

## Catchier Than COVID: An Analysis of Pandemic Coverage by Dutch News Satire Show *Zondag Met Lubach*

JONAS NICOLAÏ\*

PIETER MAESEELE

University of Antwerp, Belgium

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about difficulties for science communication in the form of declining trust in science journalism and political instrumentalization of scientific discourse. News satire has been hailed as a valid alternative to conventional forms of science communication by blending comedic and experiential modes of learning. This article investigates the COVID-19 coverage of Dutch news satire show *Zondag met Lubach*. It presents an analysis of 30 segments aired between March 2020 and April 2021, and reveals how the show critiqued news media and politics through the discursive lens of an infodemic in which media, political elites, and the political right are perceived as detrimental to a healthy deliberative flow of information. Furthermore, the findings show how *Zondag met Lubach* expanded conventional notions of satirical critique to engage in didactical dissemination of scientific topics. This article contributes to the understanding of political satire's role in crisis contexts and of comedy as a medium for science communication.

*Keywords: news satire, science communication, infodemic, Zondag met Lubach, COVID-19, deliberative discourse*

The SARS-CoV-2 outbreak in 2020 caught the world by storm, upsetting social and political structures worldwide. The pandemic was still in its early stages when the World Health Organization (WHO) released a situation report in February 2020 stating, "The 2019-nCoV outbreak and response has been accompanied by a massive 'infodemic'—an over-abundance of information—that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it" (WHO, 2020, para. 1). In the Netherlands, this resulted in confusion among news audiences as some increasingly turned to news media to make sense of the crisis situation, whereas others chose to avoid the news (De Bruin, De Haan, Vliegthart, Kruikemeier, & Boukes, 2021). Furthermore, political distrust intensified, especially among young adults, as political representatives became a perceived source of misinformation (Newman et al., 2021). In the context of a global pandemic, the unhindered flow of health communication becomes ever more essential, attributing an important role to news media and political representatives as the "face[s] of crisis management" (Wodak, 2021, p. 332).

---

Jonas Nicolai: [jonas.nicolai@uantwerpen.be](mailto:jonas.nicolai@uantwerpen.be)

Pieter Maesele: [pieter.maesele@uantwerpen.be](mailto:pieter.maesele@uantwerpen.be)

Date submitted: 2023-01-08

Copyright © 2023 (Jonas Nicolai and Pieter Maesele). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

In times of crisis, news satire is known to take up a vital role in the public debate by interrogating media practices or calling out political leaders (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019). It has been shown to positively engage audiences in scientific debate pertaining to such crises (Bore & Reid, 2014; Brewer & McKnight, 2015). In the Netherlands, one actor taking up this role during the COVID-19 pandemic was Dutch news satire show *Zondag met Lubach* (ZML). By weaving together existing news media footage with the host's comedic storytelling, such shows have the potential to simultaneously inform audiences and critique dominant media narratives (Becker & Bode, 2018).

However, news satire operates in a broader sociopolitical context that is characterized today by a proliferation of critical discourses (Nieuwenhuis & Zijp, 2022). Such a context amplifies progressive social justice movements such as #MeToo or Black Lives Matter, but it equally facilitates antivax protest movements or other forms of antiestablishment commentary. As critique seemingly becomes a staple to public discourse, some have called for a reimagining of the nature of satirical critique (Holm, 2018; Kilby, 2018). Where conventional views reflect the modernist assumption that comedy should strive to subvert the political order (Brassett, 2016), it is argued that "interrogating the supposed political work of critical humor requires us to disentangle the assumed correspondence between humor as a form of critique and humor as a form of resistance" (Holm, 2018, pp. 31–32).

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic especially, the identification of comedic critique as either progressive or reactionary has become increasingly difficult, as is exemplified by uses of critical humor that fluctuate between promoting public health measures (Zekavat, 2021) or facilitating antidemocratic discourse (Sakki & Castrén, 2022). This underscores the urgency to unpack the critical dimensions of news satire in greater depth and to look beyond interpretations of satirical critique as ridicule or subversion. Therefore, the aim of this article is to investigate how ZML covered the COVID-19 pandemic by tracing the show's interactions with pandemic-related discourse and actors and evaluating its role in terms of critical engagement with scientific topics.

This study presents the textual analysis of 30 COVID-19-related segments aired from March 2020 until April 2021. Our analytical framework draws on two distinct theoretical bodies. The first places ZML within the context of the ongoing COVID-19 infodemic, which refers to the general overabundance of information and the detrimental effects of misinformation (Simon & Camargo, 2021). Implicit to the notion of the infodemic is the agreement that the successful management of a global health crisis depends upon a largely unimpeded flow of clear and truthful information (McKay & Tenove, 2021). Such an idea reiterates assumptions of a deliberative view of democracy. We incorporate literature on deliberative democracy to interpret the dimensions of critique in ZML in as far as they discuss the disruption of COVID-19-related flows of information. A second body of literature concerns news satire's potential informational role. Here, we incorporate literature on science communication and humor to assess the way in which ZML engages with scientific discourse within and beyond its satirical critique. In doing so, we highlight the perceived polysemic nature of news satire and its sociocultural impact in times of crisis. We conclude by reflecting on the importance of news satire's interweaving of critique and science communication to create alternative paths to knowing in crisis contexts.

### The Infodemic and Satirical Deliberation

In June 2020, the First WHO Infodemiology Conference (WHO, 2020) called attention to the potentially harmful effects of COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation on public health. Whether intentional (disinformation) or unintentional (misinformation), untruthful information on COVID-19-related issues can impede dissemination of scientific information among citizens and hinder clear implementations of preventive pandemic measures. Such a view reflects normative assumptions inherent to theories of deliberative democracy, which centralize rational communicative exchange with regard to public decision-making (Chambers, 2017). Healthy deliberative media systems engage in political discussions that result in the production of ideas that promote epistemic quality, moral respect, and democratic inclusion (Mansbridge et al., 2012). In contrast, an unhealthy deliberative system “distorts facts . . . and encourages citizens to adopt ways of thinking and acting that are good neither for them nor for the larger polity” (Mansbridge, 1999, as cited in McKay & Tenove, 2021, p. 705).

The context of an infodemic thus disrupts the flow of information upholding a healthy deliberative environment necessary to manage the COVID-19 crisis. Although we do not aim to uncritically reproduce paradigmatic assumptions of deliberative democracy, we contend that the critique underlying the idea of an infodemic is inherently entrenched in at least some of its core ideas—for example, that healthy media pose a conduit between the different forums and institutions in that system. Correspondingly, when Dutch minister of interior Ollongren approved additional measures against disinformation in 2020, a governmental press release explicitly framed it as necessary to assist voters to critically assess information on elections (Rijksoverheid, 2020).

