Constructive journalism: An answer to the negativity of the news?

A focus group study on the view on and the effects of constructive journalism in a European setting.

By: Marije Poort

Supervisor: Liudmila Voronova
Södertörns University | Institute of Journalism
Master’s thesis
Journalism | 2017/2018
Abstract
News journalism often focuses on the negative (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017). This negativity can lead to citizens stop reading the news or becoming less engaged with the problems journalists report about. Following previous research conducted by McIntyre & Sobel (2017) and McIntyre & Gyldensted (2017), I investigated if constructive journalism can be an answer to this problem. In order to find an answer to this question an exploratory study was conducted through four focus groups all existing out of students in the age of 19-26 studying in Sweden at the moment of this study. Two news articles that reported on the current problem of climate change were discussed. My aim was to find out what this particular groups’ view was on news journalism in general and on constructive journalism in particular and if they felt more motivated to do something about climate change after reading the constructive news article. I conducted a qualitative content analysis of the transcripts of the focus groups to come to the findings. The results show that the participants prefer reading the article based on the principles of constructive journalism and that they want to do more about climate change after reading it. They feel that a negative article makes more impact though and therefore could be better for creating awareness for the problem. One important finding of this study is the fact that the participants do not see it solely as the responsibility of the journalists that readers come in contact with negative news so much.

Keywords: Agenda setting, Constructive journalism, Engagement, Framing, Journalism role, Media effects, News values
## Table of contents

1. **Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 4  
   1.1 Aim and research questions ....................................................................................... 5  
   1.2 Relevance of this study .............................................................................................. 5  
   1.3 Structure of this thesis ............................................................................................... 6  
2. **Constructive Journalism** ............................................................................................. 7  
   2.1 The definition explained ............................................................................................ 7  
   2.2 Literature overview .................................................................................................. 8  
   2.3 Media effect theories ............................................................................................... 9  
   2.4 A different view on journalism ................................................................................ 11  
3. **Methods** ...................................................................................................................... 13  
   3.1 Operationalisation ..................................................................................................... 13  
   3.2 Focus Groups as a method of data collection ............................................................ 14  
   3.3 Qualitative Analysis of Content .............................................................................. 16  
   3.4 Reliability and validity .............................................................................................. 18  
   3.5 Reflection on methods ............................................................................................. 19  
4. **Findings of the analysis** ............................................................................................... 22  
   4.1 News Journalism ........................................................................................................ 22  
   4.3 Discussion of the news articles ................................................................................ 28  
   4.4 Journalisms role ....................................................................................................... 38  
   4.5 Discussion ................................................................................................................ 41  
5. **Reflection and Conclusion** ........................................................................................ 43  
   5.1 Critical reflection ....................................................................................................... 43  
   5.2 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 44  
6. **References** .................................................................................................................. 46  

**Appendices** .................................................................................................................... 50  
   Appendix 1 – Focus group guide .................................................................................... 50  
   Appendix 2 – News articles ............................................................................................ 52  
   Appendix 3 – Coding scheme .......................................................................................... 54
1. Introduction

“The Grossest Thing’: Women Recall Exams by U.S.C. Doctor”, “Emergency health calls while Ebola spreads”, “Trump’s warning to Kim. Make a deal or suffer same fate as Gaddafi”. Just some examples of news headlines on one day in 2018. They are all negative, they all focus on something that goes wrong, on a conflict or on something sensational. This does not stand on its own. “For news not to be boring journalists think it should be written in a short square style and without too many shades of grey” (Haagerup, 2017, p. 43).

This view on news journalism has its consequences. By putting the emphasis on negative news, it is suggested that the media contributes to compassion fatigue (McIntyre, 2017). The public can get unmoved by seeing too much suffering and can become disengaged with the public debate and the news. They could literally tune out. The way journalism is done nowadays, can lead to a decrease in tolerance, to people feeling less entitled to help each other and to feelings of helplessness (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017). As McIntyre & Gyldensted argue, this focus on problems contradict the ethical responsibilities of journalists of fairness, accountability and minimizing harm (2017).

Roland Schatz, scholar in the field of media effects states it as follows: “Negativity is an illness caught by even serious newspapers, magazines and not least TV news broadcasters all over the western world. This journalistic negativity sickness creates fear and ignorance. It is bad for the press itself, bad for people, bad for politics, bad for business and bad for the future. I consider this one of the most dangerous tendencies in our democracies” (as cited in Haagerup, 2017, p. 53).

Constructive journalism aims to do journalism in the opposite way. It tries to give more positive information and it gives readers for example solutions to problems or it shows a possible future (Gyldensted, 2011; Cajo, 2016; Haagerup, 2017; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017; McIntyre & Sobel, 2017). Constructive journalism scholars argue that this new kind of journalism could be an answer to the fact that the readers are tuning out and are getting less engaged both with the public debate and journalism itself. Previous research shows that readers have more positive attitudes towards a constructive news article, that readers feel more informed about a certain issue and that the readers feel like they can do something about this issue.
1.1 Aim and research questions
I want to explore if constructive journalism is an answer to the problems journalism is facing today and if readers feel like this too. The main aim of this thesis is to find out if constructive journalism can enhance the engagement of the readers with journalism itself and with the topics or problems journalists write about. The problem of climate change is used as a case in this study, as it is one of the main problems humankind is facing today (O’Neil et al., 2013).

The thesis is mainly inspired by the work of McIntyre and Gyldensted (2017) and McIntyre and Sobel (2017). The research questions are based on their studies, but formulated in a slightly different way. First of all, because the study is conducted in a different context and the method of research is qualitative instead of quantitative. The first two questions thus follow on the questions asked by McIntyre and Sobel (2017), but are asked in a more general way. Secondly, by asking the third question I want to find out if readers value a constructive journalism role. The other researchers did not focus on this part.

The following questions have been formulated:

1. What attitudes and emotions do readers have towards a constructive news article?
2. Does a constructive news article make readers more engaged with the news and with the issues journalists write about?
3. Do readers support a constructive journalism role?

1.2 Relevance of this study
In order to get people engaged with journalism again, journalists needs to find another way of reporting. It thus is of importance that new forms of journalism are investigated and improved.

By putting the emphasis on negative news, the media can contribute to compassion fatigue (McIntyre, 2017). This means that the public could get unmoved by seeing too much suffering. The public could not only getting detached from journalism, but also from socially relevant issues. It is possible that people get disengaged from the public debate (Haagerup, 2017). It seems that journalists or media outlets are only successful if they come with breaking news, if they are the first one to ‘reveal’ a story. “Journalists aim for scoring with a good story instead of informing people so they could make up their own mind” (Haagerup, 2017, p. 43). Constructive journalism could change this. Earlier research shows promising outcomes, but more research is needed to actually be able to get a full understanding of the possible advantages of constructive journalism.

Only the research conducted by O’Neill, Boykoff and Niemeyer (2013) has focused on
climate change as a subject. Their main study objects were images though, while this thesis has text as a study object. In addition, only one previous research was done in a European setting, namely the follow-up study conducted by Metag, Schäfer, Füchslin, Barsuhn and Kleinen-von Köningslöw (2016). The rest were all conducted in the US. The question is if the same results can be found in Europe, where the (media) culture differs from the Anglo-American countries.

Other research has mainly just focused on the influence constructive news articles has on readers. By using focus groups as the method of data collection it is also possible to see what views readers have on constructive news. It is important to know what readers actually perceive as constructive, in able to develop constructive journalism further.

1.3 Structure of this thesis
In the following paragraphs I will aim to find answers to the research questions stated above. First I will outline and explain the theoretical fundamentals of this study. I will do this by giving an explanation of what constructive journalism is and which theories are connected to it. Secondly, I will explain which methods I have used to conduct this research and which limitations come with it. Then I will outline the analysis of the data collected via the focus groups. I will touch upon different themes that I abstracted from the data and I will apply the theories to get a better understanding of the findings. To conclude I will critical reflect on the study and I will summarize the most important findings of this thesis.
2. Constructive Journalism

Emerging forms of journalism ask for a redefinition of what journalism is and what role it has in society. Constructive journalism approaches news in a different way as we know it from the traditional media and it challenges the way the traditional journalists cover news. In this chapter I will first give a definition of the concept. Thereafter I briefly touch upon the literature that already exists now. Then I will touch upon the theoretical foundations of constructive journalism. To conclude I will outline the implications constructive journalism has for journalism as we know it today.

2.1 The definition explained

Constructive journalism is described by scholars in different ways. In their article, McIntyre and Gyldensted (2017) combine earlier given definitions and put it as follows: “Constructive journalism is an emerging form of journalism that involves applying positive psychology techniques to news processes and production in an effort to create productive and engaging coverage while holding true to journalism’s core functions” (p. 20). Examples of positive psychology effects are, providing solutions, use positive emotions and balance the coverage of negative and positive information. McIntyre and Gyldensted (2017) write that acting as a watchdog, spreading important information and accurately portraying the world are the core functions of journalism.

In constructive journalism it is important to cover stories that are of social significance and to portray the world in a ‘more accurate’ way by covering both negative and positive issues and by giving multiple perspectives. The aim is to contribute to a healthier public climate and to the growth of society (Gyldensted, 2015; Cajo, 2016; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017; McIntyre & Sobel, 2017). According to Haagerup, former executive director of news at the Danish Broadcasting corporation and founder of the Constructive Institute in Aarhus, constructive news focuses on what works, on what we can learn; it inspires us and makes us smarter (2017). In his book ‘Constructive News’ he also explains what constructive journalism is not. It is not activism, it does not define what the right solution is and it is not just happy or positive news. Positive news is also one-sided and it mostly does not hold true to journalism’s core functions (Haagerup, 2017; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017).

The constructive journalism department of Windesheim university in the Netherlands has developed a practical toolkit for journalists to apply on their news coverage. They write that a constructive journalists should expand their perspectives, experiment with angles, ask more
questions, engage the public and get the world moving (Van Gameren, 2016). At this moment the department is also developing the HOUVAST (SUPPORT)-method, in which they explain what a constructive journalists is. It says that constructive journalists have hope and an eye for the future, they are critical but not cynical, they challenge the system, they explain complexities, they aim for an active and open debate, they work together with the public and they are transparent about their own pitfalls (Smouter, 2018).

Constructive journalism is an umbrella term under which four journalism styles can be identified, namely solution journalism, peace journalism, prospective journalism and restorative narrative (Cojo, 2016; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017; McIntyre & Sobel, 2017). In solution journalism, journalists report on how people are responding to problems, and give the readers possible solutions. In peace journalism the focus of the story lies on the challenges and opportunities that conflicts give. Or in other words, it focuses on depolarisation (Cojo, 2016). Prospective journalism includes future possibilities in the coverage of stories and restorative narrative focuses on the recovery after a conflict or issue (Cojo, 2016; McIntyre, 2017; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017; McIntyre & Sobel, 2017; Solution Journalism Network, 2017).

