Screens, Sources, Stories: Technology's Impact on Dutch Foreign Correspondents in the Americas

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Abstract
Foreign correspondents increasingly integrate digital technologies into their reporting routines, streamlining newsgathering and communication. However, no comprehensive analysis of the technological habits of Dutch foreign correspondents has been conducted. This article examines how Dutch foreign correspondents in the Americas utilize digital tools, including mobile chat applications and social media, in their daily work, and how this influences sourcing, collaboration, and editorial practices. The study draws on thirteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Dutch foreign correspondents based across North, Central, and South America. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns in the use and perception of digital technologies. Findings reveal a selective integration of digital tools: messaging apps facilitate faster communication, but social media is viewed critically. Correspondents continue to emphasize the importance of traditional media and in-person reporting as essential to their professional practice. Digital technologies supplement but do not replace established journalistic routines. These insights offer a nuanced understanding of how foreign correspondents navigate technological change while maintaining editorial integrity.

Keywords
The Americas, foreign correspondents, digital technologies, technological developments, North America, South America, journalism, international communication.

Introduction

Foreign correspondents play a crucial role in shaping global perceptions of North and South America (Hannerz, 2004). In recent years, digital technologies have radically transformed how foreign correspondents work (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2017; Çatal, 2017). Social media platforms allow journalists to instantly connect with people all over the world and facilitate contact with colleagues, both those in the correspondents' geographical vicinity and those outside. It has never been easier to reach colleagues, sources, and fixers, thanks to mobile chat applications such as WhatsApp, which allow for instant contact directly (Dodds, 2019, p. 740). This has caused the speed and reach of reporting to increase and the costs of reporting to drop (Wolf & Schnauber, 2015, p. 759), but it also presents challenges for journalists. For example, fake news and disinformation spread like wildfire on social media and mobile chat applications.

This study examines the impact of new technologies on the working routines and habits of Dutch foreign correspondents, with a particular focus on their use of digital tools while reporting on the Americas. By examining journalistic practices and the impact of technology on source and subject selection, the study explores the evolving relationship between digital innovation and foreign correspondence in this region.

In this ever-changing context, understanding whether and how digital technologies shape the work of foreign correspondents is crucial for assessing the integrity of international reporting. As audiences increasingly consume news via digital platforms, the risk of limited perspectives and decreased source diversity grows (Wolf & Schnauber, 2015). This has profound implications for public perception, policymaking, and the ethical responsibilities of journalists, such as a decrease in trust in news outlets (Culver & Lee, 2019, p. 87). At the same time, digital tools offer new opportunities for faster communication, real-time updates, and broader reach. Despite the growing relevance of these issues, few studies have examined how individual foreign correspondents use technology in their daily work. By examining how Dutch foreign correspondents in the Americas engage with digital tools, this study sheds light on technology usage and its impact on foreign reporting, ultimately contributing to the broader discussion on the future of international journalism in an increasingly interconnected world.

The Americas—defined here as North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean—are highly diverse regions, frequently covered by foreign correspondents for domestic audiences. In the Netherlands, U.S. news receives significant attention, reflecting strong public interest (van Riet, 2018). While studies exist on Latin American coverage in German and U.S. media (Cazzamatta, 2018; Larson et al., 1986), no such research exists for Dutch media outlets. The region, especially North America, hosts a high concentration of Dutch correspondents: NOS has three U.S. correspondents (*Onze mensen*, n.d.), RTL has two (RTL, 2025), and all major Dutch newspapers maintain a presence. There are also many Dutch correspondents in Central and South America. The Netherlands' colonial history with Suriname and the varied media climates across the Americas, such as the anti-press stance of U.S. President Donald Trump, add further complexity (Enrich, 2025). These factors make the Americas a compelling case for exploring how new technologies are reshaping Dutch foreign correspondence.

The geographical focus is methodologically and substantively significant for three reasons. First, it allows for a comparative analysis between North and Latin America, where coverage patterns, news values, and technological constraints may diverge. Second, the relative abundance of Dutch correspondents in these regions provides a strong empirical basis for analyzing how technological developments are reshaping foreign reporting practices. Third, the disproportionate emphasis on North America in Dutch media makes the Americas an ideal context to examine broader patterns of visibility, neglect, and technological adaptation in foreign correspondence.

This study's research question is: How have digital technologies changed foreign correspondents' working routines in the Americas? This question will be answered through 13 semi-structured interviews with Dutch foreign correspondents living and working in the Americas.

Literature Review

SECTION 1 – FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE

1.1. Early History

For over a hundred years, foreign correspondence has been the primary means of learning about what happens abroad (Sambrook, 2010). From the first "friendly souls in London or Paris who wrote letters home'' (Cole & Maxwell Hamilton, 2008) to the major news outlets' advanced international bureaus staffed by multiple journalists and editors, foreign correspondence is an ever-changing and evolving area of journalism. In the early 1800s, American newspapers began to focus more on news that attracted large audiences, including foreign news. Cole and Maxwell Hamilton (2008) attribute this to the relatively small world in which most people in Western societies lived at the time. Day-to-day affairs in their hometown were often discussed with neighbors, so there was no need to report them in the newspapers. Foreign news, on the other hand, was interesting, and something most ordinary people did not hear about in their regular lives. It also had the added benefit of not being inflammatory in these small and local communities, as the news did not concern the readers themselves. In other words, it "was less likely to impinge on local sensitivities'' (Cole & Maxwell Hamilton, 2008, p. 801). This fits into the long-standing role of foreign correspondents as cultural intermediaries who brought otherwise inaccessible information to domestic audiences (Gross & Kopper, 2021). The kinds of foreign news published in papers at the time were often related to economics, usually from countries that were colonially tied to the home country. Policies such as new taxing strategies on imported and exported goods had direct effects on merchants and were therefore of high interest to them (Cole & Maxwell Hamilton, 2008). As a result, specialized reporters began to be sent abroad to cover the events there. This early expansion of foreign correspondence coincided with what Gross and Kopper (2010) describe as the professionalization of global reporting and the growing symbolic status of foreign correspondents (p. vii). However, many still had other part-time jobs on the side, as a foreign correspondent was not yet a full-time occupation (Cole & Maxwell Hamilton, 2008).