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has to be placed in a broader context of what has been called an “epistemic cacophony” (Dahlgren, 2018, p. 25) in which the very foundations of rational-scientific thinking are under attack. In the Netherlands, the many faces of scientific skepticism have contributed to a rise in vaccine hesitancy and low levels of trust in scientific institutes in general (Rutjens & van der Lee, 2020). One meaningful example has been ongoing debates surrounding the necessity and effectiveness of mass vaccination, which were unremittingly fraught with counterclaims ranging from the antiscientific to the deranged conspiratorial. In this “post-truth” context, the pandemic has brought about a transformation in the public exchange of health information between scientific experts, government, journalism, and citizens (Van Dijck & Alinejad, 2020). Whereas conventional models of science dissemination hinge on a linear exchange between experts and nonexperts, with policymakers or media institutions as mediating entities, the pandemic serves as an example of how nonexpert voices can have an exacerbated impact on public debate.

One such voice is that of news satire. Shows such as *The Daily Show* (Smithberg & Winstead, 1996–2023) have been praised for reviving “a journalism of critical inquiry and [advancing] a model of deliberative democracy” (Baym, 2005, p. 259). At first sight, this could seem to oppose conventional theories of deliberative democracy that assume deliberative discourse to be incongruous with popular culture or entertainment media (Weinmann & Vorderer, 2018). Some studies corroborate this view by associating news satire with higher message discounting (Nabi, Moyer-Gusé, & Byrne, 2007) and reduced argument scrutiny (LaMarre, Landreville, Young, & Gilkerson, 2014). Deliberation indeed hinges on the ability to

produce a coherent argumentative logic that the presence of humor is then thought to obscure. However, by now multiple studies have revealed the merits of satirical humor as a conduit for deliberative discourse. For example, satire is found to mobilize political participation through emotional provocation of its audiences (Chen, Gan, & Sun, 2017). More recently, it has been shown that that satirical content elicits more user interaction and discussion than conventional news content—both prerequisites for deliberative communication (Boukes et al., 2022). Furthermore, deliberation involves the exchange of diverse ideas (Wessler, 2008). In this regard, news satire can interweave humor with a reasoned deconstruction of social issues to potentially highlight perspectives outside of the conventional media spotlight (Waisanen, 2018). Such findings gear understanding of deliberative discourse toward the inclusion of news satire and political entertainment as a valid route for public deliberation.

### **News Satire and Science Communication**

Public discourse and policy increasingly involve scientific topics. As a result, science communication's importance has been emphasized over the last years (Davies, 2021). On the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and its infodemic nature, research reflects an acute necessity for insights into what constitutes effective science communication (Massarani, Murphy, & Lamberts, 2020). The recent Horizon 2020 project QUEST found that quality science communication is relatable to the everyday lives of laypeople, aimed at generating changes in society and contains a "readiness . . . to address controversial topics or wrongdoings" (Olesk et al., 2021, p. 18). Viewed as such, science communication interlinks with deliberative views on democracy that put forward an informed citizenry and the rational deliberative debate prefacing it as a goal worth pursuing.

Conventionally, however, science communication is attributed almost exclusively to professional science journalists or scientific institutions, hindering access to scientific topics for laypeople (Bucchi & Trench, 2008). Today, science communication has also widely penetrated popular culture. The prevalence and popularity of initiatives like TED/TEDx conferences (Mattiello, 2017), scientific podcasts (Barrios-O'Neill, 2018), or science-based videogames (Curtis, 2014), have opened the doors for science communication to breach its traditional mold and overcome the hurdles of paywalls or specialist jargon. News satire is no exception to this list. Comedy infused with scientific issues has proliferated over the last several years and gained mainstream cultural legitimacy as a site for societal and political discourse. A recent overview by Kaltenbacher and Drews (2020) confirmed that the use of humor in climate communication can raise awareness (Davis, Glantz, & Novak, 2016), facilitate learning (Boykoff & Osnes, 2019), and mobilize audiences to change individual climate-related behavior (Skurka, Niederdeppe, & Nabi, 2019). In addition, Osnes, Boykoff, and Chandler (2019) revealed how comedy on environmental topics can regulate negative emotions associated with climate anxiety.

Such studies almost unilaterally imply a positive view of comedy—a progressive kind of humor at the service of science dissemination, aimed at facilitating constructive changes among its audiences. For instance, Osnes and colleagues (2019) make the distinction between "good-natured comedy" and "negative (mean-spirited) humor" (p. 226). But this approach underexposes certain key features of political satire that reveal additional dimensions of science engagement. News satire, specifically, has been praised for its potential to hold power accountable through ridicule and comedic juxtaposition (Baym, 2005) and showcase

how “mean-spirited” comedy is not necessarily in opposition with constructive forms of public discourse. In the context of climate coverage specifically, satire can strengthen belief in the scientific consensus of global warming (Brewer & McKnight, 2017) or function as a gateway to traditional forms of news (Young & Tisinger, 2006). The core idea underbuilding these findings is that “piggybacking” scientific information on comedic content enhances audiences’ attention to scientific issues. In this sense, television news satire functions as an “attention equalizer” (Feldman, Leiserowitz, & Maibach, 2011) by bridging the gap between laypeople and “elite” scientific audiences.

### ***Zondag met Lubach***

In 2014, ZML debuted on the Dutch public broadcaster VPRO. Quickly after its release, it acquired increasing popularity among broad audiences. ZML deviated from Dutch traditions of cabaret comedy, managed to gather critical acclaim, and won numerous television awards for being a “unique and successful combination of entertainment and investigative journalism” (Nipkowschijf, 2016, para. 3). Its blend of satirical comedy and news places ZML in a wider tradition of satirical late-night comedy, hallmarked by well-known forerunner *The Daily Show* (Smithberg & Winstead, 1996–2023). Nonetheless, it draws on long-form “deep dives” more akin to *Last Week Tonight* (Carvell, 2014–2023). By constructing well-researched comedic narratives, ZML offers audiences a weekly deconstruction of topics outside of the current news cycle (Davisson & Donovan, 2019). In doing so, it manages to weigh in on political discussions resulting in what some have called the “Lubach-effect” (Den Hollander, 2021). This type of satire is known to incorporate scientific issues, and as a result, it plays a central role in translating science to broader public (Feldman, 2017).

For example, with a segment titled “The Online Trap of Tales” (De Wit et al., 2020a), ZML broke its own viewing record by attracting more than two million viewers. In it, host Arjen Lubach tackled the link between rampant conspiracy theories and the algorithmic user engagement logic of social media platforms. During 24 minutes, the segment argues that tech companies play a significant part in fueling misinformation by facilitating algorithmic conspiracy rabbit holes for their users. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, topics like vaccine skepticism, the fear of microchip implants, and the denial of SARS-CoV-2 altogether were addressed in ZML’s trademark fashion. Halfway through the segment, Lubach invited audiences to experience how the “Trap of Tales” works:

**Lubach:** I did a little test. I removed all my cookies, installed a new browser, and opened a new YouTube account. I’ll start with a neutral search term like “PCR test reliable.” This is the test to detect a virus. My top hit is “Invalidity of PCR test explained in five minutes.” I’ll click on it. In my suggested videos, “Does SARS-CoV-2 exist? Where is the evidence?” appears. Of course, I click on this. Meanwhile I see “Lange Frans<sup>1</sup> and Adèle van der Plas about pedos within the judiciary.” What? You got me hooked! I’m watching, and then in the suggested videos “Lange Frans en Sjors van Houts about 9/11” appears. Wow! Within three clicks, I went from corona tests to conspiracy theories about the attacks on the Twin Towers, via a video about pedophile networks. (De Wit et al., 2020a, 11:48)

---

<sup>1</sup> A Dutch rapper known for his podcast that circulates conspiracy theories and antiestablishment narratives.