Constructive journalism can be seen as an addition to traditional journalism. As McIntyre and Gyldensted (2017) say: “Constructive journalism, offers a way for traditional journalists to report and produce more productive stories – stories that present vital information while engaging news consumers and portraying the world more accurately (p. 21).” It attempts to make readers feel positive and inspired after reading a news article. It is not about avoiding problems, but about choosing another angle on stories that cover problems and also about putting more emphasis on things that are going well in society.

2.2 Literature overview
Constructive journalism is emerging. It has existed for a longer time as a journalistic practice, but it has gained popularity the few last years. Academics started to do research on it just recently. This means that there are only a few studies that can form an example for this thesis.

In her research Solutions Journalism. The effects of including solution information in news stories about social problems, McIntyre (2017) mentions a quasi-experiment conducted by the Solution Journalism Network and the Engaging News Project, which represents one of the four types of constructive journalism. It found that readers felt they knew more about a certain issue, and could do more about this issue themselves after reading a solution journalism article. In her own empirical study she found that providing the readers with context, solutions
and a positive sound enhanced the attitudes towards a story and towards the presented solutions. Although, it must also be mentioned that she could not find evidence of an enhanced engagement with the problems presented (McIntyre, 2017).

In another study McIntyre and Sobel (2017) applied two journalistic techniques, namely shocking audiences and inspiring audiences, to see how people can be best urged to act. To shock the readers, they used offensive stories about sexual trafficking and to inspire the readers they used stories about sex trafficking that included a solution. The results showed that the respondents felt more positive and motivated to read more about the subject after reading the solution story. However, the study did not find that the respondents were more likely to act after reading an article based on the practices of solution journalism.

O’Neill, Boykoff and Niemeyer (2013) conducted a study on how images of climate change can enhance the public with the issue. They found that pictures that showed the impacts of climate change made people aware of the problem, but also left them with the feeling that they could not change the situation. Images showing solutions however, made the respondents feel they could actually do something about climate change. In a follow-up study conducted by Metag, Schäfer, Füchslin, Barsuhn and Kleinen-von Köningslöw (2016) in the German speaking countries, the same results were found.

2.3 Media effect theories

One could argue that constructive journalism finds its theoretical foundation in media effects theories. To be more specific, on the assumptions of agenda-setting and framing theory, since its aim is to enhance public engagement and covering stories in a more positive way.

Agenda-setting theory claims that the media influences the perceived importance (salience) of a certain issue by the public, by putting emphasis on this topic (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2006; Weaver, 2007; Denis Wu & Coleman, 2009). This is called first level agenda-setting. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) put it differently, and claim that agenda-setting forms attitudes “based on the considerations that are most accessible” in peoples own minds (also called salience) (p. 11).

In later research academics identified a second level of agenda-setting. This level looks at the characteristics or attributes of a certain ‘object’, for example a trait of a certain politician. This means it distinguishes two dimensions, the substantive dimension, which is the ‘object’, and the affective dimension, which are the emotional qualities of this ‘object’. This can be negative, positive or neutral. The media transfers these characteristics of an ‘object’ to the
public, just as they do with the salience of an issue (Weaver, 2007; Denis Wu & Coleman, 2009). Thus, if journalists write about a person or situation in a certain way, it is possible that the public will remember it in a certain way. In general one could say that agenda-setting is about what is covered. Constructive journalism asks for more coverage of social important issues and for engagement with the topics that are covered. By putting emphasis on certain events constructive journalists can enhance salience with topics they believe are important for society and contribute to a healthier debate. With salience both perceived importance and accessibility are meant.

Framing theory is about how a certain issue is covered. It argues that the media affects the understanding of the public of an issue. How journalists write about an ‘object’ influences the way the public sees this ‘object’ (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Corbett, 2015). “The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Entman (1993) argues that also the ‘communicators’, in this context journalists, use frames to choose where to put attention to. In addition, frames are used by the receivers, in this context the readers of the news, to make sense of the information presented. In general Entman (1993) claims that “culture might be defined as the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping” (1993, p. 53). This means that framing exists on both macrolevel and microlevel (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). It is this macrolevel that differs framing from agenda-setting.

On the microlevel second level agenda-setting and framing are overlapping though, since this level talks about frames or characteristics used by journalists in a text. The characteristics of an ‘object’ can be seen as a frame, because it is more about how something or someone is portrayed in the media than what is portrayed (Weaver, 2007). The similarity between second-level agenda-setting and framing depends on what definition of framing is used (Weaver, 2007). If a frame is seen as a social construct, for example different kinds of statements, it cannot be seen as second level agenda-setting. A statement is after all not a characteristic belonging to an ‘object’. A statement such as ‘climate change is not real’, can be called a frame but not second level agenda-setting. A frame is in this context a broader concept, like a “moral evaluation or a causal reasoning” (Weaver, 2007, p. 146). Second level agenda-setting does not go this far, it only focuses on the salience of a characteristic.

Constructive journalism aims for a broader view on issues, and the coverage of multiple perspectives. It wants to provide its readers not only with problems, but also with (possible)
solutions to these problems. As McIntyre (2017) puts it, constructive journalism frames issues in a different way. It puts the emphasis on solutions or the future, on hope and on recovery. This thus mostly touches upon the frames used by the communicators and in the text. By using these frames the public should get a better understanding of the complexity of problems.

2.4 A different view on journalism
According to Hanitzsch et al. (2011) there are several functions that journalists value around the world, such as detachment, non-involvement and factualness. Most journalists see it as their role to define a problem and to give the readers the information they need to make their own decisions (Gyldensted, 2011; Hanitzsch et al., 2011). From a traditional (Western) perspective journalists should not promote certain values, they need to be objective, neutral and be distanced from the stories (Hanitzsch et al. 2011; Brüggemann, 2017; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).

Although constructive journalism holds true to the core functions of journalism, the role of the constructive journalist is slightly different. From a constructive journalism perspective a journalist is involved and active. This means that journalists actively search for different angles to a story and actively try to see news in non-conflict events. Instead of focusing on spreading stories, the constructive journalist focuses on what effect news can have on readers (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017). The aim is to always put the audience in mind and to always consider the consequences of reporting certain stories. Constructive journalism scholars and journalists say that journalism nowadays does not emphasize on informing the public to enhance citizenship anymore, but on being the first and fastest with breaking news (Haagerup, 2017; Lewis, 2017). It is suggested that is could be good to take more time to overthink the effect of news on the readers.

Abalo (2017) argues that the way traditional journalists interpret objectivity makes it hard for journalists to fulfil their watchdog role. By seeing things ‘as they are’, journalists overlook the complexities of many issues. The whole context is via this way not shown. Abalo (2017) gives the example of social inequality. According to him journalists treat this as something natural, as a thing that is as it is. While poverty and inequality are formed by the distribution of power and the economic structure of society (Abalo, 2017). By overseeing this, the journalists will not hold people of power accountable, as the watchdog role implies.

The traditional detached role often leads to journalists just producing stories, without thinking of the impact these stories can have on society (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017). This has had its consequences for climate change coverage too. “News story standards call for fairness, which meant including comments from all sides of an issue. That practice allowed
global warming sceptics to get what sometimes amounted to equal play in an issue that most mainstream scientists say was no longer a scientific issue of equal weight” (Wyss, 2008, p. 12).

News factors are another possible problematic part of traditional journalism. It influences the choice of journalists to pay attention to a story or not. A story thus becomes newsworthy if there are many news factors present. Several scholars have identified the news factors events generally have to contain to be considered newsworthy: Exclusivity, negativity, immediacy, conflict, strangeness, entertainment, elite, celebrity, relevance and proximity (Atad, 2016; Harcup & O’Neill, 2016; Boukes & Vliegenthart, 2017). Following this perspective, journalists leave out possible important stories that could contribute to a healthier public climate, if they do not meet these criteria. Climate change can be seen example of this. As said before, journalist write about it when an event related to this subject occurs. This can give the public the idea that the problem of climate change is not as urgent and important (Wyss, 2008; Lewis, 2017). In certain parts of the world the news media pay already more attention to the issue nowadays. Lewis (2017) though, claims that when writing on the issue of climate change, news media often focus on the economic consequences and therefore report one-sided.

Boukes & Vliegenthart (2017) argue that journalist can also make an event newsworthy themselves, by ascribing news factors to it. From this perspective, journalists are active actors. This is in line with the view of constructive journalism and with what Brüggemann (2017) and Lewis (2017) write; if a subject is important for society the journalist should cover it. News does not have to be new, as the factors immediacy, strangeness or exclusivity imply. News should enhance citizenship and show new ideas.

Constructive journalism asks for a broader journalistic role. A journalist should motivate and involve people in the existing problems and engage the public with certain issues via news stories, to improve well-being and the world (McIntyre, 2017; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017, p. 4). They should not only focus on the negative parts, but should also show solutions, so that people feel like they actually can take action themselves. Journalism should help people make sense of the complexity of problems, some scholars say (O’Neill, Boykoff, Niemeyer & Day, 2013; Berglez, Olausson & Ots, 2017; Nurmis, 2017). According to McIntyre, “it is a reporter’s role in democracy to both reveal problems and contribute to their solutions” (2017, p. 4). By showing readers what is being done or what could be done, it is believed that citizens will become more active and involved themselves. This goes against the norm of the distanced journalists, and thus implies a more active role. Journalist should not only care about identifying problems but also about what the consequences are of revealing them.
3. Methods

In this section I will outline the methods that are used to find answers on the research questions stated earlier in this thesis. First I will give an operationalisation of the most important terms used in this thesis. Secondly I will explain with which method I will collect the data. I will also outline in which way I will analyse the collected data. To conclude this chapter, I will touch upon the difficulties this research entails.

3.1 Operationalisation

In order to be able to answer the research questions, some concepts and terms need clarification. In the theory section traditional journalism and constructive journalism are mentioned. As made clear in the first paragraph of section two, constructive journalism is an addition to journalism as it is mostly done nowadays. This is what I call, following constructive journalism scholars, traditional journalism. In the following parts of this thesis the concepts are separated, to make a clearer distinction. When discussing traditional news I mean news with a negative tone and a focus on conflict and what is going bad. As said before, constructive journalism is an umbrella term. The news article used in the focus groups belongs to solution journalism and prospective journalism, since it provides the readers with solutions and hope. This means that in the next sections of this thesis when writing on constructive journalism, I mean solution and prospective journalism. Throughout the whole thesis, when writing about journalism, the genre of news journalism is meant.

