the healthcare will still be able to manage the influx of patients. This decision involves focusing more on the responsibility and compliance than imposing a full lockdown paired with laws forcing people to stay inside.

Crises occurring as a result of government failure are almost always followed by that government apologizing and focusing on restoring the trust in institutions. An effective crisis communication effort leading to the public accepting the government's perspective on the crisis event will positively affect the long-term legitimacy of public institutions (Boin et al., 2013).

These efforts relate to IRT (Benoit, 1995), focusing on organisations who hold responsibility of a crisis happening to some degree trying to save face, using various image repair strategies like denial – 'we didn't do it', evading responsibility – 'it was us, but we had no control over it', and corrective action – 'it was us, and we will do everything in our power to avoid it from happening again.' (Benoit, 1995). As Griffin-Padgett and Alison (2010) argued, communication during crises over which the organisation in question does not hold responsibility benefits from restoring public confidence and raising resilience. In the case of the the speech in March, the meaning making effort from the Prime-Minister is focused more on those objectives, rather than saving reputation. As the cause or blame for the crisis cannot be allocated to the government, there is not much reputation to save in March. This situation is no different nine months later as the Prime-Minister speaks to the nation for a second time.

Sub-question 3: To what extent and how did PM Rutte address and render the necessity of the different measures imposed on the public? And what lessons can be drawn from that?

The Covid-19 crisis in the Netherlands forced the Dutch government to take action against the spread of the virus, relating to the aforementioned responsibility to protect its citizens. These measures have the biggest effect on society, as all non-essential shops and public schools closed. As argued before, this situation makes it more difficult for the government to reach sufficient support for measures that affect society in a disruptive way, especially in a crisis of long duration like the Covid-19 crisis. This support is much needed though, as compliance with rules like keeping distance to one another, wearing a face-mask indoors, and only inviting a small amount of people into your home are vital to prevent personal contact in order to stop the virus from spreading.

PM Rutte defends the choices for the short-term and long-term strategies on how to cope with the virus by referring to insights from experts. The importance of experts is underlined by him in his March speech. Furthermore, in both the speech in March as well as December Rutte strongly adheres to feelings of solidarity and stresses that we all need each other to do their part in the battle against the virus. These efforts are focused on two different groups of people: those who do not perceive the measures as proportional or fit for the current situation, as well as those having trouble to adhere to the rules which is acknowledged to be very difficult by Rutte himself in his speeches. The focus on resilience in crises over which organisations do not hold responsibility with regard to the cause (Griffin-Padgett & Allison, 2010) can be seen here, especially in the speech in December as the Prime-Minister does his best to lift the spirits and to almost 'rally the troops' for a battle which is unfortunately needed again as infection numbers are rising. Even though these rising infection may be perceived as a failure from people not being able or not willing to live by the rules, PM Rutte chooses to hold a positive note and thanks those who are still keeping their behaviour in check, even if this is difficult.

The Prime-Minister takes his explanation of different measures and the necessity for them to a next level by presenting the public with three possible different ways of dealing with the virus in his March speech. As argued before, this specific choice may be perceived as a choice in communication strategy in line with dilemmalogica (Rijnja, 2018), involving the public when the problem is still at hand and informing them about various considerations that preceded the eventual decision that was made to minimize the possible consequences of the crisis. Dilemmalogica as a communication strategy is used by PM Rutte to better explain the choice from the government to balance controlling the spread of the virus with letting normal life continue as much as possible.

He names two other possible strategies of managing this crisis, but explicitly presents the significant downsides of these strategies and frames those as unfeasible. By presenting measures and future measures related to the overall strategy of controlling the virus as essentially 'the best option', PM Rutte tries to seek support for these measures, which will hopefully lead to more compliance. He stresses that he understands the current measures are unheard of for countries in peace-time (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020b), but by taking the public by hand and showing citizens that the government took their interests seriously (Rijnja, 2018), the Prime-Minister tries to get more understanding for the difficult position the government finds itself in as it needs to take radical measures that will disrupt society and life as people know it.