This segment is exemplary for how ZML's form of "investigative comedy" (Nicolai, Maesele, & Boukes, 2022) succeeds in expanding the importance of social topics in the public debate (Boukes, 2019). It also reflects ZML's tendency to draw heavily on scientific discourse, often referring to governmental reports, scientific expert opinions, or peer-reviewed articles. For example, a 2017 segment on alternative medicine draws at length from a peer-reviewed systematic review study to debunk claims on alleged beneficial effects of acupuncture and reincarnation therapy, and a 2019 segment on the tobacco industry features a leading scientist working for the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment. This connects ZML to the broader acknowledgment that political satire plays an increasingly important role in the dissemination of scientific discourse within popular culture (Feldman et al., 2011).

### **Method**

We conducted a qualitative discourse analysis of 30 COVID-19-related segments—aired between March 2020 and April 2021—with a focus on the show's use of humor and its subjects in the context of COVID-19 discourse. Segments, here, refer to individual pieces of coverage on one specific topic. A full episode of ZML conventionally consists of one shorter segment (approximately five minutes) and one longer segment (approximately 15 minutes). These segments were viewed online on the show's official YouTube channel, where they are uploaded as stand-alone items. We apply the term "discourse" in a broad sense, approaching similarities to the notion of public debate. Nonetheless, we implicitly embed it in critical traditions that acknowledge its dimensions of identity construction, contestation, and the drawing of discursive boundaries.

Our analysis is multimodal and takes into account textual dimensions of the show's script, visual and stylistic elements such as host strategies (e.g., body language, emotional reactions), and formatting choices (e.g., interaction with third-party source material, in-studio events). As such, our approach is embedded in the notion of political aesthetics (Holm, 2017), which emphasizes that comedy's political function is performed simultaneously through its overt content and more covert form.

We present our findings in two stages. The first stage (subsections 1–3) focuses on critical dimensions of ZML's segments, discussing which subjects it targets and why. From this critique, however, arises the additional construction of a discourse that upholds scientific insights and, as a result, educates audiences on COVID-19-related topics. A subsequent stage (subsection 4) therefore presents the ways in which ZML interacts with scientific discourse in relation to governmentally issued COVID-19 measures.

### **Analysis**

#### ***Live From the Infodemic!***

Similar to *The Daily Show* (Smithberg & Winstead, 1996–2023) and *Last Week Tonight* (Carvell, 2014–2023), ZML embodies elements of broadcast news in appearance and content (Fox, 2018). However, rather than creating own news content, it uses existing news segments as building blocks for a broader metanarrative. These commentaries express a distinct view on the role of media during the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with its predecessors, ZML's media critique harnesses a classically modernist interpretation

of news media as a site for “neutral and current factual information that is important and valuable for citizens in democracy” (Ekström, 2002, p. 247). But in the context of the pandemic, where Dutch citizens increasingly turned to broadcast news for public health updates (De Bruin et al., 2021), its critiques of news media magnify the media’s democratic role.

A first critique posits that, under ever-accelerating commercial logics, news media have surpassed their informational function (Johnston & Forde, 2017). In the first episode dedicated to the pandemic, titled “COVID-19” (De Wit et al., 2020b), ZML addresses this by showing an overview of the different ways in which media outlets tackle questions surrounding the at the time still mystifying SARS-CoV-2 virus:

**Lubach:** The NOS<sup>2</sup> was not the only one who answered questions. This is Limburg L1<sup>3</sup>: “Five coronavirus questions in Limburg.” RTL<sup>4</sup> thought, we can top that: “The 6 most important questions about the coronavirus.” Then AD<sup>5</sup> let us count: “Are quarantines not over the top? And six other questions.” So six plus one is seven. Then Het Parool<sup>6</sup>: “What exactly is up with the coronavirus? Everything you need to know in 15 questions.” So that’s 15 plus one, but that was already 15? So 15. But the winner is Hart van Nederland<sup>7</sup>: “Hart van Nederland answers all questions about the coronavirus!” (De Wit et al., 2020b, 03:23)

Through the comedic juxtaposition of different news articles, Lubach argues that news media’s informational function suffers under the urge to outbid each other in “breaking” the news. This is even more explicit in the segment “Communication on COVID”: “Clear communication starts with the transmitter, in this case the government, but also the press plays a part,” Lubach states (De Wit et al., 2020c, 09:05). The segment continues with a number of clips of reporters at press conferences being cut off prematurely by in-studio news anchors, while governmental officials continue their address in the background. Lubach then gets riled up at the media’s short attention span, working his way toward the claim that their communication could be clearer, only to get cut off by his sidekick Tex De Wit. In parodic reference to the earlier news clips, Lubach mimics and exaggerates the news, using its (faulty) logic against itself. Similarly, in the segment “Curfew,” Lubach explains how the curfew has been revoked by the supreme court even before it was implemented: “If that sounds confusing, wait until you hear [NOS news correspondent] Rob Trip’s summary!” (De Wit et al., 2021a, 00:28). Following a clip with a fumbling Trip on the revoked measure, a bewildered Lubach invites sidekick Tex De Wit a second time to deconstruct the news anchor’s grammatical confusion.

---

<sup>2</sup> NOS is one of two Dutch public broadcasters legally ascribed with the task of independent news dissemination.

<sup>3</sup> L1 is a regional Dutch broadcaster

<sup>4</sup> RTL is a Dutch commercial broadcaster.

<sup>5</sup> AD is a Dutch daily newspaper.

<sup>6</sup> Het Parool is a Dutch daily newspaper.

<sup>7</sup> Hart van Nederland is a Dutch commercial tabloid news program that focuses on regional and local lifestyle news.

Critiques aimed at the media's inability to inform citizens culminate in a segment on the "Corona-app" (De Wit et al., 2020d). The segment kicks off by reviewing how broadcast news covered citizens' willingness to install a contact tracing app on their smartphones. Later on, it unearths how governmental officials are inspired by these news polls in adjusting crisis policies: "The problem is just that these polls are taken before we knew anything about this app" (De Wit et al., 2020d, 01:46) Lubach then describes how the government's decision to launch the app is the result of a self-fulfilling circle starting with the minister of health mentioning the app on Tuesday, after which news media poll the willingness to download it on Wednesday, followed by the government's decision based on these polls a few days later. The skit lays bare a plea in ZML's discourse for a slower journalism, in contrast with the fast-paced "churnalism" (Johnston & Forde, 2017) of vox pop polls. Ultimately, it promotes slower forms of policymaking that weigh public decisions and advocate for expert opinions over the ad hoc implementing and revoking of COVID measures.