I also talk about attitudes and emotions. Attitudes can be negative or positive. If the participants report getting more trust in journalism, feeling inspired and engaged, and feeling more informed by the article, this means they have positive attitudes. Negative attitudes are not feeling informed, not feeling inspired and not seeing the article as trustworthy. When talking about positive emotions in this thesis, feelings of hope, optimism and positivism are meant. Feelings of hopelessness, uselessness and negativity are seen as negative emotions.

The last term that is of importance is engagement. When talking about engagement I mean both engagement with journalism and with the issue of climate change. Participants are engaged with journalism if they feel informed, want to search for more information, and feel that consuming news is important. Participants are engaged with climate change if they feel informed about the topic, but most of all if they feel they can do something about the issue and if they report wanting to do something about the issue.
3.2 Focus Groups as a method of data collection

While conducting this research I used a qualitative method of data collection, namely focus groups. Previous research on which this thesis draws upon is based on quantitative methods. Studying the subject from a qualitative perspective could give new insights and a deeper understanding of the meaning and role of constructive journalism.

Qualitative research implies that actions need to be, as far as possible, studied in their natural contexts (Klauw Bruhn, 2013). This is also what focus groups try to establish. A focus group can be seen as a type of group discussion where the focus lies on a specific topic (Sim, 1998; Della Porta, 2014; Winke, 2017). Kahn and Manderson describe the aim of a focus group as follows: “the primary aim of describing and understanding perceptions, interpretations, and beliefs of a select population to gain understanding of a particular issue from the perspectives of the group's participants” (as cited in Winke, 2017, p. 74). The data collected via the group discussion taking place in the focus group can give an understanding of the individuals’ perceptions (Winke, 2017). Krippendorff states that “reading a newspaper may be an individual act, but newspapers do not only print what editors consider to be of public interest, newspaper readers also talk to others about what they read and so make newspaper reading a public activity” (2013, p. 79). Via a focus group I tried to simulate a situation like this. In addition, Della Porta (2014) states that focus groups are a good way to study emerging fields, which constructive journalism is.

Focus groups are being led by a moderator. The moderator asks questions and motivates the participants to all take part in the discussion (Sim, 1998; McLafferty, 2004, Della Porta, 2014). The moderator mostly can be (almost) not involved at all, and only interfere to make sure the discussion functions well. Or the moderator can be highly involved, and be asking questions following a certain structure. This structured way of doing focus groups is relevant if the goal of the research is answering research questions (Della Porta, 2014). I followed a moderate structured moderator role, since my aim was to find answers to specific questions formulated earlier in this thesis. I mostly stayed out of the discussions going on, and left space for the participants to fill in the silences themselves.

3.2.1 The explorative study

Winke (2017) states that several focus groups have to be conducted in order to avoid wrong generalisations. I formed four focus groups, all consisting out of students in the age range 19-26 living (temporary) in Stockholm. Table 1 shows how the focus groups looked like.
It is important that a particular group is homogeneous; the group members should share as much characteristics as possible (McLafferty, 2004; Bruhn Jensen, 2013; Winke, 2017). “The more homogeneous a group, the more confident individual group members are likely to be in voicing their views” (Sim, 1998, p. 348). All participants were moderately to highly engaged with the topic climate change. Originally, the idea was to form the focus groups based on the participants engagement, with also a group consisting out of climate change deniers. This was thought of in order to see if constructive news would have the same effect on non-engaged readers as engaged readers. Unfortunately it was not possible to find climate change deniers, therefore all respondents are somehow engaged with the topic at hand.

As McLafferty (2004) writes, there is no consensus on the number of participants a focus group has to contain. Barbour (2007) states that the number of participants should range from a minimum of three and a maximum of eight. I chose to follow her in this, and formed groups with three to five participants (see table 1). The smaller group makes it for me as a low experienced moderator also easier to manage the conversation.

Table 1. Focus group sample overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20-22</td>
<td>Swedish and Romanian</td>
<td>Female and Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21-23</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22-26</td>
<td>Swedish, German and Spanish</td>
<td>Female and Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I tried to recruit the respondents in several ways. First of all I asked teachers from the environmental department of Södertörn University to post a message on Studiewebben, the main digital platform every student uses for their studies. Secondly, I put up posters throughout the university. Lastly, I asked acquaintances to participate. All in all I used constituted group interviews to collect the data. “Constituted group interviews are constituted specifically for the purpose of research represent a compromise between the respondent and naturalistic strategies. Group members remain bearers of particular demographics, while entering into an approximated natural group dynamic” (Bruhn Jensen, 2013, p. 241) Eventually all the respondents were acquaintances of me or of each other. This could have been beneficial for the study, since discussing a topic with friends makes the setting more natural for the respondents.

To make sure I covered all the topics that are important for this study, I developed an
interview guide. As the word already implies, the guide was used as a basis upon which I conducted the focus group interviews. The questions stated in the guide were starting points of the desired conversations. If the participants mentioned things which I, as a moderator, thought were important for this research, I asked follow-up questions. I conducted one test focus group to see if the questions I developed were sufficient. Following this test I made some changes, which has led to the final guide that can be found in appendix 1. I made the decision to also use the data of the test focus group for my analysis, since the collected data uncovered relevant aspects and the discussion worked well.

During the focus groups the participants had to read two similar news articles. The original article was published by the Guardian (2018). Since this article was quite long, I chose the first part as the piece that should be discussed in the focus group. The original part could be identified as a constructive journalism example. To develop a similar negative article, I left some paragraphs out. The news articles used in the focus groups can be found in appendix 2. I presented both articles at the same time and asked the participants to read each article individually and carefully. I did not give further instructions.

As mentioned earlier, I took the role as moderator. I asked the questions and made sure all the relevant topics were covered. All focus groups were audio recorded using my mobile phone. Three focus groups took place in the meeting room ‘Gripen’ located at the Student Union of Södertörn University and one took place in a student dormitory in Stockholm. The focus groups lasted between 40 and 60 minutes.

All respondents were informed of the purpose of this study before the start of the focus group conversation. I gave them the opportunity to ask questions and to make any comments. I told them that they would stay fully anonymous and that I would not use any full names in this thesis. Thus, the interview was conducted on the basis of informed consent, which is in line with doing ethical research in ethnographical studies (Ferdinand, Pearson, Rowe & Worthington, 2007). There were no other ethical implications with this study, since the collected data does not contain any personal or sensitive information.

### 3.3 Qualitative Analysis of Content

After the data was collected through the method of focus groups, it had to be transcribed and analysed. I chose to do this via qualitative analysis of content. Because the content was analysed in a qualitative way, it was possible to redefine concepts and categories throughout the study. The specific method I used for this was thematic coding. “It represents an attempt to
identify, compare, and contrast meaning elements, as they emerge from and recur in several different contexts” (Bruhn Jensen, 2013, p. 251). The context from which the data is collected is of influence on this data, and thus has to be taken into account.

Due to the limited amount of time I chose to not fully transcribe all the focus groups. This means that while listening to the audio recordings, I transcribed the parts of which I believed where relevant for this study. To illustrate, if a participant spoke about a specific example for a long time or if the participants repeated themselves, I chose not to transcribe it. As a result, small parts of the conversations that had been taking place are not presented in the transcriptions. If the respondents spoke about their views on journalism in general and on the news articles specific, about the emotions the news articles generated and about their opinions it was transcribed.

For the analysis, I read the transcriptions of each focus group very carefully, several times, to see if different themes could be distinguished. Several of these categories were already formed before starting the first analysis. For example, I focused on content that showed if participants were positive or negative towards news journalism after reading the news articles, or if the participants reported feeling more informed. Thus, the research questions stated in the beginning of this thesis were the starting point of the analysis. I also used the focus group guide to help me with the analysis, since the questions stated in this guide would help me collect data that would answer the main research questions.

In the first part of the focus group discussions, I let the participants talk about news journalism in general, their views on it and their way of news consumption. The second part consisted out of the discussion about the two presented news articles, in which the respondents talk about their views and preferences. The last part of the focus groups focused on the role journalism has when talking about enhancing engagement. The focus groups were thus conducted based on three sections, namely: News journalism, Discussion of News articles and Journalism role. Via this way it was easier for my to divide the data into different themes. The sections are divided into six themes, which can be seen as main themes. This themes partly come from the theories and the earlier research presented earlier in this thesis and partly from the data collected via the focus groups. I thus worked in a hermeneutic way, which means that I moved from the theory to the material and back. Some themes represent concepts that are already brought up by constructive journalism scholars before, for example the negativity of the news and some concepts come forward out of the collected data. The main themes are split up into subthemes that are connected to this main themes.

Not only did I analyse the interviews separately, but I also compared the interviews with
each other. Did the groups touch upon similar or different topics? Can contrasting categories be distinguished? This was done by forming a coding scheme. My starting point of the analysis was one of the focus groups, which I fully transcribed. I created a coding scheme based on this transcription and used it in the analysis of another focus group. This means I compared the data with each other via the coding scheme while at the same time amplifying the coding scheme if new themes emerged. Eventually I created a full coding scheme based on the data of all four focus groups (appendix 3).

3.4 Reliability and validity

Reliability is about the repeatability of a study. “A research procedure is reliable when it responds to the same phenomena in the same way, regardless of the circumstances of its implementation” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 267). In qualitative studies reliability is discussable, since the circumstances are of more influence on the data. I made the reliability has high as possible, by creating a focus group guide with specific questions that have been asked in every group.

Validity is about measuring what you want to measure. My aim has always been to make the internal validity as high as possible, for example by taking a neutral stance (as far as possible) as a moderator and by operationalising the used phenomena thoroughly. What can be questioned is if a focus group is the best way to find answers to the research questions. In a focus group participants have an open discussion about a certain topic, they respond to each other and therefore they influence each other. The question is if an individual’s view and motivation can be measured in this way. However, a journalists aim is to instigate a discussion in society. “Based on a modality of discussion among equals, focus groups allow us to recreate—almost as in an experiment—conditions similar to those considered as belonging to normal paths of opinion formation” (Della Porta, 2014, p.1). A focus group is a simulation of a discussion you would stir up as a journalist in real life too.