1.2. The Golden Age

This progressed over time into the interwar "golden age of foreign correspondence" (Cole & Maxwell Hamilton, 2008, p. 803–804), a period in the early-to-mid 1900s when foreign correspondence was well-organized, professional, and clearly defined. As Sambrook (2010, p. 5) explains, the ideological conflicts of the early twentieth century—such as the rise of communism and fascism, along with the two world wars—highlighted the importance of international reporting for Western news organizations. This is crucial for the development of foreign news services as we know them today, as it was during this period that the foundation for the high-quality, round-the-clock news services we are accustomed to now was laid. The establishment of international bureaus and staff correspondents during this period also illustrates that interest in foreign affairs was no longer focused primarily on economics, but was becoming more multifaceted, a trend that remains true of many foreign news outlets today. The focus is often broad, with correspondents paying attention to culture, (geo)politics, art, finance, environmental news, and more (Hannerz, 2004).

This golden age of foreign correspondence peaked during the decolonization period and the Cold War, which lasted from 1945 to the early 1990s (Lightbody, 1999). Western news organizations—the biggest, best-resourced, and most influential news sources—had started to globalize, corporatize, and technologize (Hannerz, 2004). This resulted in more frequent and higher-quality news, which coincided with an increased interest in the news by audiences back home. According to Brennan (2015), Western audiences were particularly interested in decolonization news as it often concerned countries formerly part of their empire. The Cold War was also highly relevant, as many Western countries perceived the rise of communism as a direct threat to their security and capitalist way of life (Boel, 2019). Every foreign event was a case of 'us versus them,' which made news urgent, relevant, and compelling (Sambrook, 2010). This heightened interest in foreign news was mirrored in the East, where foreign correspondents also became key figures in the Cold War information battle. As Bechmann Pedersen and Cronqvist (2020) note, East German journalists working in West Germany did not simply report the news. Instead, they acted as informal diplomats, gathering intelligence and promoting the political goals of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Their work was closely intertwined with state interests, and their reporting was often ideologically one-

sided, portraying capitalism as riddled with crises and failures, and socialism as superior (Bechmann Pedersen & and Cronqvist, 2020). Foreign news was therefore not only a reflection of world events, but a carefully curated tool for soft power and propaganda on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

1.3. Post-Cold War Decline

Only after the Cold War ended did interest in foreign affairs begin to dissipate (Franks, 2005). As the standoff between the two major powers ended, news from far-away places became less relevant to a Western audience, as it often no longer directly related to them As explained by Westerståhl and Johansson (1994), proximity and importance were two of the main news values considered when publishing foreign news in the years immediately after the Cold War. Therefore, news that occurred closer to home was given more importance than events happening in faraway countries (p. 84-85). Franks (2005) confirms this, stating that foreign news events "were often dismissed as 'tribal' or 'ethnic' conflicts, neither comprehensible nor worthy of much interest'' (pp. 92–93). The decline in interest marked a turning point from the Cold War period, when foreign affairs were seen as central to public understanding, to a post-Cold War landscape where distance often equated to irrelevance.

However, interest in foreign affairs peaked again after the 9/11 attacks in New York City. Still, the coverage of these events and the 'war on terror' that ensued was characterized as too US-focused and not holistic enough (Wu & Hamilton, 2004). Hahn and Lönnendonker (2009) conducted interviews with twenty-seven foreign correspondents working for different US media outlets in Europe in the years following 9/11. They find a consistently downward trend in the coverage of foreign affairs in the US, with interest remaining high only in stories from abroad that have a clear link to current US affairs.

This decline in foreign coverage is what Williams (2011) calls 'the paradox of globalization.' He explains that as the world becomes increasingly connected and people travel to new and more distant places faster than ever before, the individuals responsible for reporting on global events are becoming increasingly scarce. There are more opportunities than ever to learn, know, and understand more about the world, but

foreign news is paradoxically declining. This structural decline reflects economic pressures on traditional media and the perception that foreign news is less commercially viable (Franklin, 2012).

This economic pressure is confirmed by Faure et al. (2025), who investigate international news agencies' adaptation to rapidly transforming business models in South America, and the increasing casualization of the role of a news agency's foreign correspondent. They find that the professional status of these correspondents is under pressure, with the working conditions becoming increasingly flexible and precarious. These findings are paralleled by Franklin (2012), who describes a bleak outlook for the US and UK media, primarily due to the loss of advertising revenue. He states, "Starved of economic and editorial resources, these newspapers watchdogs are constrained on a tight financial leash, no longer able to hold local politicians and governments to account'' (p. 482). The increasing precarization of journalism and foreign correspondence, therefore, has direct consequences on the societies that it aims to serve.

1.4. A New Golden Age?

However, not all research adheres to this pessimistic line of thought. Sambrook (2010) states that we might be on the verge of the new golden age of foreign correspondence, due to the increasing quality and depth of foreign reporting, and the ever-greater number of (freelance) journalists efficiently using digital technologies. Archetti (2013) describes how, in London, foreign correspondents do not all face the same challenges as those investigated by Faure et al. (2025), making it impossible to generalize about an overarching crisis in foreign correspondence. There are numerous sources, audiences, and opportunities available to them, which makes their reporting stronger and more reliable. Through new communication technologies, access to alternative sources is facilitated, enabling foreign correspondents in London to better contextualize events within a broader range of perspectives. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Archetti (2013) is not unwaveringly positive in her research, as she acknowledges the financial precariousness many correspondents face in their day-to-day lives (pp. 433). This can also be attributed to the ever-changing and increasingly online journalistic landscape in which foreign correspondents find themselves.