When ZML satirically interrogates news media for not upholding modernist journalistic ideals—that is, facilitating an informed body of citizens in function of rational decision-making—its arrows are predominantly pointed in the direction of television news broadcasts. Perhaps broadcast news' enduring authoritative status as a reliable source of news in the Netherlands (Van Dijck & Alinejad, 2020) makes it an easy target for satirical attacks. Nonetheless, critiques aimed at the media's inability to correctly inform citizens are not dismissive of news media as a whole. More than a judgment, they are a diagnostic call to news media to do better in times of crisis, and they uphold an image of news media as an indispensable ingredient for successful pandemic coverage (Hameleers, van der Meer, & Brosius, 2020). In mitigating the infodemic and its interconnectedness with citizens and policy, ZML also engages in facilitating media literacy for its audiences. In the segment "Rutte doesn't understand COVID" (De Wit et al., 2021b) ZML urges the prime minister to strive for a highly diverse media diet as a cure for informational confusion:

**Lubach:** So, Mark [Rutte], I have a few tips for you to increase your knowledge so you can guide us through this pandemic even better: The podcast of NRC<sup>8</sup> is real chill, Maarten Keulemans<sup>9</sup> has good threads, the live blog of RTL is nice, these are more short news clips, Rijksoverheid.nl<sup>10</sup> also explains things really clear, and NOS op 3<sup>11</sup> does those "explainers" with really fluent tweens. And often, rewatch your own press conferences once? Silly. (De Wit et al., 2021b, 06:29)

### ***Laughing in the Faces of Crisis Management***

In times of crisis, political leaders are called upon to guide citizens in emergency matters and become the "face of crisis management" (Wodak, 2021, p. 332). During such critical moments, effective

---

<sup>8</sup> NRC is one of the Netherlands' leading daily newspapers, generally considered to be a newspaper of record.

<sup>9</sup> Maarten Keulemans is a Dutch science journalist working for the daily newspaper De Volkskrant.

<sup>10</sup> Rijksoverheid.nl is the official website of the Dutch government.

<sup>11</sup> NOS op 3 is a one-minute news bulletin predominantly aimed at teenagers and adolescents, airing on the public broadcaster channel NPO3.



political leadership consists of recognizing threats, mobilizing efforts to overcome them, and managing their impact (Boin, Hart, McConnell, & Preston, 2010). The epidemiological context of the COVID-19 pandemic additionally problematized politicians' governing role because cooperation with scientific experts became central to identifying relevant measures and correctly relaying them to citizens. Furthermore, politicians were assumed to possess scientific insights in the SARS-COV-2 virus and the logics of preventive measures in order to encourage collaborative action (Forester & McKibbin, 2020).

Early on during the pandemic, ZML dedicated segments to the role of political communication in crisis management, reflecting an inclination to target the government's role in managing the pandemic. In doing so, ZML's coverage articulates an alignment with normative assumptions of political leadership in crisis management. In the Netherlands, the frequent governmental COVID-19 briefings—which became a go-to for pandemic measure updates—meant that Prime Minister Mark Rutte and First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Health Hugo de Jonge quickly became the faces of Dutch crisis management. These two politicians especially became the recurrent targets of ZML's satirical attacks on the role of politics in pandemic management.

A first dimension of critique concerns ZML's provocation of Rutte and de Jonge for their failure to take up responsibility as political leaders. The segment "Third Wave" (De Wit et al., 2020e) discusses the prevention of a third wave of COVID-19 infections and critiques Rutte's views on leadership by deconstructing his media appearances:

**Lubach:** In the Netherlands, we also have a boss, and that's Mark Rutte. And I, for one, don't mind this. But he does.

**Rutte [in a segment of a television interview]:** In public, it often happens that parents see me and tell their kids, "That's our boss!" And to that, my answer is always, "No, [your parents] are boss."

**Lubach:** Yes, and then that child thinks, "My parents are boss? But then why does Daddy cry all the time? And why did those people come to collect the furniture?" (De Wit et al., 2020e, 03:49)

Lubach continues by explaining that this was Rutte's view before the pandemic, but that it is common for political leaders to take up a strongman role during crises. The segment then explains how Rutte's lack of leadership has resulted in conflicting messages among cabinet members, scientific experts, and media outlets on mask mandate policies, resulting in confusion among citizens. As such, Lubach's critiques echo ideas on a crisis of representative democracy (Tormey, 2014) characterized by an increasing skepticism among citizens toward their elected officials. Bereft of sarcasm or irony, they highlight the explicit importance ZML attributes to the principle of democratically elected leaders. In this regard, Lubach ascribes himself the role of the host as citizen-surrogate (Day, 2011) who comedically interrogates what the role of prime minister during a global pandemic should entail.

Similar critiques are visible in ZML's coverage of the cabinet's lack of factual insight into COVID-19-related issues. Here, de Jonge's authority as minister of health is interrogated on account of his ignorance on pandemic matters. When introducing an interview with the Dutch director of Pfizer, Lubach jokes how "even de Jonge can be wrong [on vaccination targets], but in this case it's not just de Jonge saying it, but also people who actually have expertise on the matter" (De Wit et al., 2021c, 02:06). Between the lines of this ironic quip at overly optimistic vaccination goals lies a discursive attempt to delegitimize de Jonge as a policy maker. Similarly, a segment bearing the less suggestive title "Rutte Doesn't Understand COVID" (De Wit et al., 2021b) is dedicated entirely to ridiculing the prime minister's lack of knowledge about COVID-19. It opens with a collection of clips of Rutte neglecting COVID-19 measures (e.g., shaking colleagues' hands) or fumbling when asked for explanations on mask mandate exceptions. Such ad hominem puns, targeting Rutte's inadequate exemplary role as a political leader through imitation and ridicule, trivialize the prime minister's power as a politician. Later on in the segment, a clip is shown with Rutte claiming there is no sense in testing for COVID-19 as long as one has no symptoms:

**Rutte [voiceover from a newspaper interview]:** I never got tested. You only do so when you have symptoms, or if you're part of a presymptomatic group.