Since this thesis is conducted in an explorative setting, the external validity is not as strong. “Focus groups data are contextualised within a specific social situation, therefore they produce ‘situated’ accounts, tied to a particular context of interaction which may not be a particularly natural one for many participants” (Sim, 1998, p. 349). An empirical generalisation of the conclusions is not possible. However, as Sim (1998) states, conclusions drawn from a study using focus groups can be theoretically generalised. In this way two contexts can be compared based on concepts. “The findings of focus groups can at least be transferred to other
settings which have similarities to the context in which the data were gathered” (Sim, 1998, p. 351). It can be argued that the findings of this study could be applied to other situations in which individuals discuss a certain news article.

3.5 Reflection on methods

An important aspect of scientific research is objectivity. Of course everyone has their own backgrounds, values and beliefs and this always affects studies in a certain way. Important is though, to not become biased as a researcher. As a moderator of the focus groups I had to be neutral. This means I asked open questions, I did not show any (dis)agreement and I let the participants speak as much as possible. Although, I also prepared questions that had as aim to lead the conversations in a certain direction. My own bias was also of influence when choosing the news article used as the subject of discussion.

First I wanted to choose an article from the database of the Solution Journalism Network, since the news articles in this database are selected by a professional organisation. In that way my own bias would not be as much of influence. Since I could not find an article that, in my eyes, would generate a fruitful discussion, I selected one myself. The news article is recently published by the Guardian, a newspaper that uses constructive journalism in its daily practices. Although I thoroughly described the meaning of constructive journalism, and based the selection of the news article the criteria that it applies positive psychology techniques (f.e. providing solutions), I cannot deny that my personal view has been of influence on selecting the news article. I also chose myself which parts of the original article I left out in order to create the traditional article. Again, I based this as much as possible on the descriptions that scholars give on traditional news and constructive news. I left the positive psychology techniques out, in this thesis this means that the parts that showed a solution and a possible future were deleted. It is possible that a different news article, covering a different subject, would have generated different kinds of conclusions.

This also applies to the fact that I conducted focus groups consisting only out of students. It is of course possible that younger people have a different view on news, and value other things in news journalism than older individuals. Maybe other conclusions would have been drawn if the focus groups would have consisted out of middle-aged or elderly people. Also, the fact that most of the participants knew me and interacted with me before, could have been of influence on the outcome.

The fact that this research was conducted in English, and the news articles used in the
focus groups were also in English could have been of influence too. Most participants do not have English as their mother tongue and mostly consume news in their own language. This could have been of influence on the data, since it is possible that the respondents would have explained certain things differently in their own language. Most participants had a high level of English though and if a certain person was not able to explain what they wanted to say they got help from the other participants. Therefore I believe that this has not affected the data as much.

In the analysis I combined the data of all four focus groups and made comparisons and connections between them. Most of the answers on the questions where similar to each other, but the focus group consisting out of three American female exchange students had some other perspectives on the articles. All the other participants were European citizens, which can explain the difference with the American group. The (media) culture in America (and other Anglo-American countries) differ in some aspects from the (media) culture in Europe. Of course the (media) cultures between European countries differ too, but since most of the respondents were Swedish it is possible that this did not come forward that much.

Two of the focus groups consisted solely out of young women, the other two groups had mixed sexes (see table 1). It could be argued that men experience news journalism in a different way or have different views on it than women because of their gender roles in society, but the focus group data does not imply such a thing. Something else that needs to be kept in mind is the age of the respondents, most of them are around 20 years old but there was also a group with a participant of 26 years old. It is possible that this participants’ answers differ sometimes from the others because of the small age difference. Although, again, I have not encountered this in the data.

All the focus groups consisted out of people that know each other (as friends or acquaintances) and therefore interact with each other on a weekly or even daily basis. This could mean that the respondents agreed with each other more often, because they already share the same views as friends. Although, looking at the focus group data, this could also have been the reason that they were open and critical to each other. Most participants asked each other questions and also spoke out when they disagreed. Only with the American students I had to involve myself in the conversation more, because they were not asking each other (critical) questions or were not really taking up a conversation. It is thus possible that the data conducted from that focus group is more biased.

To conclude, most participants were also acquaintances of me. This has to be taken into consideration as well, since it could have been of influence on the data collection. The participants could have had a certain image of me as a person, and that could have had an effect
on their perception of my objectivity as a researcher. I was not involved in the discussions though and tried to let the participants talk with each other as much as possible.
4. Findings of the analysis

In this chapter I will share and analyse the outcomes of the focus groups. The theories and the earlier research presented earlier in this thesis are applied to this data in order to make conclusions. To make the findings of my analysis as clear as possible, I start this chapter with an deeper explanation of the differences and similarities of the focus groups. Some characteristics could have been of influence on the data, and need to be taken into consideration throughout the whole analysis. Then I will outline the six different themes that I have identified through the analysis of the data. As mentioned before, the themes belong under three different sections that are based upon the order in which the focus groups were conducted. I conclude the analysis part with a discussion, where I will go deeper into the new findings of this thesis and what this means for the existing knowledge.

4.1 News Journalism

In order to create an image of the use and consumption of news by the respondents I started the focus groups with talking about news journalism in general first. All the participants said that news journalism is important, because it spreads information and helps people understand what is happening in the world. Most of them however, pointed out many negative aspects. According to the respondents news is more dramatic and sensational, it is often oversimplified, cynical and biased. This shows that users of news use similar critiques as constructive journalism scholars.

Theme 1: Tone of the news

The main argument that constructive journalism scholars put forward is that the negativity of the news is the major reason for people to get less engaged with journalism and with society (Haagerup, 2017; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017). Also the respondents of the focus groups think the news is often too negative.

Mod: Do you think the news is too negative nowadays?

Multiple: Yes, yes, definitely

S: I saw someone talking about political, and we only like journalist only post things about political things that is going wrong or is negative. But not what...

D: Who is right
S: Yes. Like positive news. We never see that. And that can effect, how do you say, how we think about the world.

Mn: That everything is going to hell right now. I recently read an article about that, we were all talking about that 2017 was such a bad year, because that is mostly what we saw in the news. But then someone had written up a 170 good things that happened that year. And it was a lot, and it was very big things too. I don't think we had seen most of that, that wasn't something I saw in my...

S: Yes and that is what I mean with is the world getting better? It actually does, but we only see the negative things and that, with social media and journalism, it has become bigger, putting in more negative stuff. And that is what makes us think that everything is getting worse all the time.

As can be seen in this text, respondents say that the focus of journalism lies on what is going wrong. Another participant mentioned that she tries to read good news every day, “because she does not want to feel bad all day”. The respondents in this focus groups do not totally tune out from the news because of the negativity, they all keep reading it. The negative, dramatical and cynical tone of the news, make some participants look for alternatives though. This supports the argument that there is space for constructive journalism, and maybe even that it is needed.

Theme 2: New media and technology
A theme that was brought up in every focus group was the use of new media and technology as a means of news consumption and the way this can be constructive or deconstructive. Most participants use social media, like Facebook or Twitter, to get news. Also several apps that bring together news articles from different news outlets are often used. The established news outlets are a news source for the participants too, but this news is received mostly via the online versions of these newspapers or public broadcasters.

The use of social media is said to make the negativity bigger, or as one of the respondents put it: “All the bad stuff is more accessible now”. The use of new media technology also gives an opportunity to tune out though, according to participants it is easier to create your own bubble or to swipe away from the negativity.

P: It <news journalism> is trying to adapt to a new climate, especially with social media. In Sweden there was criticism on the coverage of the murder on Kim Wall. The most
macabre things were mentioned everywhere. They are using dramatrical fiction in order to get you to consume the news. You see that more regularly. You get top lists. What they are trying to do is to make the narrative easier for you, to consume while on the go. Because many people use smartphones. There is a big danger in that. First of all because you don’t let people find their own opinion in themselves. They are trying to do a service with it, and in some cases it is really funny. It can work to the benefit.

Social media and the use of smartphones to consume news is seen as both positive and negative by this respondent. He gives the murder on journalist Kim Wall as an example of the dramatization of news and also the way news spreads fast and almost cannot be ignored on social media. News outlets use a dramatrical tone to attract readers, he says. By creating an easy narrative, the journalists report in his eyes one-sided.

- Clickbait and trendings
Notable is the critical stance the respondents have towards the news and the use of new media. According to them the news nowadays is “clickbaity” and sensational. The new media, as they say, are partly the reason for this. There are more content makers, which leads to a competitive atmosphere.

*Mod:* What is your opinion about news journalism?

*M:* I would say that is sometimes obvious that it is about selling things and being the first with everything, and more of a competition between if we talk newspapers or journalism in general, but now newspapers in particular. It feels like competition.

This is in line with that scholars and journalists in constructive journalism say. News outlets want to be the first one to come with a story (Haagerup, 2017; Lewis, 2017), that is how they believe they score and attract readers. The participants do not see it as something positive though, it is something that makes them not (want to) read the article.

Another point of critique from the focus group participants is that social media show the news the readers ‘want’ to see or show trending news and not the most important. This is connected to a theme upon which I will touch later in this analysis more thoroughly, namely the preference of the readers for negative news. If more people click on the negative articles, it will spread out and show up on the feed of others, who will click on it again, etcetera.
**T:** So many people get their information from Facebook now, because of social media, and I feel that that is whatever is trending and not necessarily whatever is the most important. I feel if I learn about these events in class where I should know about, but I just had no idea. That’s because of the things that gets prioritised in terms of coverage are often pop culture news. Things that seems pretty trivial.

This participant says that instead of information that she needs, she sees the information that is trending. She would like to see what happens in the world and not necessarily what is most popular in the world.

The use of social media, has changed the way people receive news. The image of journalists as the powerful agenda-setters of certain issues does not apply this simply on the new ways of news consumption anymore. Not only is a social media platform as Facebook an agenda-setter for the individual users, since it uses algorithms that define which information a certain persons sees, also the users of the media influence the information flow that their friends get in contact with. This is not necessarily seen as something negative. Social media can also be of help to find more about a certain subject.

**G:** I recently created a twitter account to follow news from my country <Romania>, Sweden and America as well. I realised how easy it is to get news by that.

**P:** The thing is that you get also selective news.

**G:** But social media helps a lot to bring out the most important news, at least on Twitter. You see trendings and there are hashtags like news. If you click on that you find all the sources that you need.

In this example, a social media outlet is again the main source of information. On Twitter ‘trending topics’ are those subjects people tweet about the most at a certain time. What this respondent reads it thus determined by the other users of the particular media.

- **Fake news**

The respondents connect the fact that news journalism is so competitive, and many of the news outlets want to be the first with a story, to fake news. Fake news is seen as a problem and has led them to trust the news less. Fake news is thus not constructive. It does not engage readers with news journalism, but pushes them away from it.
A Spanish participant for example says that he only uses the non-established online media, because he feels he cannot trust the traditional outlets because they have been involved in fake news scandals within Spain. Whereas others report that the new types of media has led to more competition and therefore to (online) journalists who are less critical to the content they publish.