This divergence in scholarly perspectives highlights a broader transformation in the field, one that is increasingly influenced by technological innovation. Digitalization has profoundly altered foreign correspondence, changing how news is gathered, produced, and consumed. As Belair-Gagnon et al. (2017) and Faure et al. (2025) observe, digital tools have expanded the possibilities for reporting while also increasing pressure on journalists to work faster and across multiple platforms. While these developments offer new opportunities, they also demand more from correspondents—often with fewer resources. In this way, digitalization presents both a challenge and an opportunity, reshaping the profession in real time.

SECTION 2 – IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE

2.1. New Digital Tools and Usage Patterns

Sambrook (2010) paints a highly positive picture of the role of new digital technologies in the world of foreign correspondence:

> Technology has unquestionably made foreign reporting more productive – in terms of quantity at least. Today, armed with mobile phone and laptop, a reporter can file live from almost anywhere on the planet. As well as cutting newsgathering costs for established media, technology has breathed fresh air into freelance journalism. Now independent journalists are no longer dependent on newspapers and channels to reach the public. They can leapfrog over the heads of editors and report directly (pp. 28)

This effectively illustrates the radical impact technology has had on journalism and foreign correspondence. Sambrook's perspective highlights how digital tools have expanded the autonomy and reach of reporters, particularly by lowering barriers to entry and enabling real-time reporting. However, to critically assess the implications of this technological shift, it is essential to examine how specific tools such as chat applications are reshaping journalistic practices, especially in complex reporting environments like foreign correspondence.

There are different kinds of technologies used by foreign correspondents to produce their stories. Belair-Gagnon et al. (2017) focus on the use of chat apps such as WhatsApp, Telegram, or WeChat, and how these apps impact the way foreign correspondents report on protests and political unrest. They find, through interviews with 34 foreign correspondents working in Hong Kong and mainland China, that chat apps are a new and distinct way of gathering news. They have an impact on journalistic sourcing, as they facilitate access to what is happening during protests significantly and can also provide easier fact-checking (i.e., through timestamps and geolocation features on chat apps). On the relationship between journalists and sources, they state "chat apps further enmesh journalists within audiences, allowing for a series of private and semi-private interactions with sources and fellow reporters'' (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2017, p. 3). However, this increased degree of reciprocity between source and reporter is not only a positive development; the authors of the study also report that rumors and false claims made on chat apps pose a challenge for journalists using these platforms to report on current events.

Çatal (2017) confirms the new world opened up by digital technologies, while further looking into the latest sets of skills journalists have had to learn because of this. Journalists need to be able to perform HTML editing, video and graphics production, and continually stay up-to-date with the latest trends in newsgathering and news production. She also confirms the increased reciprocity between journalists and their audiences, as activities such as commenting on social media and receiving email feedback become increasingly common. Her main argument is that while the profession of journalism has remained largely unchanged, the platforms on which it operates are subject to significant changes, which impact the skills journalists need to do their work and publish their stories. She also writes about similar negative aspects of the increased use of technology in journalism, as noted by Belair-Gagnon et al. (2017), which lists the increasing speed of journalism as a means for errors or false information to spread. She states that the demand for instant updates on the news means journalists are spending less time gathering news on the ground and more time at their desks, thereby increasing the risk of false reporting (Çatal, 2017, p. 7467).

A real-world example of this trend was highlighted by Al Jazeera correspondent Step Vaessen in an interview with presenter Twan Huys on *College Tour, de podcast!* Here, she expressed surprise at the absence of Dutch journalists at the riots surrounding the Ajax-Maccabi Tel Aviv football match in November 2024. She noted that only two individual journalists, neither affiliated with major Dutch media outlets, documented the events overnight. At the same time, most news organizations failed to recognize the story's significance in real time. Vaessen linked this to a lack of urgency in Dutch journalism, contrasting it with her experience at Al Jazeera, where breaking news is treated with immediate priority (College Tour, de podcast!, 2024). Her observation underscores Çatal's (2017) concern that the increasing demand for instant updates can lead to a reduced physical presence in the field, potentially impacting the depth and accuracy of news coverage. This is confirmed by Dodds (2019), who finds the technologies such as WhatsApp and other mobile chat apps "have taken news production to a state of never-ending rolling'' (pp. 732). There is no clear start and end to the work day, it is almost an assembly line running non-stop.

There are also differences in the way younger and older journalists utilize digital technologies in their work. Brandtzaeg and Chaparro Domínguez (2018) study how Norwegian journalists with a median age of 24 and 50 used social media in their reporting, and find that the set of younger journalists used a variety of social media platforms. They use platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook to gather news and spread their productions around. Older journalists primarily use X and obtain their information mainly from elite news accounts rather than from ordinary civilians. This means that younger journalists come into contact with a more varied range of sources and are less skeptical of them. Brandtzaeg and Chaparro Domínguez (2018) attribute this to the fact that younger journalists grew up with social media, while older journalists did not. As a result, younger journalists are more likely to adapt to new media, and older journalists are more likely to stick to their familiar routines, running a higher risk of excluding potentially valuable sources.