**Lubach:** . . . But presymptomatic means that you've been infected, and have no symptoms yet. And you only know this afterwards. You can't know that you're part of a presymptomatic group if you've never been tested! I'm just trying to think along here. So he picked up a fancy word from Uncle Jack, which he just doesn't really understand? (De Wit et al., 2021b, 07:59)

This exchange is exemplary for ZML's stance vis-à-vis politicians' deficit of pandemic knowledge. It follows earlier findings that show television news satire focuses predominantly on public figures when discussing public policy (Nitsch & Lichtenstein, 2019). But rather than resorting to mere personal attacks exclusively, it also contains an extended critique of feigned expertise altogether. By ridiculing the rhetorical authority of those at the wheel of the pandemic, ZML calls out politicians to abandon their elitist lexicon and address their constituents in a clear voice. As such, ZML strives to level out political discourse, as it favors layperson registers over fabricated "expert speak." Finally, ZML not only aims to critique cabinet members for their inadequate pandemic management but also invites audiences to evaluate inconsistencies and absurdities in their rhetoric. By engaging in an ironic dialogue with politicians, Lubach comedically highlights their shortcomings and creates space for collective reflection on alternative ways of governance in pandemic times. In this sense, ZML's critique of policymakers is corrective rather than exclusionist and dialogical rather than indicting. It contains an evaluation of a specific normative idea of political leadership, one that is well-informed, conscientious, and willing to govern.

### ***The Political Right and COVID-19***

Aside from targeting cabinet members, a large part of ZML's pandemic coverage interrogates oppositional parties. Explicit attention is given to right-wing populist parties Party for Freedom (PVV) and Forum for Democracy (FvD). Given the prominence of media coverage in the Netherlands on issues pertaining to immigration and national identity (de Jonge, 2021), both parties have received extensive

media attention during the pandemic. However, ZML does not reproduce dominant media perspectives when incorporating these parties into its segments. Rather, where cabinet members leadership qualities were satirically called into question, right-wing views are excluded from the debate altogether. In the episode "Opposition in COVID Times" (De Wit et al., 2020f), a segment on FvD's party leader Thierry Baudet details how the party is behind in the polls despite being among the first to have publicly addressed the impending COVID-19 pandemic:

**Lubach: [imitating Baudet]:** "Fuck it. Then I say something that cannot be interpreted as racist, and again it's not right!" So Baudet goes back to his roots, and again he does the things that made him famous. For one, bluffing with bullshit.

**Baudet [in an interview]:** We know that when the weather gets better, especially with sea wind, that the virus disappears. It dies.

**Lubach:** No, a virus doesn't die, and especially not from a sea breeze! Imagine Baudet being your doctor: "Madam, the bone is sticking out of your leg, but it's rain season, and there's a nice trade wind out, so if I were you, I'd go for a nice walk." (De Wit et al., 2020f, 06:51)

As with Rutte and de Jonge, ZML critiques right-wing populist parties for playing their part in perpetuating the COVID-19 infodemic. However, rather than evaluating their false claims in the light of their presumed political functions, right-wing politicians' misinformation claims are placed in a broader discursive context of antidemocratic politics. When later in the episode Baudet is shown floating the idea to bribe other nation states into selling excess test kits to the Netherlands, Lubach continues:

**Baudet [in an interview]:** What I would do is send a private plane with some bribe money all across the world to get some test kits. That's what you do when you're head of a country, no?

**Lubach:** And name the capital after yourself? And erect a giant statue of yourself on a square, and right in front of it build a palace and masturbate while looking out of your window? No? (De Wit et al., 2020f, 08:15)

Not only is Baudet called out for perpetuating falsehoods, but his contribution to the infodemic is framed as a viable threat to democratic discourse. Through comedic exaggeration, Lubach equates Baudet's claim with the caricatural image of a narcissistic dictator, demarcating Baudet's rhetorical style as bad political form. Similarly, when FvD politician Wybren van Haga is discussed on ZML, it is for his appearance on a podcast by rapper and television personality Lange Frans, known for spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories. Van Haga's criticism of PCR tests renders him, according to Lubach, "fully on board the conspiracy train" (De Wit et al., 2020a, 19:47). Furthermore, ZML calls out van Haga for retweeting a message claiming PCR tests, HIV, and COVID-19 altogether are hoaxes. Through such discursive interventions, ZML unambiguously delegitimizes Haga on account of his ties with antidemocratic conspiracy views. This is most clear in the segment "Vaccination Passport" (De Wit et al., 2021d): On its face value,

the segment discusses different political views regarding the question of how much more freedom a vaccine can offer citizens. However, the episode quickly becomes a systemic delegitimization of any political actors questioning vaccine efficiency. According to Lubach, "There's people who get their opinion from Antivax 13, verse 7 . . . and then there's the conspiracy argument" (De Wit et al., 2021d, 02:29). Of the latter, Lubach then states, "Not all conspiracy thinkers vote for FvD, but most of them like the party nonetheless" (De Wit et al., 2021d, 03:51). The quote follows a clip showing a member of the religious extremist party Jesus Lives clumsily attempting to validate the claim that vaccines contain fetal material, while another member distractedly devours a cheese sandwich in the background. Despite their comedic appeal, such sections are bereft of strategic ambiguity commonly related to satire, and they reflect a clear association of right-wing politics with antivax logics and religious fanaticism. In other words, their rhetoric is discounted as unorganized, unhinged, and thus antideliberative and the antithesis of rational, scientific discourse favored by ZML in effective pandemic management.

### ***Pandemic Measures and the Surpassing of Critique***

So far, we have focused on how ZML critiques news media and political actors for perpetuating the COVID-19 infodemic, hindering the dissemination of truthful information and implementation of preventive measures. This interpretation of the state of public discourse is not ideologically neutral. Whereas some have warned for the excessive use of the term infodemic and rebutted the "moral panics" it could facilitate, (Simon & Camargo, 2021), others approach it as an all-too-real threat to public health in need of information literacy solutions (Zaracostas, 2020). ZML's critical interventions enforce the latter view and can be seen as a legitimation of pandemic measures and the rational-scientific discourse underbuilding them.

COVID-19 measures have rapidly become highly politicized, dividing politics, communities, and citizens on grounds of whether or not to follow them. ZML employs different strategies to legitimate measures and counters such divisiveness. For example, the segment "Measures coronavirus" (De Wit et al., 2020g) bridges the distance between citizens' experiences and the pandemic's severity by including audiences in the host's thought process and his search for clarity in the debate. As such, by incorporating the use of plural first-person pronouns ("we"), segments often promote a sense of inclusion and potentially reinforce group solidarity among its audiences:

**Lubach:** It seems that everyone either wants to stock up on all the rice in Western Europe, or they are chill and say it's just a hoax and quickly still lick Danny De Munk<sup>12</sup> as a joke. But most people are luckily in between [extremes]. Not shaking hands, working from home, limiting bed partners is something we don't do because we think the world is going down, but because we get that it's the only way to save a bunch of lives, and that's how it works in a pandemic. (De Wit et al., 2020g, 10:47)

---

<sup>12</sup> Danny De Munk is a Dutch singer and musical actor who drew attention to himself during the pandemic for his critical stance on the severity of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

By including audiences in a universal “we,” Lubach directs a collective understanding of how to behave during a pandemic and implies that everyone is equally affected by the pandemic. Therefore, ZML naturalizes pandemic measures as the only logical policy, rendering them irrefutable on moral grounds. As a result, individuals not following measures are framed as an obstacle to overcoming the shared pandemic threat. In one segment, Lubach describes vaccine skeptics as “damaging public health” (De Wit et al., 2021d). By delegitimizing vaccine hesitancy, ZML positions itself as provaccination, hinting that antivaccination opinions are not legitimate and have to be bypassed, even if by illicit means:

**Lubach:** People that do not want the vaccine can show their preference by wearing this pin [visual of a pin reading “I do not want the vaccine”]. This pin can be collected at your local health worker. You will barely feel anything! (De Wit et al., 2020h, 06:39)

Here, humor is used as a form of othering and serves to distance audience members from the butt of the joke i.e., vaccine skepticism (Archakis & Tsakona, 2005). But despite their highly politicized nature in the Dutch public debate (Martinescu, Dores Cruz, Etienne, & Krouwel, 2022), ZML does not in any way critique COVID-19 measures. As such, on the one hand, it engages in what Colpean and Tully (2019) call “weak reflexivity”: Jokes that seem reflexive in their acknowledgment of their own ideological positionings at the same time dismiss and reproduce other dominant ideologies. However, ZML seems aware of such pitfalls as it also applies discursive strategies to explicate its own ideological positions. The show does this by framing measures in the light of an unprecedented crisis, which safeguards them from critical evaluation. When Minister of Health de Jonge refers to the “nice and refined system of small labs which we also need after the crisis” as sufficient for covering the Dutch vaccination needs, Lubach replies, “Nice and refined? It’s crisis! We don’t need nice and refined; we need to make sure there will still be an after the crisis” (De Wit et al., 2020e, 10:40).

In defense of the pandemic measures, ZML also supersedes its satirical-critical function to perform an informational role. Out of the idea that media and politicians fail to take up their role as clear communicators originates the self-ascribed mandate to educate audiences on COVID-19-related issues. As a discursive practice, satire always exists in relation to a target (Simpson, 2003). Throughout its pandemic coverage, however, ZML also discusses COVID-19-related issues without clearly defined satirical targets. On a formative level, for example, we note a difference between ZML’s longer and shorter segments. In the latter, topical developments in pandemic measures are covered (e.g., closing hours for the catering sector, the implementation of a curfew) that offer audiences brief comedic yet informational overviews more in line with objectives conventionally ascribed to broadcast news (Montgomery, 2007). In addition, in the segment “China and WHO” (De Wit et al., 2020i), Lubach is seen to moderate his comedic persona and take up a more serious, pedagogical tone:

**Lubach:** Where did the virus outbreak come from? Well, it started on animals and jumped to humans. This is called zoonosis. And you know something’s wrong when there’s “oh, no” in a word. Think of Bono, monogamy, and of course, child pono.<sup>13</sup> Many well-known viruses are zoonosis. For example, HIV jumped from a monkey to a human. And Ebola

<sup>13</sup> A deliberate mispronunciation of *porno*, the Dutch word for pornography.

jumps, via bats, to other animals and to humans. MERS was thought to jump from a bat to a dromedary to a human. In terms of infection risk, bats are nature's cleaning wipes. Scientists discovered that there are a hundred more viruses in bats, waiting to jump to humans. (De Wit et al., 2020i, 01:34)

During this bit, the over-the-shoulder visuals reflect the instructive character of Lubach's argument. First, only the word "Zoonosis" is projected on a neutral gray background. The only other visuals accompanying Lubach's argument are a model of animal-to-human virus transmission and a screenshot of the scientific source material used to make his claims. Here, ZML refers to an academic article retrieved via ResearchGate, visually highlighting the article's findings that bats prove to be rich reservoirs for emerging viruses. In such cases, the humor in ZML is not so much satirical but rather a form of comic relief aimed at increasing audience awareness. This comedic and evidence-based argumentation can be seen as a form of "scaling" that facilitates accessibility to complex multilevel issues (Boykoff & Osnes, 2019). Throughout the pandemic, ZML uses similar argumentative techniques to break down the effect of pandemic measures on health care capacity, the effectiveness of vaccines, or the link between bio-industry and future epidemiological risks.

### **Concluding Overview and Discussion**

A Reuters poll taken during the COVID-19 pandemic found that the Dutch media landscape is characterized by increasing concerns among citizens regarding the presence and effects of misinformation—increasing from 30% in 2018 and 2019 to 40% in 2021 (Newman et al., 2021). As a result, researchers have formulated the concrete advice—for citizens as well as public health officials—that it is beneficial to consume less news, rather than more, and to even turn to entertainment programming as a way to counter news fatigue (De Bruin et al., 2021). In this context, the aim of this study was to analyze the way news satire show ZML covered the COVID-19 pandemic in the Netherlands. The findings show how ZML critiqued news media and politicians of the incumbent Rutte cabinet for contributing to the infodemic during the COVID-19 pandemic, and ousted right-wing populist parties as illegitimate for their antidemocratic rhetoric.

First, ZML's critiques reflect the idea that news media surpassed their democratic function by overloading citizens with information, making it increasingly harder for citizens to maneuver through the overabundance of pandemic news. In doing so, it enacted a form of "self-policing" of its media peers (Mansbridge et al., 2012) for their perceived epistemic shortcomings. Second, by comedically interrogating policymakers' statements and actions, ZML diagnosed and countered the "top-down misinformation" from politicians and other prominent social actors, which has been found to account for 20% of the general infodemic flow (Nielsen, Fletcher, Newman, & Howard, 2020). These critiques are in line with previous studies on news satire which reflect its broader tendency to function as "a journalism of critical inquiry and . . . model of deliberative democracy" (Baym, 2005, p. 259). Central to the theory of deliberative democracy expressed in ZML's pandemic coverage is the idea that news media and elected politicians should fulfil the civic roles of, respectively, societal watchdogs and leaders by example.

In answer to its diagnosis of a distorted informational context, ZML also expanded its conventional satirical function to take up an informational role for its audiences by covering and endorsing pandemic measures. At the same time, it needs to be emphasized that ZML uncritically affirmed the pandemic measures, potentially impairing the inclusion of multiple perspectives in the public debate. This follows earlier findings on science coverage in *The Daily Show* (Brewer, 2013) and *Last Week Tonight* (Brewer & McKnight, 2017), which perhaps point toward a vehement opposition to science skepticism and adherence to science-based logic in news satire. For example, a recent study by Nieuwenhuis (2022) concluded that ZML engages in a technocratic and thus depoliticizing interaction with its topics, ultimately defending rather than interrogating the status quo. However, we contend it is important to take into account the pandemic context: ZML's legitimation of pandemic measures and naturalization of scientific reasoning as a normative good is not automatically problematic when the issues at hand concern the implementation of health measures aimed at mitigating a global pandemic, even if they are governmentally issued. Rather, this places ZML in the emerging tradition of satire as a form of advocacy journalism (Kilby, 2018, Waisanen, 2018) where, in the absence of pandemic leadership, its host Arjen Lubach takes up the role of "wise leader" for its audiences (Zekavat, 2021). To address this evolution more fully, future research should focus on specific discursive strategies that lie at the basis of these changing dimensions of satirical critique.