K: News nowadays, even the more trusted sources, like Dagens Nyheter or Svenska Dagbladet, they tend to have headlines that have been more sensationalised I think.

Z: Do you think that the daily news like SVT also do that? I haven’t noticed.

K: More so than before. Mostly online. The actual paper news is still probably the same. But online they have more freedom to crack in into hindsight and nowadays it is very important, because you are always connected, you should be the first to get the news. So instead of actually being thorough and oh is this correct or not, ok we just scroll through it and in hindsight ooh it was not good, oh we will track this it was not true.

F: Yes, but I don’t have another possibility. Given that there are so many newspapers and so many pages.

This touches upon the role that journalists according to the principles of constructive journalism should have. Instead of being led by competition and not taking into consideration what effect publishing content could have, journalists should take an active stance, scholars in constructive journalism say (McIntyre, 2017; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017). This is connected to what some respondents say, and will be outlined further under the theme ‘the role of journalism’.

- **Responsibility**

In most of the focus groups responsibility came forward as an important concept, especially regarding news on social media. First of all it was highlighted that journalists themselves have a responsibility, since journalism has “a huge influence over people”. This regarding to the above mentioned avoidance of fake news too. The responsibility came also forward when talking about the negativity of the news.

S: Yes and that is what I mean with is the world getting better? It actually does but we only see the negative things and that, with social media and journalism, it has become
bigger, putting in more negative stuff. And that is what makes us think that everything is getting worse all the time.

D: I buy that to a certain degree but not 100%. Because as it is with social media, you have so much power over what you can see in your flows, you can control what you see on your twitter feed, on your Facebook. Maybe not Facebook because what your friends like and what they want to see, you can see some of that as well. But even there you have the option to block certain things. So when everyone says 2017 was the worst year ever. I wouldn’t see it like that, because I was in my own bubble, looking at things I enjoy seeing and reading about.

Mn: But is that good too?

D: It is not good, but you can't just put the blame on the media for being too negative. Maybe the news that you consume is too negative. Maybe you choose those things actively.

This is an interesting topic to discuss. Constructive journalism asks journalists to take more responsibility over the content they spread, by providing the readers with several angles and more positive frames. The subjects they put on the agenda and the way they frame these subjects should be different. Some respondents though also highlighted the responsibility of the readers themselves. In the above conversation this means that readers should surround themselves with more positive news. Others point out the same thing. They argue that people most often choose the negative articles and that this has become even worse since social media has emerged. In this light it would mean that journalists only respond to the demand of the audience, and that the agenda-setting influence of journalists is not that high.

L: Yeah, I think we prefer to read negative news.

D: Exactly

L: It's not about what good thing happened in this country. We like to discuss bad things. I think. So we are more likely to click on those articles.

However, this could also be used as an argument for the use of constructive news. Especially, because the respondents see it as something negative and even report to stop reading news because they read about so much negativity. Maybe readers would start to choose the articles with a more positive tone, if they will get in contact with it more often. It is possible that readers choose for negative news, because they are so used to the traditional news and its
focus on the bad.

Another responsibility of readers according to the participants is to inform themselves with different viewpoints.

**K:** Nowadays people don't do research anymore, they read ‘immigrants are bad’. Now I know that, very good, next. They tend to not read up on topics to get the whole picture.

**R:** Like she said. I feel that it is important to look at all different types of news. A lot of younger generations will stick to Buzzfeed or to more liberal news. I feel, when you only stick to one perspective you can get really stigmatized towards different things in the world, which is a pretty bad outlook in my opinion. You should always try to understand where the other people are coming from, which is very hard to do these days.

According to the principles of constructive journalism, these different viewpoints have to be put into one article by the journalist. The respondents though, do not necessarily report it as a responsibility of the journalist solely. As mentioned before, some participants say that they should actively search for information that challenges their viewpoints themselves or to get their information from different news sources. They do value the more complex article though.

### 4.3 Discussion of the news articles

The main part of the study focused on the discussion about two news articles, of which one could be identified as a constructive news article and one as a traditional news article.

**Theme 3: Content**

This distinction was also made by the participants in the focus groups, based on the content of the articles. Table 2 shows the attitudes and emotions the respondents mentioned while discussing both news articles.

**O:** The shorter one gives the reader the feeling like ‘Oh nothing will really happen, we will die anyway’.

**P:** Yes it is more doomsday.

**G:** The short one is more apocalyptic, it just show what has happened. There is no solution, we are going to die whatever. The other one is like yes we have done this, but
we also have done this. And if we continue to do this, something good might happen in the future.

Table 2. Associations with the news articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional article</th>
<th>Constructive article</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Attitudes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One sided</td>
<td>Nothing happens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Bigger picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clickbait</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clickbait</td>
<td>Inspires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unengaging</td>
<td>Not complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not memorable</td>
<td>Makes impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is bad</td>
<td>Creates awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Emotions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Feelings of guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is bad</td>
<td>Hopeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useless</td>
<td>We will die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confusing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nuance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individuals are not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>addresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Negative attitudes**

In table 2 I collected all the words associated with the news articles during the different focus groups. It is clear that the respondents overall have a negative attitude towards the traditional article. The article is seen as one sided and simplified. It gives the readers feelings of guilt and of being useless, they think the article shows a hopeless picture because it does not show a solution. Although it must also be said that many participants believe the negative article is better in creating awareness for climate change, because it makes an impact. This is in line with the earlier findings of O’Neill et al. (2013), who concluded that pictures that show the impact of climate change make people aware of this problem.

Something that O’Neill et al. did not put forward though, is that the use of new technology and online media can be partly the cause of this. Like discussed above, most participants use online media for their news consumption and their smartphone is the device on which they read it. Life nowadays happens online, many social media channels are used as different means of communication, and there is a lot of information available. In order to stand
out in an information overload and in order to get attention from readers, it might be necessary to ‘shock’ people.

*K: And I think, now more than ever, people have less time to actually read the news.

O: Yes.

K: Because you are constantly online.

A: Yes maybe not we have less time, maybe we don’t value it in the same way.

F: Yes, we don’t take the time.

A: Exactly. We don’t sit at the table to read the newspaper in the mornings. We do in the train, I think that is kind of the same anyway. But in a different context.

K: Yes, but if you read your news in the morning on your phone, there is so many distractions to get you away from the news. I see someone wrote me a message, I’ll check. Someone shared a Youtube link, I will check. Then you think what was I reading? Ten dead in Africa. Ok, get back to that.

A: Yes it is like that.

Maybe it is not the way we frame the stories that has the most effect on getting attention and engage readers with issues. Maybe the fact that especially the younger generation is exposed to so much information, is the major influence factor on where the attention of readers lies. The internet has created the possibility to establish way more media outlets than there were before. Plus the use of the mobile phone, as respondent ‘K’ says too, creates the possibility to process much information at almost the same time. This could mean that readers do not have their full focus or attention on the information of the news media. Which lead them feeling not fully informed. Creating constructive content can still be seen as useful, but something constructive journalism should consider is how to be also constructive in means of getting to the audience.

- **Positive attitudes**

The attitudes towards the constructive article are overall positive. The participants say this article shows a bigger picture and the complexity of the problem. They think it has a less dramatic tone, that it inspires and that it gives an understanding of the dynamic world (see also table 1). Again, this is in line with earlier research. As mentioned before, McIntyre (2017) concluded in her study that providing readers with a positive sound created better attitudes towards the story.
G: I usually go for the positive one. Because it at least shows that we can change something, even though we destroyed it we can still do something about it.  
P: In the longer one they try to explain it more.  
G: They show both sides.  
P: Yes, they give you both sides.  
O: I prefer a news article where I actually learn something from. The longer one I actually learn more.  
Mod: Why do you prefer articles that teach you something?  
O: Because I learn something new. Then I know, what did I do before, what did I do wrong there, maybe the new one is. Let’s try, if I don’t like it maybe I can question it too. This one <article 1> gives one point of view. It basically tells people that you are stupid, that you can’t do anything. While the other ones says it is up to you humans for your survival, what you can do in the future. That is the more realistic one.

The framing of a news story in a constructive way, by showing solutions and giving both negative and positive information, gives this respondent the feeling he actually learns something. Like the framing theory says, the understanding of a certain issue is influenced by the way this issue is framed (Scheufele & Tewskbury, 2007). This again shows that a news article written according to the principles of constructive journalism, can have a positive effect on the readers.

- Solutions
When asked why the participants prefer the constructive article (in the focus groups called ‘the second article’ or ‘the longer article’), an often heard answer was that it comes with solutions. It shows them what can be done. Showing the solutions makes them see the article as more positive.

Mo: This <article 1> feels more like we can’t do anything. Because on the end it is about the break on the emissions, but they don’t stop. So this is not positive at all. This is hopeless. I would say. Where this <article 2> moves on, this gives a bigger picture. And also say that you can do something. And also saying that China is putting up this emission, but they are still replacing a lot of their need with solar energy. So I would say it gives a better picture of it.
D: This also shows a more positive picture, because whereas they talk about the emissions have grown and the numbers have grown, but this is what we are doing about it now. And this is what this and this country, what they are doing is good.

Interestingly, the American participants found the constructive article also confusing. They value solutions in an article, as the example above shows, but the news article discussed in the focus group does not do it in an effective way in their eyes.

R: The second one says 'what should we do?', I don’t think it answers anything. It comes up with a question but it is not really answering it. I don’t know what it is trying to do. I don’t know what the question is for. I think it is a way to try to connect with us, but it doesn’t really do anything.

This implies that simply framing a story in a constructive way is not always seen as constructive. If readers get confused, the article does not reach its goal. Than it does the opposite of what it aims for, it will not inform readers and make them engaged, but it will leave them with questions and will make them unengaged.

• Focus on individual

A critical note that was putted forward by all groups is that the articles focus on people or institutions with power. The participants feel like it does not show how they as an individual can do something to tackle the problem. This was mainly seen as a problem in the constructive news article. The respondents would like to see what they can change and do themselves.

R: News always talks about what is happening on the bigger scale, not on how individuals can fix it. There is no articles telling you what you should do. If there are, there is so many news in the world that it is hard to find them.

G: Usually after reading these articles, you actual think of change. You start changing yourself. I think that this shows the solution political leaders can do, so maybe people can organise themselves and try to change their work ethics. It is the same with the industries. I think individually this can’t help you give you the solution. Rather than acknowledging 'Oh china did this, India did this, that's great'. I mean if you are from
this countries, you probably feel motivated to go on. Personally, I don't know how you can do something by reading this article.