2.2. Local Sources and Power Transitions

Regarding local sources, recent research has highlighted a shift in the power dynamics of these relationships. Murrell (2019) emphasizes how fixers (locals who help facilitate

foreign correspondents' news productions), who were traditionally treated as logistical helpers, are increasingly asserting themselves as media entrepreneurs, leveraging their expertise for personal growth in the journalism industry. This contrasts with Mitra and Paterson (2019), who, through their focus on the continued structural inequalities faced by local journalists, argue that their contributions remain undervalued despite playing a key role in the production of global news narratives. These structural inequalities include a lack of recognition in media productions, precarious working conditions, lower pay, and being at a greater risk of government repression. Both studies acknowledge the critical function of local sources but diverge in their framing. Murrell sees a path toward greater autonomy, whereas Mitra and Paterson highlight the persistent challenges of precarity and lack of recognition. Together, these perspectives highlight a tension between the increasing professionalization of fixers and the entrenched power asymmetries within international journalism.

Dodds (2019) adds a technological dimension to this discussion by examining how mobile chat applications, such as WhatsApp, have altered interactions between journalists and their sources. While Murrell (2019), and Mitra and Paterson (2019) focus on the structural and economic aspects of local source usage, Dodds (2019) explores the interpersonal consequences of new forms of digital communication, highlighting both enhanced accessibility to sources and the ethical dilemmas that arise. The intimacy fostered by WhatsApp can empower local journalists by making them more integral to the reporting process; however, it also raises concerns about verification, editorial control, and blurred professional boundaries. Taken together, these studies suggest that while local sources are becoming increasingly embedded in foreign news productions, their agency remains constrained by systemic factors, from industry hierarchies to the unintended consequences of digital technologies.

2.3. Metrics and Increased Pressure

Another important aspect of digital technologies in news is audience metrics. Through services like Chartbeat or Smart Octo, journalists can stay constantly in the loop about how their stories are performing on the website or app of their medium. These analytics are often displayed on large television screens hung centrally in the newsroom, making them constantly visible to all the people working there. According to Dodds (2023):

> Chartbeat creates a strange sense of competition among journalists, for it informs reporters about people's preferences between all the content available on the website. It is a direct message about how the audience values and rewards the topics journalists have been working on and bestows upon the winner a feeling of success over their co-workers based solely on the number of times someone has clicked on their story. (pp. 404)

This has also had the consequence of journalists feeling the need to publish their stories quicker and quicker, in an effort to adapt to the fast-paced nature of online news and social media. Usher (2014) describes this as a hamster wheel, where journalists are forced to keep running faster and faster just to try to keep up. He compares this wheel to the atmosphere inside the modern, digital newsroom. The focus in this newsroom is on speed and quantity, not proper, qualitative, and fact-checked journalism. These dynamics illustrate how digital analytics and the pressure for immediacy are not only reshaping journalistic routines but also raise important questions about how these changes affect the editorial choices and professional values of foreign correspondents. For foreign correspondents, this dynamic can constrain their ability to report deeply and independently on international issues, as they too are increasingly evaluated through the lens of real-time audience engagement.

Methodology

To shed light on digital technologies and their impact on the world of foreign correspondence, I conducted thirteen semi-structured interviews with foreign correspondents in the Americas. To answer my specific research question, I chose semi-structured interviews as my preferred research method. This allowed me to gain an overview of the working routines of several correspondents, all of whom lived and worked in different countries in the Americas. This interview style enabled me to focus on reaching data saturation and recognizing patterns (Flick et al., 2004).

I gathered a list of twenty-three foreign correspondents living and working in North and South America as of spring 2025. This list was compiled through a comprehensive search of media and countries on search engines such as Google, as well as social media platforms. Once I compiled this list, I reached out to all of them either through email or LinkedIn direct message. Some snowball sampling occurred; one person I was

recommended to was not available, but I did manage to reach out to one correspondent after hearing their name mentioned during another interview. I also tried to reach out to the collective of Dutch embassies abroad on WhatsApp (*Nederland Wereldwijd op WhatsApp)*, as this was a strategy for finding interviewees mentioned in similar research, such as Archetti (2013). Unfortunately, in the same fashion as Archetti, this attempt proved unsuccessful.

Unfortunately, not all the correspondents I reached out to were available for an interview. As well as a few who did not respond to my repeated inquiries at all, many North America correspondents were too busy, which can be attributed to the timing of this study, which happened just after Donald Trump's re-election. This was also in the period where Trump announced his widespread tariffs, which caused a big uproar around the world and gave many correspondents so much work they did not feel they could meet with me for an hour.

In total, thirteen interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. The correspondents I did end up speaking with included foreign correspondents working for *NRC, NOS*, *Trouw, De Volkskrant, BNR Nieuwsradio, Het Financieele Dagblad,* and *VPRO Bureau Buitenland.* Some correspondents work exclusively for radio or TV, whereas others work for a newspaper only. Out of thirteen interviewees, eleven were men and two were women. Their ages ranged between 31 and 66 years old. Despite my best efforts to create a diverse sample, this uneven distribution is partly explained by the fact that I reached out to seven women, but they were all too busy to meet with me. Another reason is the general gender gap in foreign correspondence, as outlined by Faure et al. (2025) in their paper on foreign correspondents working for news agencies in Chile. In 2025, it remains true that many foreign correspondents are male, and women continue to fight for some of the same rights and privileges that their male counterparts have enjoyed for years (Faure et al., 2025, p. 160).

Dutch foreign correspondents were chosen for this article, as there are very few studies on Dutch foreign correspondents in general, and even fewer about the Americas. The Dutch media landscape is diverse, with a strong influence from both public and private broadcasters (Mediamonitor, 2024). This enables an examination of how national policies, funding structures, and editorial independence influence foreign reporting in

the digital era. The fact that all correspondents are native Dutch speakers allowed for easier, more free-flowing interviews.