However, apart from people understanding the difficulty of the situation and the challenge that lies ahead during which everybody needs to do their part, successful crisis management is brought about by communicating clearly and actionable information to the public (Boin et al., 2005, 2013; Ansell et al., 2014). The speech in March was not entirely effective with regard to that goal, as the inclusion of the concept of herd immunity in the speech led to confusion among the public. PM Rutte mentions that controlling the virus and not imposing a lockdown will result in the creation of herd immunity against SARS-CoV-2, and even labels those not threatened by the virus a wall protecting the weakened. This insight combined with the call to feelings of solidarity may lead to people perceiving the solution to the current problem as getting infected as soon as possible, in order to get to the sufficient level of infections that is needed for herd immunity. This idea was also contrasted heavily by the measures that were taken by the same government that presented the strategy of herd immunity, as those measures were imposed to hopefully decrease the spread of the virus.

The director of the RIVM Jaap van Dissel informed members of parliament on the 18th of March, only two days after the speech about this herd immunity strategy and stressed that the creation of herd immunity against SARS-CoV-2 was not the goal of the current strategy and policy implications (NU.nl, 2020b). Later that day, PM Rutte repeated this information and rephrased himself in a debate about the government's strategy for the Covid-19 crisis (NU.nl, 2020c).

Even though these rectifications were reported in the traditional media (NU.nl, 2020a, 2020b), a technical briefing and a debate in parliament are not as widely watched as a speech by the Prime-Minister on national television, which attracted a live viewership of 7.6 million people. A live viewership like that is only comparable to a small list of unique moments on Dutch television, like the announcement of the Dutch queen's withdrawal and the inauguration of the new king (NOS, 2020b). Because of this accidental frame of creating herd immunity by letting infections spread among healthy as a durable strategy that would put an end to the current crisis, a dissonance between the specific idea behind the strategy of herd immunity as it was proposed by the government compared to intent of the strategy that stuck with the public This dissonance can also be perceived in some letters sent to NRC by citizens. As is shown in the codebook, a collection of citizens (articles number 28, 30, and 37) would prefer deliberately infecting healthy people who would survive a Covid-19 infection in order to reach herd immunity against the virus quicker. One author even pleads for setting up an 'immunityhotel' in which healthy people will purposely infect each other with Covid-19 (article number 30). These letters were all written and sent to the paper in the month of April 2020, and one even in the month of November 2020, at least three weeks after both RIVM director van Dissel en Prime-Minister Mark Rutte reiterated that deliberately infecting people will not work as a structural solution to the problem.

The existence of these letters show a gap between what is envisioned by the government strategy-wise and what was understood by the public. A gap like that will lead to confusion about the rules focused on decreasing the spread of the virus, and may turn into - both deliberate and not deliberate- less compliance with the rules and eventually into less effective management of the crisis in terms of getting the spread of the virus under control.

This confusion may not be the only element of the meaning-making process and context that hurt the support for different measures and the eventual compliance with laws and rules. An important part of meaning-making that was mentioned earlier is the existence of different actors from various backgrounds that try to get their perspective on the crisis event as well as the way to lead the public out of it to be the dominant one (Boin et al., 2005, 2013; Ansell et al., 2014). In the case of the Covid-19 crisis in the Netherlands, two different groups tried to get their perspective on the crisis to be accepted by the public or at least hurt the legitimacy of the perspective put out by the government; politicians and experts.

Other politicians did engage in framing their perceived best way of managing the crisis and gained some traction in terms of online activity as #PVV (Dutch opposition party), #FvD (Dutch opposition party), #Wilders (Surname of political leader of the PVV, Geert Wilders), and #Haga (Surname of prominent politician of the FvD, Wybren van Haga) were all frequently used hashtags in Tweets about Covid-19 during the speeches and Tweets about the specific frames. Forum for Democracy (FvD) has profiled itself as the only Dutch political party that would immediately put a stop to all measures that have been taken against Covid-19, as they frame the virus as just a tough flu that only poses an immediate danger to the most-weakened part of society. The party also has some ties with Viruswaarheid, the protest organization which was mentioned earlier. Wybren van Haga has spoken against the government's management of the crisis specifically, in particular against the introduction of the curfew.