P: I share the same view.

G: They still give some solutions. Maybe as an individual this doesn't help so much, but you acknowledge what the solution would be and also maybe just a CEO or someone with power reads this article and gets inspired by it. Maybe they would try to apply it on their companies. So it is still not useless.

On the other side this also shows that the respondents are encouraged by the article to think about the problem and the actions they can take. As ‘G’ mentions, readers can feel positive towards the solution even if it is not aimed at them as an individual. It can be questioned though if this would also happen with respondents who are less engaged with the subject of climate change.

**Theme 4: Engagement**

Earlier research has mostly focused on enhancing the engagement with news journalism and with certain issues via constructive journalism. In order to see if the conclusions from those studies also apply in a different context, I paid attention to this factor in the focus groups too.

- **Engagement through positivity**

  From what the participants say, it is possible to conclude that the constructive article motivates people to do something on the problem. The article makes people believe that they can do something about climate change more than the traditional article.

  L: It just races more interests the second one. Like you said, you become more engaged. And like ‘what can I do?’. The first one is just you read it and you get sad.

  D: And you hate China.

  Mo: Yes, yes that is true. This is more like an end to it. This is more about what you can continue to do better.

  One participant says she also still feels bad after reading the constructive article, but that reading about things that are getting better and about other people engaging with the problem motivates her more. Another way that shows that the constructive article can engage the readers is a comment of one of the respondents:
L: I see myself reading the second one and be ‘I am going to talk with my parents about this during dinner and my classmates at lunch’. It is more a discussion that keeps on going. The first one is ‘ok done, next article’. Like that.

All: yes, yes.

In this way the article has exactly the outcome constructive news aims for, namely contributing to a debate. It could be of influence though that this particular respondents is already very engaged with the topic and also shares her own stories about sustainability via Instagram. The other participants agree with her on this, but are also all engaged in the topic since they are involved in development studies that focuses on environmental development too.

- **Opposite effect**

A very important comment heard in every focus group is that positivity could make readers disengaged with the problem. Some participants believe that readers could start thinking that the problem is solved, if they read about things going well.

G: *You can see sometimes with the positive ones that people think 'the change is happening, so I don't necessarily have to do anything about it.' So after all, which one is good? If you read the negative one, it is just 'I am not going to do anything, because everything is already doomed'. With the positive one it is either 'something good is happening so I don't have to do anything' or 'something good is happening so I can join the movement'.*

The comment above does not stand on its own. Other participants in other focus groups also mentioned this problem. They are afraid it makes people feel ‘comfortable’.

This negative effect of positive content is something that the constructive scholars have not taken into account. In the existing literature scholars write about the negative effects of negativity on readers, but not about the possible negative effects of positivity. Constructive journalism is based on the findings of positive psychology though. Many of those findings are brought up by McIntyre and Gyldensted (2017) and show that a positive approach in general has a positive effect on people. Of course it is possible that certain persons are more triggered by negativity and doom stories, as one of the American students brings forward.
Not all participants agree on it either, since others believe that reading about what is going well and what can be done would engage them.

A: I would say like K before. I really think in general when reading good news, people tend to keep doing positive stuff. When everything is fucked up, you see that people feel more negative. They start thinking why should I do something? When they see this is changing, also the big powers are doing good stuff, I feel more open to keep doing it with an article that tells me that others are also doing things.

F: I think it loses a bit of conscience if you only get good news. Then you think now it is getting better, so it is less important. Then you keep falling back to your negative habits.

As the framing theory implies, frames influence the understanding of a certain topic. What a certain frame means to one does not have to be the same for another. On an individual level it can be hard to say that constructive frames have an engaging effect. However, based on the data of this thesis, in general, and in line with earlier research, it is possible to conclude that the constructive article engages more than the traditional article.

- **Balance**

All in all the focus group participants believe that a news article should contain both positive and negative news. They mostly do not see the purpose of a solely negative article, other than creating awareness for the problem. Although, as mentioned in the paragraph above, some of them also say that too positive articles can have an opposite effect. A Balance is needed.

L: Do you think it is good or bad that the first one is more negative and the second one is both?

Mn: I like it both. Because I have noticed that, when I am talking to a lot of young people, about how do you feel about climate change and what we can do and everything. Everyone is like yes it is a serious problem, but what can I do? There is nothing for me to do. So when you only present restrictions like we are going to die, it is over. Someone loses hope.

?: Yes, exactly.
**Mn:** So people read, and then they stop there. If they don't see another solution. So I really don't see the point of this [article 1], except for giving out the information. But it doesn’t engage people.

**S:** Inspire.

Looking at what scholars say, this balance is what constructive journalism recommends. It wants to cover both negative and positive issues, and it says journalists should give multiple perspectives (Gyldensted, 2015; Cajo, 2016; Haagerup, 2017; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017; McIntyre & Sobel, 2017). It also complies with the conclusions of earlier research, namely that an article based on the principles of constructive journalism makes readers more positive towards a news story, the presented solutions and towards taking action (O’Neill et al., 2013; McIntyre, 2017; McIntyre & Sobel, 2017).

**Theme 5: Format**

The format of the articles was often a point of discussion in the focus groups. It shows that the level of media literacy of the participants is quite high. Most of the participants are active users of news, this could partly explain the focus on this subject.

Constructive journalism itself does not say anything on the format of articles. It does not say what works best in terms of titles, of order of presenting positive and negative information or of amount of text. This could be quite relevant though. Maybe some combinations of information work better than others.

- **Article length**

  One very clear view from the respondents on format is the length of the article. Life online and the use of smartphones as the ‘new newspaper’, make people have less time or take less time to read the news, according to some participants. This makes readers more interested or more likely to read shorter articles. Some examples of what the respondents brought forward:

  **Mo:** But then I guess this [article 1] might reach out to more people since this amount of text is what people are used to. Cause nowadays they read it fast and then click to the next one. So I guess maybe if you are going to get people doing this, maybe it is better, if we are talking about just being aware of the climate change, maybe this will make
them understand something. Even though it points the finger to the wrong people or one side of it. Maybe this <article 2> is too long for people to even get through.

\textbf{F:} I still think that people tend to read the shorter articles. If you have a longer article, even if it is good, people won't read it. They will just scan over it. Then I am not sure if it is the better one. That is hard. You can't put all this information in a shorter article. On the other hand I am not sure if so many would read it, especially online. Online you see this and you scroll down and down and down, then I think you are even less motivated to read it.

A constructive article does not necessarily need to be a longer article, but since the aim of constructive journalism is to contribute to a healthier debate and to get the world moving by showing more complexity and give more viewpoints, it is harder to avoid longer articles. The question is if a constructive news article achieves its goal if readers avoid these articles because of their length. Constructive journalism criticises the traditional news for chasing away readers by their negativity, but it is possible that constructive journalism scares readers too. The new way of news consumption thus has to be taken into account when creating this new type of journalism.

Some respondents also bring forward that this should not only be a thing journalists need to think of. According to them readers have to change themselves and have to put effort in reading the longer and complex articles.

\textbf{Z:} If you only read the shorter articles you won't get the full picture. Even with this one <article 2>, it’s not that long at all and you get more of a context. People in general want to have the short one, just to know what is happening.
\textbf{F:} That is true
\textbf{Z:} Everyone should read the longer ones, because than you can better understand how complex situations are.

This brings me back to responsibility again. Is it the journalists who should change, in order to change the mindset of the audience or is it the other way around? The constructive journalists scholars say that it is the journalists who should take on a more active role. In this way, the audience should get more engaged with both journalism and the issues presented in the news.
The readers again say they should take their responsibility themselves. In the discussion I will further elaborate on this.

- **Article structure**

  *K: I am just thinking of the consequence of where they focus on first. People tend to read shorter articles. If you would put in the other way around, put the positive paragraph first, then people would have a different view on the topic and maybe feel like that all there good work is helping.*

This quote shows that readers believe that an article should be structured in a certain way in order to be able to see it as constructive. The participant is commenting here on the traditional article, that only shows one paragraph that could be seen as more positive (although by many respondents it was identified as one-sided). Together with another participant, he discusses the order in which certain information is shown, also connected to the fact that people do not take time to read the news anymore. They argue that by showing the positive information first, the article can be seen as constructive. Another participant does not agree. He argues that the article still lacks a lot of information and sees it as one-sided. According to him it does not matter in which order you put it, if an article is too short it cannot show the complexity.

Structure does seem to be important in enhancing the engagement of readers. The order in which information is shown could make a difference on the perception of the story on readers. Simply changing the framing of issues is perhaps not enough to make the change in society constructive journalism strives for.

**4.4 Journalism’s role**

From the perspective of constructive journalism the role of journalism and the journalist differs from a traditional journalistic perspective. As described in the theoretical framework, constructive journalism asks journalists to be active in their way of covering stories, this means letting go of the traditional view that news is only news when something new happens and being aware of the effect a certain story can have on society (Haagerup, 2017; Lewis, 2017; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017).

**Theme 6: Support for a constructive role**

When asked if they agree with the portrayed role of the journalists as explained above, all the participants agreed. In their eyes journalists should try to engage readers with climate change
via their news stories. In line with the agenda-setting and framing theories, they feel that journalists have much influence over what people think and what people do.

**O:** Since it is the third power, they have a huge role in it.

**G:** It is still a major source of information for a lot of people.

**P:** For most of us, would we the individuals go back to for example the individual reports on a political summit? No. Because that is what many of us consider the job of a journalist, like report back, what is going on?

**O:** Since people like to have apocalyptic news, it can sometimes be hard.

**P:** Good news sells as well. With a positive but apocalyptic undertone.

**F:** Because it is information. And you don't start doing things if you don't have information.

**A:** It also has a social impact. I feel like journalism is politics as well. I think journalism has a social responsibility. If they decide to use this responsibility in a good way it would make me feel do stuff.

‘A’ claims that journalism has a social responsibility, exactly as the social responsibility theory of the press says too. Journalists should take the interests of the society into account when making news decisions (McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017). This is an important comment, because it underlines what scholars in the constructive journalism say. According to them journalists should choose to write on stories that are of importance for society and should take responsibility for the effects their stories have on society.

Another argument that is used to underline that journalist have a role in engaging the public with issues like climate change is brought forward in the following quote:

**T:** You want it to be objective and present facts, but at the same time with a pressing issue like climate change, if you show them all these devastating facts, you should also have some kind of role to lead people in the right direction.

**R:** When it comes to issues like this then yes I think journalism does have a role in trying to word things in a way that people really understand that it is a big deal.