Finally, in defining news satire's merit as a form of cultural politics, we must not lose sight of the distinction between humor as a form of critique or humor as a site of resistance (Holm, 2018). The absence of explicit critique on pandemic measures in ZML's coverage does not overwrite its potentially progressive character. Rather, the political contributions of news satire are shaped by the context in which they exist. On the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of antidemocratic discourses, upholding normative standards of science communication, political leadership, and public debate can thus effectively instill broader emancipatory and ultimately democratic forms of commentary.

### References

- Archakis, A., & Tsakona, V. (2005). Analyzing conversational data in GTVH terms: A new approach to the issue of identity construction via humor. *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research*, 18(1), 41–68. doi:10.1515/humr.2005.18.1.41
- Barrios-O'Neill, D. (2018). Wild listening. In D. Llinares, N. Fox, & R. Berry (Eds.), *Podcasting* (pp. 147–172). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-90056-8\_8
- Baym, G. (2005). The Daily Show. *Political Communication*, 22(3), 259–276. doi:10.1080/10584600591006492
- Becker, A. B., & Bode, L. (2018). Satire as a source for learning? *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(4), 612–625. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2017.1301517

- Boin, A., Hart, P., McConnell, A., & Preston, T. (2010). Leadership style, crisis response and blame management. *Public Administration*, 88(3), 706–723. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.2010.01836.x
- Bore, I. L. K., & Reid, G. (2014). Laughing in the face of climate change? *Science Communication*, 36(4), 454–478. doi:10.1177/1075547014534076
- Boukes, M. (2019). Agenda-setting with satire. *Political Communication*, 36(3), 426–451. doi:10.1080/10584609.2018.1498816
- Boukes, M., Chu, X., Abdulqadir Noon, M. F., Liu, R., Araujo, T., & Kroon, A. C. (2022). Comparing user-content interactivity and audience diversity across news and satire. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 19(1), 98–117. doi:10.1080/19331681.2021.1927928
- Boykoff, M., & Osnes, B. (2019). A laughing matter? *Political Geography*, 68, 154–163. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.09.006
- Brassett, J. (2016). British comedy, global resistance. *European Journal of International Relations*, 22(1), 168–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115586816>
- Brewer, P. (2013). Science: What's it up to? *International Journal of Communication*, 7(1), 452–470. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1941>
- Brewer, P. R., & McKnight, J. (2015). Climate as comedy. *Science Communication*, 37(5), 635–657. doi:10.1177/1075547015597911
- Brewer, P. R., & McKnight, J. (2017). A statistically representative climate change debate. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 25(3), 166–180. doi:10.1080/15456870.2017.1324453
- Bucchi, M., & Trench, B. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of public communication of science and technology*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Carvell, T. (Executive Producer). (2014–2023). *Last week tonight* [Television series]. New York, NY: HBO.
- Chambers, S. (2017). Balancing epistemic quality and equal participation in a system approach to deliberative democracy. *Social Epistemology*, 31(3), 266–276. doi:10.1080/02691728.2017.1317867
- Chen, H., Gan, C., & Sun, P. (2017). How does political satire influence political participation? *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 3011–3029. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/6158>
- Colpean, M. L., & Tully, M. (2019). Not just a joke. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 42(2), 161–180. doi:10.1080/07491409.2019.1610924



- Curtis, V. (2014). Public engagement through the development of science-based computer games. *Science Communication*, 36(3), 379–387. doi:10.1177/1075547013492436
- Dahlgren, P. (2018). Media, knowledge and trust. *Javnost—The Public*, 25(1–2), 20–27. doi:10.1080/13183222.2018.1418819
- Davies, S. R. (2021). Performing science in public. In K. Kastenhofer & S. Molyneux-Hodgson (Eds.), *Community and identity in contemporary technosciences. Sociology of the sciences yearbook* (Vol. 31, pp. 207–223). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Davis, C. B., Glantz, M., & Novak, D. R. (2016). You can't run your SUV on cute. Let's go! *Environmental Communication*, 10(1), 62–83. doi:10.1080/17524032.2014.991411
- Davisson, A., & Donovan, M. (2019). Breaking the news . . . on a weekly basis. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 36(5), 513–527. doi:10.1080/15295036.2019.1649706
- Day, A. (2011). *Satire and dissent*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- De Bruin, K., De Haan, Y., Vliegthart, R., Kruikemeier, S., & Mark Boukes. (2021). News avoidance during the COVID-19 crisis. *Digital Journalism*, 9(9), 1286–1302. doi:10.1080/21670811.2021.1957967
- De Jonge, L. (2021). *The success and failure of right-wing populist parties in the Benelux countries*. Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge.
- Den Hollander, E. (2021). *Lubach vraagt 1,7 miljoen kijkers: Wil je geen pandemie meer? Kies dan deze partijen niet* [Lubach asks 1.7 million viewers: Tired of the pandemic? Don't elect these parties]. *AD*. Retrieved from <https://rb.gy/jb4u6>
- De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2020a). The online trap of tales [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive Producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.
- De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2020b). COVID-19 [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.
- De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2020c). Communication about COVID [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive Producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.

De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2020d). Corona-app [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.

De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2020e). Third Wave [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.

De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2020f). Opposition in COVID times [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.

De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2020g). Measures coronavirus [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.

De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2020h). Who gets the vaccine first? [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.

De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2020i). China and World Health Organization [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.

De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2021a). Curfew [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.

De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2021b). Rutte doesn't understand COVID [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.

- De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2021c). We're almost there [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.
- De Wit, T., Lubach, A., Smit, D., Van het Reve, J., Weghs, J., Jouke, P., . . . Guzman, E. (Writers), Gitsels, J., & Van Engen, H. (Directors). (2021d). Vaccination passport [Television series episode]. In P. Klok (Executive producer), *Zondag met Lubach* [Sunday with Lubach]. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Human Factor TV.
- Ekström, M. (2002). Epistemologies of TV journalism. *Journalism*, 3(3), 259–282.  
doi:10.1177/146488490200300301
- Feldman, L. (2017). Assumptions about science in satirical news and late-night comedy. In K. Hall Jamieson, M. D. Kahan, & A. D. Scheufele (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the science of science communication* (pp. 321–332). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.  
doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190497620.013.35
- Feldman, L., Leiserowitz, A., & Maibach, E. (2011). The impact of the Daily Show and the Colbert Report on public attentiveness to science and the environment. *SSRN*. Retrieved from <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1838730>
- Forester, J., & McKibbin, G. (2020). Beyond blame. *Socio-ecological Practice Research*, 2(3), 205–216.  
doi:10.1007/s42532-020-00057-0
- Fox, J. (2018). Journalist or jokester? In J. Baumgartner & A. Becker (Eds.), *Political humor in a changing media landscape* (pp. 29–44). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Hameleers, M., van der Meer, T., & Brosius, A. (2020). Feeling “disinformed” lowers compliance with COVID-19 guidelines. *Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review*. doi:10.37016/mr-2020-023
- Holm, N. (2017). *Humour as politics*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holm, N. (2018). Against the assault of laughter. In K. B. Rutter Giappone, F. Francis, & I. MacKenzie (Eds.), *Comedy and critical thought* (pp. 31–45). London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Johnston, J., & Forde, S. (2017). Churnalism. *Digital Journalism*, 5(8), 943–946.  
doi:10.1080/21670811.2017.1355026
- Kaltenbacher, M., & Drews, S. (2020). An inconvenient joke? *Environmental Communication*, 14(6), 717–729. doi:10.1080/17524032.2020.1756888
- Kilby, A. (2018). Provoking the citizen. *Journalism Studies*, 19(13), 1934–1944.  
doi:10.1080/1461670X.2018.1495573