His actions in the political arena for FvD are spoken about on Twitter, as seen in figures 6 and 12. These political actors did not get much to no attention in the traditional media. Their activities in parliament were documented, but their framing of the current events and potential solutions were not explicitly positively remarked, nor repeated as a better way of handling things at that moment in time.

Another group that gained attention on both Twitter as well as in the traditional media are experts. The aforementioned 'Outbreak Management Team' (OMT) which has been consulting the Dutch government on their management of the Covid-19 crisis since the 24th of January consists of various members from different organisations that play an important role in managing epidemics and pandemics. Some members have chosen to appear in the media to talk about the Dutch strategy of the Covid-19 crisis and give some more explanations regarding the necessity of some measures. Diederik Gommers has been invited to the OMT on several occasions as he is the chairman of the Dutch Association for Intensive Care (NVIC), as the amount of available spaces in intensive care departments around the country became very limited due to the pandemic. Gommers became a public figure quickly during the Covid-19 crisis due to his appearances on different talk shows and his engagement with the public on social media. As is seen in figure 12, Gommers gained some online attention in the week during which the parliament debated about introducing a curfew. On the 20th of January, he spoke negatively about imposing a curfew in the talkshow Jinek, as the numbers on new daily infections and hospitalisations did not alarm him enough yet to impose a radical measure that affects the youth a great amount (RTL Nieuws, 2021). A day later, Gommers already rectified his comments and stressed that a curfew was needed, as new numbers on the amount of people admitted to intensive care departments that he did not have the day before were alarming him (van der Aa & Klaassen, 2021).

Such appearances and comments from an expert that is supposed to be in line with government policy, may hurt the confidence in the government's management of the crisis, and may affect the compliance negatively in the long-run once the curfew is imposed. As figure 12 shows, #Gommers is frequently used in Tweets concerning the curfew, and is accompanied by negative hashtags like #ikdoenietmeermee (I am not complying anymore), #dictatuur (dictatorship), #huisarrest (house arrest), #stopdelockdown (stop the lockdown) and #geenavondklok (no curfew). Those not in favour of the curfew may use the words and arguments of an expert like Gommers to get their point across, and those already having doubts about a measure with substantial impact like the curfew will possibly get more hesitant.

Members of the OMT can also positively affect the perception of the measures and the necessity of those by appearing in interviews and giving explanations from a more scientific standpoint. Marion Koopmans is a member of the OMT and gave a big interview in April about the strategy of creating herd immunity, in which she nuances the perception of all people needing to get infected sooner rather than later in order to build op herd immunity (33 in the codebook). She points to the long-term solution of vaccinating against the virus, and stresses the importance of creating herd immunity by only allowing healthy people to get infected. Those endangered by the virus in a deadly way will be vaccinated first, and eventually the natural way and artificial way of creating herd immunity will find each other at the end. By giving room to a positive message from an expert on crisis situations like the current one, the newspaper contributes to positively framing the strategy of creating herd immunity. Newspapers also found their way to experts on virology, epidemiology and pandemics in general who are not part of the OMT (10, 14, 15, 29, 33, 34, and 62). The government's response to the crisis has been heavily based on scientific advice from experts, as the OMT plays a vital role in the decision-making process.

As a result, you would expect a substantial level of positivity about the measures in the interviews with experts outside the OMT. However, from the seven articles, three adopt a negative tone towards different frames. This signals the lack of a consensus on how a pandemic of this magnitude and effect should be handled, which may lead to more difficulties regarding explaining and framing the necessity of the measures and again may hurt the compliance with measures in the long-run.