**J:** Journalism definitely has a role, just already by presenting the facts. And creating a mood.
It seems that the participants of the focus groups think action towards climate change is needed. They see journalism as an important ‘power’ or ‘source of information’ in this.

- **Objectivity**
  Another important theme brought forward is objectivity. Most participants value this trait and think journalists should be as unbiased as possible. Although it is also discussed into what extent objectivity is possible and desirable. Respondent ‘T’ brings this up as can be read in the quote above. The comment implies that the content of articles should be objective, but journalists do not always have to be objective in coverage choices.

  \[ R: \text{I think that journalists and researchers too, should keep a very unbiased tone, to keep as factual as possible. The moment you put your own opinion into something that is real, people start to opposing you. It is hard to persuade others to understand that it is real.} \]

Like the constructive scholars already say now, the traditional journalism is not objective either since the negative stories are mostly in the news.

  \[ G: \text{I don't think that not allow a journalist to add their own opinion is a bad thing. It just shows like we give you this information, we don't have influence over it.} \]

  \[ P: \text{But there is still a bias that you actually report something in the first place.} \]

One of the respondents brought up what Wyss (2008) writes in his book. Climate change is a problem that according to scientists exists, by choosing to follow the traditional journalism rules of objectivity and fairness, the journalists treat is as if it is still a negotiable problem.

  \[ Mn: \text{But wasn't this a big thing with the Nazi's marching in Gothenburg? Everyone was like you have to keep neutral, they have the right to do this. But then I think it is actually someone’s responsibility, when it is something that is so obvious not good, then you can’t be objective. There is nothing to be objective about. You are picking a side when you are holding it quiet or just presenting it as...} \]

  \[ ?: \text{exactly} \]

  \[ Mn: \text{a fact.} \]

  \[ ?: \text{or even being neutral} \]
**Mn:** Exactly, there is nothing called being neutral when it is a situation like this. When you don’t choose the ?? about climate change then you are taking a stance.

Actively choosing to cover certain topics is not seen as unobjective, as long as the content of the article does not show bias. Journalists should present the facts as they are, which means they should show both sides of a story. The traditional news is not necessarily seen as objective, because putting the emphasis on only the wrong and the bad is perceived as opinion.

**4.5 Discussion**

One main aspect that comes forward out of the data of the focus groups is the responsibility of journalists and of readers. It is connected to the rise of social media, the use of smartphones and the preference of negative news. The question that can be asked is: who is or should be responsible for what the audience reads? Is it the readers themselves or is it the journalists?

It is an interesting and complex question, since nowadays there is no clear distinction between creators/producers and audience anymore. Social media and the internet have made it easier for everyone to create content and spread information. The influence of readers on the content is way higher than before.

Who is the agenda-setter nowadays? As the agenda-setting theory says, the perceived importance of a certain topic is influenced by the emphasis that is put on it (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2006; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007; Denis Wu & Coleman, 2009). This was easier to apply on the earlier times, when journalists were the only source of information. Now readers can share stories they perceive as important, or just as fun. They can create their own videos and put emphasis on the things they think should get attention. Readers can frame certain stories too, and by this create images of certain people or issues. Ergo, readers become agenda-setters and framers themselves.

On the one hand this can be seen as constructive, since it gives people the opportunity to get in contact with different viewpoints really fast and easily. On the other hand it is not constructive at all, since it is known that algorithms on social media create an information bubble and mostly show the things that you are already interested in. It creates a one-sided worldview. This also applies on the use of news apps which give readers the possibility to only get news about certain topics in which they have interest. Readers do not need journalists anymore who choose what is important for them, they do it themselves via all kind of new news platforms. They actively participate in their own agenda-setting and framing.

The participants in this study acknowledge their own role in this. They recognise that
people, including themselves, mostly get in contact with the fast news, the short one-sided stories and the ‘doomsday’ news. They see it as their own responsibility, or at least partly, to actively search for other perspectives, to take time to read longer and more complex articles and to search for more positive news.

Constructive news could play a part in this too though. Looking at the themes and subthemes in the analysis, it is possible to say that readers prefer to read a news article based on the principles of constructive journalism. It inspires them, makes them feel engaged, gives them some hope and teaches them something about the issue at hand, namely climate change. The (second level) agenda-setting and framing of a topic as climate change, is seen as needed. The participants seem interested in the more positive stories, they even literally say that they actually would like to read more articles as the constructive one. The readers do not feel that this goes against journalism as they value it, namely unbiased and factual. As long as the content of an article is neutral, it is seen as valuable.

This demand for neutrality does not go against constructive journalism. To be exact, the readers see a constructive article as more neutral than a traditional article. It can be argued that the claim of objectivity by traditional journalists, leads them to not being objective at all.

Constructive news is seen as the better way of doing journalism by the respondents in this focus groups. The online media and new technologies have to be taken into consideration though. In order to reach the goal of creating more engaged, better informed citizens and a less polarised debate, not only the way news is done should change, but it seems that readers have to change their behaviour too. To say it in the words of one of the respondents though, journalists should lead the readers in the right direction.
5. Reflection and Conclusion

As also mentioned in the methods section, the findings of this study cannot be empirically generalised. It shows how a particular group of people thinks about certain subjects, and in that way how others might see this subject. The findings of this study can be useful in our understanding of the news experiences and values of readers.

The findings are influenced by certain aspects of this study. Several have been highlighted in the methods and analysis section, but there are still other things that have to be taken into consideration. Therefore I will first outline these aspects in the reflection, before summarising the most important findings in the conclusion.

5.1 Critical reflection

One aspect of this study that has been of major influence on the findings is the difference in length of the news articles. The negative article was shorter than the constructive article (appendix 2). Most of the respondents brought this up and, as can also been read in the analysis section, argued that this kind of article probably reaches more people. It is an interesting finding, but the question is how much the format of the experiment has influenced the data. Would the participants also have highlighted this aspect if the news articles would have been of the same length? This is something that has to be taken into consideration in future research.

Most respondents say, in line with the constructive journalism scholars, it is needed to show more sides of the stories and to show the complexity of problems. This can be a problem. After all the aim is to influence the society as whole in a positive way. Longer and more complex articles can be of interest for higher educated people, as all the respondents in this study are. Maybe some readers need simplification in order to understand a certain situation better. In this way one-sided news coverage could sometimes be hard to avoid. Since all the respondents are studying at a university, it is not possible to see if also lower educated readers value complexity and multiple perspectives in a news story too.

As also highlighted thoroughly in the analysis part, positivity could have a negative effect on certain people according to the respondents. It could make them stop taking action and make them lose a sense of responsibility, since others already solved the problem. Although constructive journalism leans on the claims of the science of positive psychology, I cannot say myself if these arguments could be true or not. To be able to counter these comments, I should first get more knowledge about the effects of positive psychology.

Another aspect that has been of influence on the results is the level of engagement of the participants with the chosen subject climate change. At first it was my aim to form three
focus groups, which could be divided according to the level of engagement of the respondents. Since it was hard to find respondents and the time to finish this thesis was limited, this was in the end not possible. All the respondents believed that climate change exists and that something needs to be done to stop it. They also saw that they have their own responsibility in this, although there was a difference in the actions they had been taking already. The fact that the participants say that journalism has a role in making people engaged could be affected by this. What would less engaged readers or climate change deniers say? Maybe there is no difference, and do these people believe it is the role of the journalist to enhance engagement too. This study does not give an answer to that question.

5.2 Conclusion
The participants in this study (young, university students, (highly) engaged with climate change, news consumers) see news journalism as something important and value its existence. They also see the news as sometimes too negative, ‘clickbaity’ and feel that it has become more competitive. They have lost trust in (traditional) news outlets, because of these problems but also because of fake news. Although the participants see some responsibility for themselves. Most of them consume the news online, via apps or social media and use their smartphone as ‘the newspaper’, they acknowledge that this behaviour leads them to consume the news faster and to be distracted more. They say they do not have or take the time to read longer and more complex articles, although they would prefer to consume this kind of news.

The differences between the two presented articles were clear for all the respondents. The negative article was seen as one sided, simple and unengaging. It gave them feelings of guilt, as if nothing is happening and of hopelessness. The constructive article was seen as positive, inspirational and realistic. It gave the respondents some hope and the solutions in it were valued. These findings are in line with earlier research conducted by McIntyre (2017), McIntyre & Gyldensted (2017) and O’Neill et al. (2013). Respondents also reported that the negative article would have more impact in their eyes, and therefore would create more awareness for the problem. Something O’Neill et al. (2013) also found in their study of how images can enhance the engagement with climate change. All in all, the participants feel more motivated to do something on climate change after reading the constructive news article. This study shows that constructive journalism can indeed enhance the engagement with climate change, although it cannot be concluded if the participants actually would do what they say.

The role that constructive journalism ascribes to journalism and journalists is supported
by the comments of the focus group participants. Although objectivity is highly valued, the respondents believe that certain issues cannot be ignored by journalists and therefore journalists should cover these stories and share this information with society. There thus is a difference in the objectivity of the content, which should as the participants say always be sought, and being objective in choosing the issues or subjects to cover.

With the limitations of this study in mind, there is much space for further research. Following studies could focus on the similarities and differences in views on constructive journalism by different kinds of people. For example, lower educated versus higher educated people, older versus younger participants or little engaged versus highly engaged respondents. Also more focus groups have to be conducted in order to be able to make broader generalisations. In following research the news articles should have the same lay-out and also be of the same length. Although this thesis follows up on earlier quantitative research, further studies could combine multiple research methods to get a full understanding of the views on and the influence of constructive news.
6. References


Appendix 1 – Focus group guide

**Introduction**
Welcome. First of all, thank you for participating in this focus group. My name is Marije, I am a student at the international program in Journalism here at Södertörn University. This focus group is part of my master’s thesis.

I will tell you now in short what we are going to do. During this focus group I will show you two news articles which you have to read with attention. The idea of this focus group is that you will talk about this news articles and the topics that are connected to it. I will ask some questions, but the conversation/discussion will be between you all. I encourage each one of you to speak out and share your views and ideas. And to respond to each other. If you agree with someone, say it out loud. If you don’t agree with someone, say it out loud. But also know that you are allowed to not respond if you don’t want to.

This focus group will be audio recorded. Afterwards, I will transcribe the conversation. It is fully anonymous. Before we start I will ask each one of you to state a name and talk for a short time, so that I know which voice belongs to which person. You don’t have to use your real name.

Are there any questions or objections?
I will now start the audio tape. Could you please all state a name and say something briefly. Now we will start the conversation.