The Americas are highly diverse, yet Dutch foreign correspondents extensively cover the region, particularly the U.S., reflecting strong public interest. While studies have examined Latin American news coverage in German and U.S. media (Cazzamatta, 2018; Larson et al., 1986), Dutch media remain underexplored. The Netherlands has a significant number of correspondents in the Americas, with NOS, RTL, and major newspapers maintaining multiple reporters, especially in North America. Historical ties, such as the Netherlands' colonial past with Suriname, further shape coverage. Additionally, media landscapes vary widely, as exemplified by the political hostility toward the press in countries like the United States (Enrich, 2025).

All the interviews were conducted online, with two via audio call and eleven via video call (using Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and WhatsApp video). The interviews lasted on average one hour and were conducted between mid-March and mid-May 2025. The questions were sufficiently open-ended to encourage spontaneity in the interviews. After conducting and recording all the interviews, they were transcribed using AmberScript (a GDPR-compliant transcription software) and coded with Atlas.ti. The interviews focused on three main themes: the topics foreign correspondents reported on, the sources they relied on for their stories, and how they framed those stories to appeal to a Dutch audience. Each interview began with a set of practical questions covering the respondent’s name, age, place of residence, years of experience, and—most importantly—the digital technologies they used in their work. Then, specific questions about how and why they used these digital technologies in relation to the three themes were asked throughout the interview, in order to gather as much detail as possible.

Once uploaded, a thematic coding analysis was performed to identify, scrutinize, and report patterns across the entire dataset. The codes were created through a thematic analysis, with no pre-existing code frame used. This way, an open perspective was kept throughout the coding process, with no pre-emptive steering of the results. As the coding process began during the interview process, it was very flexible, and I often went back and changed codes or added new ones to already coded interviews once something new and interesting emerged. For example, if a correspondent said, “I always used to use Twitter for my newsgathering and inspiration, but since Elon Musk took over, I switched

to BlueSky. Unfortunately, it is just not the same as Twitter in its glory days,'' this fragment would be given the codes 'twitter', 'social media as inspiration for stories', 'BlueSky', and 'BlueSky not relevant enough yet'.

After all the interviews were finished, the 72 codes emerging from the interviews were organized into thematic groups to facilitate the organization of the results. The following thirteen different code groups were identified: attitudes to social media, contact with sources, Dutch audience interests, feedback, local journalists, locals' attitudes, places where news is gathered, places where sources are found, social media platforms, subjects, technological advancements, types of people followed on social media and ways to message people.

Each correspondent was assigned an abbreviation so they could be referred to throughout the research without being traceable back to their original name. Due to Leiden University's ethical guidelines, all interviewees were anonymized in the final version of this article. Informed consents were obtained from all interviewees. A list of all the (anonymized) interviewees, their type of contract, employer(s), and years of experience can be found in Appendix 1. The complete list of questions asked of each interviewee can also be found in the same appendix.

Results

This study aims to investigate the way digital technologies have altered the working routines of Dutch foreign correspondents in the Americas. After speaking with thirteen of these correspondents, it is clear that digital technologies have had a profound impact on their working habits and routines. Long gone are the days of faxing stories to the newsroom in the Netherlands or sending video cassettes on airplanes for them to be used in next week's eight o'clock news. Today's foreign correspondent has the world at their fingertips and can relay stories to their colleagues at home within seconds. Their network has also grown significantly, with social media and messaging services enabling them to reach almost anyone within a working day.

This does not mean, however, that foreign correspondents have completely let go of the classic working routines. On the contrary, many of the correspondents interviewed for this study adhere to old habits and are not keen on adopting a routine that is wholly dependent on digital technologies. Especially not in an era of social media decline, in

which far-right power figures manipulate social media to their advantage (Mac & Swan, 2024) and the online climate grows increasingly hostile (Kumar & Maurya, 2024). As a result, the added value of digital technologies for many foreign correspondents is not always as great as the utopian vision of foreign reporting that was projected ten to twenty years ago (Sambrook, 2010).

The following results section is structured around three main themes: trust in traditional media, the value of physical presence, and skepticism towards social media and X. Together, these themes highlight how Dutch foreign correspondents navigate the tension between digital innovation and enduring journalistic traditions. At the same time, many correspondents acknowledged that digital technologies have made certain aspects of their work easier, allowing them to stay connected, reach sources more efficiently, and discover new story angles more quickly.

GENERAL DISLIKE OF X

The first main result emerging from the research is the general dislike of X (formerly known as Twitter). The reasons for this dislike range from concerns over data protection and privacy to its ownership structure. As C8 explained, they would like to get off of X simply to 'mess with' Elon Musk, who purchased the platform in autumn 2022 (Conger & Hirsch, 2022). Correspondent C13 stated they never really liked the structure of the platform in the first place but still felt the need to check it occasionally to get an idea of what is happening in the United States. This is a common thread that weaves through all the responses of correspondents when asked about X together. They all expressed a strong dislike for the platform, its structure, algorithm, and owner, yet still use it for their newsgathering. As told by C10: "I still have a Twitter account, but I hardly use it anymore. It is useful to look at certain trends, but they are by no means neutral. […] It's been completely soiled by weird accounts and weird content, but it still is useful to check when something big happens." C11 mentioned something similar; they put their X account on private due to the influx of negative comments and direct messages they were receiving, but still continued using the platform in a more passive sense (no posting, only scrolling or looking people up when needed). C11 said : "The benefits stopped outweighing the drawbacks a while ago." Despite their reservations, most

correspondents continued to monitor X to stay informed about major developments in both North America and Latin America, indicating the platform's lingering functional relevance in their news-gathering routines. Their opinion on X, however, remained consistently negative.