SQ4: To what extent did the use of emotional words first spike, and then drop after information about the COVID-19 crisis was spread during the speech in March 2020? What does this indicate for information-sharing during crises?

Earlier research argues feelings of anxiety arise as a crisis starts, but will drop down after some as a result of the dissemination of information and subsequent decline in uncertainty felt among the public (Back et al., 2010). This argument was then further tested by Jong and Dückers (2016) and they found an initial spike and then drop in the use of emotional words like 'omg' and 'wtf' in Tweets after information about a hijacking crisis was spreading. This research followed the same method of assessing for the amount of Tweets sent using 'omg' and 'wtf' and other Dutch variants of these words. Figure 3 shows the use of 'omg' in Tweets to be very limited during the speech, as well as the hours before and the days after. The use of 'wtf' spiked during the speech and then dropped down as the speech ended and night fell. The next day, the use was more limited, in line with theory on emotions of anxiety dropping down after information about the crisis event has been spread. However, two days after the speech the use of the word spiked again to levels comparable with the amount of Tweets that was reached during the speech. A short analysis of these two spikes on the 18th of March showed that the first spike was a reaction to the aforementioned news of RIVM director Van Dissel underlining that herd immunity was not the goal of the current strategy.

Hence the increased frequency of the use of the word 'specialists' (specialisten) in Tweets containing the word 'wtf', as can be seen in the right tag cloud in figure 4. People started to express their distrust in experts or specialists when Van Dissel is reported speaking against the strategy that was presented only two days ago. The second spike was a reaction to the Minister for Medical care collapsing from exhaustion during a debate in parliament later that day (NU.nl, 2020a).

The existence of different spikes in the use of emotional words may be explained by the nature and characteristics of the Covid-19 crisis. It can simply be argued that the assumption of feelings of anxiety first spiking and then dropping after information is spread in a crisis is not proven to be true in the case of this research and thus the Covid-19 crisis. However, the Covid-19 crisis is a crisis of unparalleled length as has been argued before. Compared to other, much shorter crises, the Covid-19 crisis does not follow the same characteristics in terms of length as well as the dissemination of information about the crisis. The further explanation of the herd immunity strategy by Van Dissel that resulted in the spike of the use of 'wtf' may very well be regarded as new information, and thus to be expected to incite an increase of feelings of anxiety

6.2   Implications for meaning-making

Overall, PM Rutte engaged in meaning-making efforts by coming clear about the current situation and the difficult times that lie ahead during his speech in March. He tried to reduce the uncertainty that was felt as the events and stricter measures developed quickly in the last weeks of February and the first days of March 2020. He reassures the public the government is doing its very best to manage the crisis and control the spread of the virus in order to protect the health of every citizen, but especially those who are threatened in a potentially deadly way. The Prime-Minister focuses on feelings of solidarity in line with expectations of public leaders trying to adhere to the resilience of a community in the case of a crisis over which the government does not hold much or any control over with regard to the cause of the crisis (Griffin-Padgett & Allison, 2010). Though, he extends the use of meaning-making further than mere reducing uncertainty by providing information, taking responsibility of managing the crisis and lifting spirits.

Rutte uses communication to find support for the government's policy choices by presenting citizens with a picture on potential strategy choices regarding the management of the crisis and showing different downsides as an explanation for the government's choice for a particular strategy. A crisis like the Covid-19 crisis with severe impact on all levels of society asks for a deeper use of providing meaning to the situation to show the people that their interests are being heard and the government does not overlook those interests when making decisions on a strategical level. This is strongly related to the beliefs and values behind dilemmalogica (Rijnja, 2018), which pleads for a more extensive communication including citizens in an early stage of the communication process and giving them a full picture of considerations and interests that have been weighed up before the ultimate decision was made. Leaders should still make sense of a crisis event and make decisions on the strategical level, but they should go further than explaining these decisions and how those will help return the sense of normalcy.