**Journalism & News— 10 min**
First I would like to talk briefly about news journalism in general.

1. What is your opinion about news journalism?
2. What is positive and what is negative?
3. In what way do you consume news?
4. What do you think of the tone of the news?
Climate change – 10 min
Let’s talk briefly about climate change.

5. What is your view on climate change?
6. What are you doing now on climate change?

News articles – 10 min
Now I will give you two news articles to read.

7. What do you think of the first article?
8. What do you think of the second article?
9. What are the differences according to you?

Engagement with journalism – 10 min

10. Do you prefer one of the articles above the other?
11. How does reading these articles make you feel? And why?
12. Does one of the articles motivate you to consume more news?
13. Does one of the articles give you a different perspective on journalism?

Engagement with climate change – 10 min

14. How do the articles make you feel about climate change? and why?
15. Do you think one article reports in a better way on climate change than the other? And why?
16. What should an article contain to actually motivate you to do something about climate change?

Journalism role

17. What is according to you the role journalism plays in this situation?
Good news about renewables: but the heat is still on to cut fossil fuel use

New data shows global emissions are at a historic high. Political leaders must now consider imposing serious penalties

For optimists, it was tempting to view three years of flatlining global carbon emissions, from 2014-16, as the new normal. We now know celebrations should be put on hold. Figures for 2017 published last week show global emissions from energy have jumped back up again, to a historic high.

The data from the International Energy Agency shows we still have much to do when it comes to stopping global warming. Three years ago experts cautioned that 2015’s near standstill in emissions might be only a temporary pause before resuming the upward march as India and China developed. Those warnings were prophetic.

Global energy demand last year grew by 2.1%, more than double the rate in 2016, driven largely by Asia. The problem for the climate is that more than 70% of the growth came from fossil fuels. Gas was the fastest-growing fossil fuel. But even coal, the most carbon-intensive fuel, reversed two years of declines and was up by 1%, as coal burning in China, India and South Korea grew.

With renewables records being broken seemingly every week – last weekend the UK set a new high for wind power – it is easy to think the fight has been won. But the IEA’s work is a sobering reminder that stratospheric growth in renewables is not enough. Renewables put a brake on emissions but they don’t stop coal, oil and gas from being dug out of the ground.

Constructive article

Good news about renewables: but the heat is still on to cut fossil fuel use

New data shows global emissions are at a historic high. Political leaders must now consider imposing serious penalties

For optimists, it was tempting to view three years of flatlining global carbon emissions, from 2014-16, as the new normal. We now know celebrations should be put on hold. Figures for 2017 published last week show global emissions from energy have jumped back up again, to a historic high.

The data from the International Energy Agency shows we still have much to do when it comes to stopping global warming. Three years ago experts cautioned that 2015’s near standstill in emissions might be only a temporary pause before resuming the upward march as India and China developed. Those warnings were prophetic.
Global energy demand last year grew by 2.1%, more than double the rate in 2016, driven largely by Asia. The problem for the climate is that more than 70% of the growth came from fossil fuels. Gas was the fastest-growing fossil fuel. But even coal, the most carbon-intensive fuel, reversed two years of declines and was up by 1%, as coal burning in China, India and South Korea grew.

On the plus side, renewables were the fastest-growing source of new energy and had another unprecedented year. China added as much solar power in a single year as the total installed capacity across France and Germany. The US scored the steepest drop in emissions, despite Donald Trump’s first year as president, as new renewable generation bloomed.

Indeed, with renewables records being broken seemingly every week – last weekend the UK set a new high for wind power – it is easy to think the fight has been won. But the IEA’s work is a sobering reminder that stratospheric growth in renewables is not enough. Renewables put a brake on emissions but they don’t stop coal, oil and gas from being dug out of the ground.

If the energy sector is still nowhere near compatible with the demands of climate science, and the goals set by nearly 200 governments in Paris three years ago, what do we do?

Despair is not an option, and there are reasons for hope. One is Beijing’s self-interest in tackling air quality, which means coal plant closures and bans, and the promotion of electric cars. India, the coal industry’s last great hope, has witnessed a faster than expected rise in solar power, squeezing out coal projects. Germany’s new government finally has plans to tackle the country’s outmoded reliance on coal. Globally, coal capacity will begin shrinking in 2022 at the current rate of retirements, according to a new report.

Arguably the brightest and most promising trend is that renewables are on the brink of being economically viable without government subsidies. In the UK alone, an estimated £20bn worth of wind and solar farms could be built without subsidies between now and 2030.
Appendix 3 – Coding scheme

Journalism in general

➢ Competitive
➢ Being the first
➢ Third power
➢ Huge influence over people
➢ Important/important
  - Informative
  - Make the public understand what is happening
➢ being objective/objective
  - journalists are not always objective → this is negative
  - they sometimes have a narrative
  - It can become biased
  - Not totally possible, always bias
➢ readers have less time/make less time/ have less time/value time differently
➢ what is a journalist?
  - Spreading information/?share information
  - Bloggers/instagrammers?
  - TV or newspapers?
➢ Accountability
  - Bloggers/instagrammers can’t be hold accountable
➢ Transparancy/transparent
➢ Trustworthiness
  - Relate to journalists
  - Fake news → being more careful as a reader/fake news
➢ More celebrity news
➢ Don’t give people space for forming own opinion
  - Political news is like sports news
  - cynical
➢ Old vs new media
  - Less trust in old journalist
    ➔ because of less relating
    ➔ because of scandals and fake news
  - Clickbait = new media / online clickbait / Dramatical to get attention/ clickbait for revenue
  - Sensationalised
  - More news sources/content makers → more competition
  - Complexity is low in new media
  - Different sections/categories in public broadcasting
  - More balance in public broadcasting
  - Whatever is trending will get attention
    ➔ Social media helps to get important news (Twitter), because of trendings
    ➔ People follow what is trending, and don’t form their own opinion
  - Via social media promoting initiatives
➢ They oversimplify
➢ Phone as ‘newspaper’
- Distractions
- Easier narrative for news on the go

➢ News sources
- Social media
  ➢ Facebook/Facebook/Facebook
- Online versions of Dagens Nyheter
- Online platforms
- Dagens Nyheter/newspapers
- Vice news on youtube
- twitter
- SVT
- Radio/ radio
- Podcasts (opinion)/podcasts
- Apps that show different articles from different news sources/ same/same
g➢ Easy to step out
- Apps from newspapers

Negativity

➢ Focus on what is going wrong
➢ Positive news is not there
➢ Tone affects worldview
➢ Responsibility of the readers vs responsibility of the journalists
  - Readers prefer the negative news/people are attracted to bad news/readers want to read apocalyptic news
  - Others decide what we consume
➢ News bubble via facebook
➢ I don’t want to feel bad all day
➢ More accessible, so more exposed to bad things

Climate change

➢ Believe that it is happening/it exists/ it is real/ it is real
➢ It is bad
➢ it is scary
➢ (highly) engaged
➢ Everyone has responsibility
➢ Personal struggle what to do/what not to do
  - Feelings of hopelessness
  - Others don’t do much/why should I do it when others don’t
  - We could do way more
➢ Western world view/dominant world view
  - Victims are not responsible
  - In Sweden you should do something
  - No/less effect in the Western World
➢ Responsibility of the companies and governments
News article 1

- One angle / it shows one side
- Pessimistic
- Too simple
- Missing information
- Clickbait
- No complexity
- Not memorable
- Negative
  - Focus on the negative
  - Blame on certain countries / blames the developing countries
  - False signals
  - Does not take into account different possibilities
  - Hopeless
  - We can’t do anything
- Bigger reach
  - Shorter
  - More awareness
- No engagement
- No inspiration
- Feelings of nothing is happening
- Feel bad / you feel shit this is bad
- Feelings of guilt
- Would inspire me to change
- Makes an impact, makes people do things
- Makes you feel like we will die anyway
- Apocalyptic / no solution
- Makes you aware

News article 2

- Bigger picture / both sides of the problem
- Dynamic
- Optimistic
- Examples
- Something can be done / shows solutions
- Shows what has happened in a good way
- Inspire and engage
- Also feel bad, but things can be done
- Some hope
- Less dramatic
- Positive picture
  - Can be bad for some people
  - Can give people image that they don’t have to do anything / when you see things are
  going well, some people will stop doing something / same
- Less reach
  - Long article
- Makes you want to discuss the issue
- Feelings of doubt because of many numbers
- Confusing
➢ Doesn’t show the solutions in an effective way
➢ Aimed at companies and political leaders

News articles

➢ Balance is needed
➢ second article is preferred
  - more engagement with journalism
  - makes you want to discuss it
  - **more nuanced view**
  - more information
  - Takes the whole world into consideration
  - More complex
  - **Shows that we can change something**
  - More explanation, both sides
  - I learn something
  - More realistic
➢ article 1 is shorter, thus more people read it/would not read the longer article
  - people don’t take the time to read longer articles
    ➢ seeing complex situations as black and white
  - people are exposed to this kind of articles more
  - for online news this one is better, otherwise you scroll down and down and down
  - especially if you don’t read news, this is more appealing
➢ No prefer because of language

Journalism engagement

➢ Second article
  - Getting interest in the topic
  - But maybe because of being a student
➢ Won’t read both articles
➢ Students seem quite engaged already, they talk about the structure, title, how they would like to see the lay out different. You can see them as produsers??

Climate change engagement

➢ show solutions/engage the reader on what they can do
➢ focus on the individuals (not on the governments or companies)/**no individual engagement, focus on individual**
➢ could motivate CEO or political leader
➢ article one makes you feel that it is useless
➢ Mix of good and bad
➢ People are affected by what and how you write
➢ Article 2 could make people want to organise themselves
➢ Hypothesis what shows possibilities
➢ no sugar coating
➢ pictures
➢ toplist of what you can do, give advice
➢ punch people in the face
➢ people already affected
  - less white people
➢ **BALANCE**

➢ No convincing/attacking/not forcing you to take opinion/do not persuade
  - When they try to get to your feelings
  - Objectiveness
  - Being a fanatic is bad

➢ Stay factual and unbiased
  - It is hard to persuade others to understand if it is real if you use opinion
    This is opposite of what others said: hearing opinion can make you think about it

**Journalism role**

➢ Journalism has a role in motivating you to do something
  - It is information, without information you won’t do things/major source of information
  - It has social impact, social responsibility
  - It’s the third power

➢ Being unbiased

➢ Show the whole reality

➢ Climate change is real issue

➢ Journalist are not objective if they choose to not report on it

➢ Journalism plays a role in enhancing the engagement

➢ With an issue like climate change, you have a role in leading people in the right direction
  - Bring the numbers back to our individual lives
  - Journalism is already doing it. We need a social change