In light of these overwhelmingly negative feelings about X, many correspondents decided to 'move over' to BlueSky, a new social media platform originally launched by Twitter's former CEO, Jack Dorsey. It is a more user-focused platform, running on an open-source, decentralized framework (*A Quick Guide to Bluesky*, n.d.). This massive departure from X is a wider phenomenon recognized in academic literature as well (Ng & Ray, 2025; Radivojevic et al., 2025). When asked about their thoughts on BlueSky, and its added benefit for foreign correspondence, however, most correspondents indicated they liked the promise of the platform, but did not feel it to be a complete replacement for X. C6 stated, "I've had a look a few times. I did not see enough of the kinds of sources I like to follow there yet. Perhaps in the future?'' C8 had similar thoughts on BlueSky, knowing many people in the Netherlands had switched over from X, but simultaneously not seeing too much added benefit for their daily working routine, yet. They also felt it might be more relevant a few years later, when more and more people will have 'switched over.'

NEED FOR PHYSICAL PRESENCE

The second main set of results concerns the key values of the interviewees related to newsgathering and production. When asked the question *"Do you think that new technologies, such as social media, have reduced the need for correspondents to be physically present in foreign countries, or does this technology only supplement traditional reporting?''* all correspondents answered in very similar ways. There was no one who viewed their post as having become obsolete abroad. Neither did anyone feel that social media could fully replace the need for physical presence in the place(s) where the news is happening. All of them viewed it as a useful tool, albeit one with drawbacks (as mentioned in the previous section).

C4 put it simply, saying "Nothing beats being physically present'' C6 confirmed this as well, especially when it comes to background stories. They believed there would always

be interest in background information as well as quick daily news updates, and in order to make these background reports well-balanced, a physical presence in their working country is crucial. C3 told me that there is nothing more important than going out into the streets, being among the locals, and absorbing as much local culture as possible. Social media alone is not a good replacement for being in the country and directly seeing and hearing what is happening. C9 agreed as well, stating that you cannot find out what the true local news is without actually being there. The things one notices, the daily tensions and issues, are an immeasurable and indispensable part of being a foreign correspondent, according to them. All correspondents explicitly stated they think social media and other digital tools are a good addition to their work, but will never become a full replacement.

HIGHER TRUST IN TRADITIONAL MEDIA

The third main set of results sheds light on foreign correspondents in the Americas and their attitudes towards traditional media. As described above, the work of foreign correspondents increasingly resembles a pendulum, swinging between the pervasive integration of digital technologies and a persistent reliance on traditional media as a standard for impartial journalism. After all thirteen interviews, it became clear that the pendulum continued to swing mostly towards the side of traditional media, specifically regarding newsgathering, the finding of expert sources, and verifying content found on social media.

On the topic of newsgathering, C2 shared they still heavily rely on newspapers to stay informed about the news. C4 agreed: “Many of my sources are just newspapers, the media I take seriously. When something goes viral or becomes important on social media, it will end up in regular media eventually, which is when I find out about it’’. This reliance on traditional media and newspapers can also be observed in the working routines of C1, who mostly obtain news through traditional media. If they did find news on social media, it often came from posts shared by traditional media accounts. C8 also stated that they read a lot of newspapers, and similarly to C11, they viewed social media platforms like X as a backup source of news, rather than a primary one.

Regarding finding expert sources for their own pieces, C5 often consulted traditional media from the country in question to see who had already covered the issue they are currently writing about. Seeing who the experts are these local media spoke to is an easy way for C5 to find and come into contact with experts for their own stories. C8 explained, "If I read a piece about a subject […] with a specialist who seems knowledgeable, I'll just call the newspaper. And then I'll make an appointment with the journalist and we'll exchange (contact) information." C6 and their team also made use of local or hyperlocal media to encounter experts for their own stories.

In addition to helping correspondents identify credible experts for their own stories, traditional media continues to serve as a trusted reference point when verifying the often-unreliable content found on social media platforms. For C9, "Social media alone is never a source." They hardly ever quoted anything taken directly from social media in their work, unless it came from the account of a major verified politician. All other newsworthy statements must be verified, which they usually do by consulting traditional media, such as newspapers or television. C10 used a similar strategy, always critically looking at how many other accounts had already spoken about the issue at hand, as well as referring to newspapers, etc. C7 shared the others' opinion that social media alone is not a good source, stating "I'll refer to traditional media when I see something that grabs my attention, but makes me want to double-check to see if it's correct." These practices illustrate how foreign correspondents continue to rely on established media institutions to assess the credibility of social media content, treating traditional outlets as essential benchmarks in the verification process.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the impact digital technologies have had on the working routines of Dutch foreign correspondents in the Americas. The results highlight that they are navigating the tension between the benefits of digital tools and the professional norms of traditional journalism.

Three main patterns were observed after conducting the interviews. Firstly, all thirteen correspondents described strong reservations about X, citing distrust in its algorithm and ownership structure as reasons for their reservations. Nonetheless, they continue to

use X as a passive newsgathering tool, as there is still relevant information on the platform, and alternatives such as BlueSky do not have a wide enough reach yet. Secondly, all interviewees agreed on the importance of being physically present in their reporting locations. Digital tools are seen as useful supplementary material, but not as a complete replacement for on-the-ground reporting. Finally, a strong preference for gathering news through traditional media was identified. Legacy media, such as newspapers, radio, and television news, are often used by foreign correspondents to find news, identify credible experts, and verify content found on social media.

Overall, these results suggest that while digital technologies have become embedded in the daily routines of foreign correspondents, they are used selectively and passively. Instead of replacing long-established journalistic norms and values, these tools are integrated in ways that reinforce traditional norms, such as credibility and a slower, more detailed approach to reporting news.