They should use communication and not be afraid to come clean about the difficulties of balancing interests, as Rijnja (2018) also argued: people are focused on focused on what government actions mean for them and their personal life, but are even more concerned with the way these decisions were made. They want to know if the government had an eye for their concerns and interests during decision-making processes.

To make sure policy aimed towards minimizing the harmful consequences of a crisis enjoys sufficient support is not always easy, as they might be to blame for the crisis happening to some degree, resulting in the government not being seen as an ally (Ansell et al., 2014). In this case, the public leader should also focus on restoring trust in the government, and can use image repair strategies like corrective action (Benoit, 1995). In the case of the Covid-19 crisis, the difficulties of generating support for the measures came over time, as the crisis had been going on for nine months at the time of the second speech in December 2020. For this reason, PM Rutte referred back to the situation back in the months of March and April 2020, during which the Dutch people managed to get their behaviour in check with the rules, even though the inclusion of the concept of herd immunity may have negatively affected the support for the measures. There was less room to use dilemmalogica in the speech in December, as the solution to the crisis was already made clear to the public at that moment in time. PM Rutte still used the communication strategy of showing that the government is taking the interests of the citizens at heart by stressing that the government is not turning a blind eye to the effects of the measures that had been taken. The decision to impose a full lockdown was more framed as the government having no choice due to numbers on infection rates and people admitted to intensive care departments, while the government was fully aware of the impact of such a measure after the country had already been living with Covid-19 for nine months.

A crisis of extensive length that will force the government to uphold or extent policy that affects society in a disruptive will limit the effective use of dillemalogica, as promises of the government doing its best to look out for everyone's interests need to be fulfilled at some point.

7   Conclusion

This study was conducted with the goal of gaining more insight into the workings of and contexts surrounding the challenge of meaning-making which public leaders should take upon themselves during crises. To track for meaning-making efforts and reactions to those efforts in different contexts, two speeches and different press conferences by Dutch Prime-Minister Mark Rutte during the Covid-19 crisis the reactions on Twitter as well as in traditional media to meaning-making frames were analysed.

This study argued that public leaders taking upon the challenge of meaning-making during a crisis should go further than explaining the decisions that have been made, and should come clean about different considerations that were made that led to that decision. Addressing the public about the problem at hand and the different ways the government could manage the problem will lead to more understanding from the public, even if those decisions impact their lives in a substantial way. During the Covid-19 crisis Mark Rutte engaged in meaning-making to the fullest extent by painting the difficulty of the situation and taking responsibility of protecting its citizens for the virus and its deadly consequences.

He presented the public with three possible strategies on how to deal with the crisis at hand, and just this to defend the government's decision to choose one of those strategies. This strategy of balancing controlling the spread of the virus with letting normal life continue as much as possible asked for a focus on people understanding that individual actions count, to stop the virus from spreading. The inclusion of the concept of herd immunity might have hurt the compliance with the rules presented by the government, as it was misunderstood by a part of the public, leading to immediate negative reactions on Twitter. The misconception about the strategy of herd immunity stuck with people, as can be seen by some letters sent to NRC from people confused with measures focused at preventing the spread of the virus, while they would like to see a plan to deliberately infect people to reach a

sufficient level of infections faster. As in most crises, the government was not the only actor trying to get their perspective of the crisis to be the dominant one. Other politicians framed the efforts by the government in a negative way and received substantial attention on Twitter after new measures like the lockdown in December 2020 and the curfew in January 2021 were introduced.

Meaning-making moments involving new information like these increased the use of emotional words on Twitter numerous times, as in line with literature on information-sharing during crises resulting in an increase in feelings of anxiety, indicated by in increase in the use of emotional words.

The traditional media gave room to other perspectives as well, as experts on pandemics started to make their appearance, both negatively and positively speaking about the government's efforts. This shows the role of the media is important, as they can also help getting support for policy during crises, in addition to the government using communication to get support.

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