- LaMarre, H. L., Landreville, K. D., Young, D., & Gilkerson, N. (2014). Humor works in funny ways. *Communication Monographs*, *81*(1), 5–27. doi:10.1080/15205436.2014.891137
- Mansbridge, J., Bohman, J., Chambers, S., Christiano, T., Fung, A., Parkinson, J., . . . Warren, M. (2012). A systemic approach to deliberative democracy. In J. Parkinson & J. Mansbridge (Eds.), *Deliberative systems* (pp. 1–26). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Martinescu, E., Dores Cruz, T. D., Etienne, T. W., & Krouwel, A. (2022). How political orientation, economic precarity, and participant demographics impact compliance with COVID-19 prevention measures in a Dutch representative sample. *Acta Politica*, *58*, 337–358. doi:10.1057/s41269-022-00246-7
- Massarani, L., Murphy, P., & Lamberts, R. (2020). COVID-19 and science communication [Editorial]. *Journal of Science Communication*, *19*(5), 1–5. doi:10.22323/2.19050501
- Mattiello, E. (2017). The popularisation of science via TED Talks. *International Journal of Language Studies*, *11*(4), 77–106.
- McKay, S., & Tenove, C. (2021). Disinformation as a threat to deliberative democracy. *Political Research Quarterly*, *74*(3), 703–717. doi:10.1177/1065912920938143
- Montgomery, M. (2007). *The discourse of broadcast news*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Nabi, R. L., Moyer-Gusé, E., & Byrne, S. (2007). All joking aside. *Communication Monographs*, *74*(1), 29–54. doi:10.1080/03637750701196896
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2021). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2021*. Oxford, UK: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Nicolaï, J., Maeselele, P., & Boukes, M. (2022). The “humoralist” as journalistic jammer. *Journalism Studies*, *23*(16), 2057–2077. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2022.2138948
- Nielsen, R. K., Fletcher, R., Newman, N., & Howard, P. N. (2020). *Navigating the “infodemic.”* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Retrieved from <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/infodemic-how-people-six-countries-access-and-rate-news-and-information-about-coronavirus>
- Nieuwenhuis, I. (2022). Ridiculing the unreasonable. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *25*(2), 406–421. doi:10.1177/13675494221087293
- Nieuwenhuis, I., & Zijp, D. (2022). The politics and aesthetics of humour in an age of comic controversy. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *25*(2), 341–354. doi:10.1177/13675494221084118
- Nipkowschijf. (2016). *Zondag met Lubach winner Silver Nipkowschijf 2016*. Retrieved from <https://nipkowschijf.nl/zondag-met-lubach/>

- Nitsch, C., & Lichtenstein, D. (2019). Satirizing international crises. *Studies in Communication Sciences*, 19(1), 85–103. doi:10.24434/j.scoms.2019.01.007
- Olesk, A., Renser, B., Bell, L., Fornetti, A., Franks, S., Mannino, I., . . . Zollo, F. (2021). Quality indicators for science communication. *Journal of Science Communication*, 20(3), A06. doi:10.22323/2.20030206
- Osnes, B., Boykoff, M., & Chandler, P. (2019). Good-natured comedy to enrich climate communication. *Comedy Studies*, 10(2), 1–13. doi:10.1080/2040610X.2019.1623513
- Rijksoverheid. (2020). *Minister Ollongren neemt maatregelen tegen desinformatie richting Tweede Kamer verkiezingen* [Minister Ollongren is taking measures against disinformation during the House of Representatives elections]. Retrieved from <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/11/16/minister-ollongren-neemt-maatregelen-tegen-desinformatie-richting-tweede-kamer-verkiezingen>
- Rutjens, B. T., & van der Lee, R. (2020). Spiritual skepticism? *Public Understanding of Science*, 29(3), 335–352. doi:10.1177/0963662520908534
- Sakki, I., & Castrén, L. (2022). Dehumanization through humour and conspiracies in online hate towards Chinese people during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 61(4), 1418–1438. doi:10.1111/bjso.12543
- Simon, F. M., & Camargo, C. Q. (2021). Autopsy of a metaphor. *New Media & Society*, 25(8), 2219–2240. doi:10.1177/14614448211031908
- Simpson, P. (2003). *On the discourse of satire*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Skurka, C. N., Niederdeppe, J., & Nabi, R. (2019). Kimmel on Climate. *Science Communication*, 41(4), 394–421. doi:10.1177/1075547019853837
- Smithberg, M., & Winstead, L. (1996–2023). *The daily show* [Television series]. New York, NY: Comedy Central.
- Tormey, S. (2014). The Contemporary crisis of representative democracy. *Democratic Theory*, 1(2), 104–112. doi:10.3167/dt.2014.010211
- Van Dijck, J., & Alinejad, D. (2020). Social media and trust in scientific expertise. *Social Media + Society*, 6(4), 1–11. doi:10.1177/2056305120981057
- Waisanen, D. (2018). The rise of advocacy satire. In J. C. Baumgartner & A. B. Becker (Eds.), *Political humor in a changing media landscape* (pp. 11–27). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

- Weinmann, C., & Vorderer, P. (2018). A normative perspective for political entertainment research. *Communication Theory, 28*(4), 466–486. doi:10.1093/ct/qty018
- Wessler, H. (2008). Investigating deliberativeness comparatively. *Political Communication, 25*(1), 1–22. doi:10.1080/10584600701807752
- Wodak, R. (2021). Crisis communication and crisis management during COVID-19. *Global Discourse, 11*(3), 329–353. doi:10.1332/204378921X16100431230102
- World Health Organization. (2020). *First WHO infodemiology conference*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2020/06/30/default-calendar/1st-who-infodemiology-conference>
- Young, D., & Tisinger, R. (2006). Dispelling late-night myths. *Harvard International Journal of Press-Politics, 11*(3), 113–134. doi:10.1177/1081180X05286042
- Zaracostas, J. (2020). How to fight an infodemic. *The Lancet, 395*(10225), 676. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30461-X
- Zekavat, M. (2021). Employing satire and humor in facing a pandemic. *Humor, 34*(2), 283–304. doi:10.1515/humor-2021-0001