When it comes to the skepticism towards X, correspondents displayed a pragmatic kind of selectivity. In spite of their (sometimes rather strong) dislike of the ownership structure and algorithm that X has, they kept using it for their work, although some more stealthily. Their reasoning aligns with the findings of Ng and Ray (2025), who found journalists from multiple countries (including the UK, USA, and France) cited increased fake news and far-right political content on their feed as well as the new owner of X as main reasons for their departure from the platform. Interestingly, they also conclude that the number of journalists who completely abandoned X was very small, with many journalists continuing to use it, albeit from secret or anonymous profiles.

There is some discrepancy between the opinions of the older and younger correspondents. Those whose age was closer to 50 or 60 reported using fewer X/social media platforms compared to those in their thirties and forties. This trend is confirmed by Brandtzaeg and Chaparro Domínguez (2018), who studied the working routines of relatively younger and relatively older Norwegian journalists. The younger journalists used social media more frequently and followed a wider range of people on these platforms. In contrast, the older journalists relied more on traditional news production methods and less on social media. Similar conclusions can be drawn for this research, as the older sub-group of interviewees was more apprehensive towards social media than the younger ones.

Regarding the importance of physical presence in their reporting countries, all correspondents agreed that they are very much still field-based observers, rather than office workers reporting on faraway events from their home country. This supports the idea of foreign journalism as an embodied practice, something that cannot be replaced by reviewing online content only. Many interviewees emphasized the importance of going out and speaking to people on the streets, being able to walk into an office when needed, and fully immersing oneself in the culture of their country or countries.

This aligns with Hannerz' (2004) characterization of foreign correspondents as a unique kind of reporter drawn to where others flee: "Whenever you find hundreds of thousands of sane people trying to get out of a place and a little bunch of madmen struggling to get in, you know the latter are newspapermen" (pp. 39). In one sentence, Hannerz captures both the physical commitment and slightly irrational determination that define the foreign correspondent's role—a commitment that no digital tool can fully replicate. In the age of omnipresent digital tools and technologies, the correspondents interviewed for this research still adhered to the principles outlined by Hannerz, even though they are over 20 years old.

This field-based perspective stands in contrast to Çatal (2017), who posited that the ever-increasing speed of foreign news could have reduced reporter presence as a consequence. This line of thinking is based on the notion that digital technologies can largely compensate for physical absence by enabling remote newsgathering and audience engagement. While not explicitly mentioning an increase in the speed of reporting and news production, the respondents did not recognize Çatal's (2017) hypothesis about reduced physical presence of reporters due to newly available tech. Instead, their answers aligned more with Sambrook's (2010) observations about increased productivity and the depth of foreign reporting resulting from technology, recognizing that new technology has opened up previously closed worlds.

This preference for being 'on the ground' reflects a broader commitment to conventional journalistic norms, something which is also evident in the correspondents' strong trust in traditional media. While many journalists saw the added value of technology for their work, they continued to rely heavily on traditional media for newsgathering, finding experts, and verifying social media content. This indicates a preference for more vetted, institutional knowledge, as well as a pushback against the algorithm-driven, attention-

seeking logic of social media platforms. Many correspondents expressed a particular dislike for the lack of robust fact-checking procedures on social media, a sentiment confirmed by Ng and Ray (2025) in their research on the journalist exodus from X.

This development goes against the trend described by Dodds (2023), who describes how newsroom values are increasingly being dictated by reader analytics and the kind of content that tends to perform 'well' on social media. The correspondents interviewed in this study resist this by deliberately slowing down their work and referring to traditional media in every aspect of their job. The 'hamster wheel' as described by Usher (2014), where journalists have to work increasingly faster and rely on quick fixes rather than slow, intentional researching and reporting, is something the foreign correspondents in this study did not recognize. The fact that they work from home, not surrounded by screens with analytics all day, makes a big difference in the way they produce their stories. This continued reliance on traditional media brands also aligns with findings by Wolf and Schnauber (2015), who show that even in mobile news consumption, established journalistic institutions continue to dominate users' information repertoires.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this study has primarily focused on Dutch foreign correspondents working in the Americas, meaning the results cannot be generalized to foreign correspondents from other countries working in other parts of the world. Other foreign correspondents with diverse backgrounds may have different cultural ties to North and South America, which could potentially impact the results. I would also like to point out the lack of women interviewed for the study once again, as this is another way in which the research is limited as it lacks diversity. Finally, the group of interviewees could have been greater, as many of the correspondents I reached out to were swamped with work, due to the turbulent political atmosphere in the United States (Donald Trump has just announced his unprecedented tariffs, which dominated the global headlines). The imbalance in correspondents working in North and South America (5 working in the US and 8 working across Latin / Central America) also means we cannot be certain if these results are conclusive for all Dutch North and South America correspondents.

Future research could replicate this study in regions such as South and Southeast Asia, where the work of Dutch foreign correspondents remains largely understudied. A comparative approach may reveal regional differences in how digital tools are used or resisted, and how journalistic values are shaped by local conditions. For journalists, this

study offers a valuable example. Foreign correspondents demonstrate that a selective and intentional use of digital technologies, combined with a focus on credibility rather than metrics, can lead to high-quality, well-researched journalism without the stress often associated with constant audience monitoring. Their approach invites a reconsideration of what meaningful, sustainable journalism might look like in an increasingly digital age. At a time when newsrooms are feeling pressure to be faster, louder, and more data-driven, these correspondents remind us that slowing down is not the enemy of good journalism, but often its very foundation.

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Appendix

Table 1: correspondent information

Pseudonym	City	Age	Type of Media	Type of contract	Years of Experience as a correspondent	Countries they cover
C1	Mexico City	38	Newspaper	Freelance	5	Latin America
C2	Traveling between the Hague and Latin America	60	Newspaper, magazine, TV, online and radio	Parttime for VPRO, everything else freelance	20+	Latin America
C3	Rio de Janeiro	63	Newspaper and online	Freelance	20+	Brazil
C4	New Hampshire, USA & Linschoten, NL	66	Newspaper and online	Freelance	15	USA
C5	Mexico City	38	Newspaper and online	Freelance	8	Latin America
C6	New York City	52	TV	Fixed contract	19	USA and Central America
C7	Buenos Aires	40	Newspaper, radio and online	Freelance	12	Mainly Argentina, some surrounding countries too
C8	Mexico City	59	Newspaper	Freelance	4	Latin America
C9	New York City	38	Newspaper	Freelance	4	USA
C10	Mexico City	31	Newspaper, TV and radio	Fixed zero-hour contract	8	Mexico and Central America
C11	Washington DC	42	Radio and newspaper	BNR fixed contract, everything else freelance.	7	USA
C12	Buenos Aires	42	Radio, newspaper, TV and online	Freelance	6	Argentina
C13	Amsterdam & Wynnewood, Pennsylvania	46	TV, radio, magazine and online	Freelance	7	USA

Table 2: All the different media that fall under each category in the table above

TV	Newspaper	Radio	Online	Magazine
VPRO, RTL, NOS, SBS6, Bureau Buitenland, EVA	De Tijd, De Volkskrant, Trouw, NRC, FD, De Telegraaf, Het Laatste Nieuws, Leeuwarder Courant, AD, Dagblad van het Noorden	VPRO Radio, BNR, Radio 1, VRT, Bureau Buitenland	ANP, Staantribune, various Mexican media outlets, AD, SBS6	De Groene Amsterdammer, De Spectator, New Scientist, Science News, The Economist, EW, Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad, Vrij Nederland

Table 3: An overview of all the code groups and the codes within that code group

Code Group	Codes
Local journalists	Contact with local journalists Contact with local journalists on social media Contact with local journalists through personal network Contact with local journalists through third-parties (such as websites) Finding sources through contact with local journalists Following fellow journalists on social media Following local media/journalists on social media No professional contact with local journalists
Types of people followed on social media	Types of people followed on social media
Dutch audience interests	High Dutch interest in US news stories
Places where sources are found	Finding expert sources in traditional media Finding sources in own network Finding sources on the street Finding sources online Finding sources through contact with local journalists Following fellow journalists on social media Social media facilitates source access Use of fixers for sources WhatsApp group with foreign correspondents WhatsApp has facilitated contact with sources
Contact with sources	Calling sources Interviews done on WhatsApp More use of Signal because of restrictions in press freedom Source willingness to respond to DMs

	reduced Sources need to be easily reachable Sources need to be trustworthy WhatsApp has facilitated contact with sources
Feedback	Precarity of foreign correspondence Receiving e-mail feedback from readers Receiving feedback on social media
Subjects	Subjects Subjects recommended to foreign correspondents by others
Places where news is gathered	Following fellow journalists on social media Less reliance on press agencies Reliance on traditional media for newsgathering Social media alone is not a good source Trust in established media WhatsApp group with foreign correspondents
Ways to message people	E-mail Facebook Messenger LinkedIn Messenger Relevance of E-mail in NL working situations Relevance of WhatsApp in LATAM Signal Teams (for internal communication) Texting/SMS WhatsApp WhatsApp group with foreign correspondents WhatsApp has facilitated contact with sources
Locals' attitudes	Foreign companies/people being interested in being on NL news Foreign journalists not getting through to local politicians as easily Relevance of WhatsApp in LATAM
Social media platforms	BlueSky Facebook Instagram LinkedIn Relevance of WhatsApp in LATAM TikTok Truth Social X
Attitudes to social media	BlueSky not relevant enough yet Correspondent needs to be physically in the country of relevance Foreign correspondent visibly online Indifference to social media feedback Instagram to post AND receive content Instagram to post content, not receive

	No usage of social media Passive use of social media (no posting) sharing content on social media about own work Social media as inspiration for stories Social media facilitates source access Verification of social media content Verifying social media content in traditional media Very little to no usage of Facebook WhatsApp has facilitated contact with sources
Technological advancements	Technological advancements in journalism WhatsApp has facilitated contact with sources

List of questions asked to each correspondent:

Section A) Personal Background

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you currently live?
3. How old are you?
4. Who do you work for?
5. What type of contract do you have?

Section B) Professional Background

6. When did you start as a foreign correspondent?
7. Since when have you been a correspondent in your current region?
8. What topics do you tend to cover?
9. When you go to a country, how do you familiarize yourself with the language, culture, customs, important people etc.
10. Which messaging apps do you use?
11. Which social media apps do you use?
12. Do you think that new technologies, such as social media, have reduced the need for correspondents to be physically present in foreign countries, or does this technology only supplement traditional reporting?

Section C) Subjects

13. In general, how do you select topics for your stories?
14. How do you use technology for covering topics now?
15. Has this changed due to technology, if at all?
16. Do you use social media for your sources/topics, and how? Follow-up, how do you corroborate those stories/sources?
17. Do you receive reader/listener feedback through social media, and does that affect your topic choices for future pieces?
18. What kind of accounts on social media do you get your news from?

Section D) Sources

19. In general, how do you select sources for your stories?
20. How do you use technology for finding sources?
21. Has this changed due to technology, if at all?
22. Do you use social media to contact local journalists as well?
23. In your experience, how do local sources respond to Dutch journalists? Do you find that they are more or less open to providing information based on your nationality?
    ➔ Have you ever found that your relationship with a local source was affected by differences in cultural understanding? How did you navigate that situation?
24. What strategies do you use to build trust with local sources?

Section E) Frames/ Audience

25. In general, how do you choose the frame for your stories? What kind of things do you include in the stories, what information do you include in the story?
26. How has technology changed the way you frame your stories?
27. How do you make foreign stories interesting for a Dutch audience?