



ENLENS: Energy Transition Through the Lens of SDGs

Research Priority Area application

1. Title: Engaging Citizens with Sustainable Solutions: Exploring the Effects and Professional Perceptions of Solutions Journalism in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals

2. Name main applicant and co-applicants

Main applicant: dr. Andreas Schuck (UvD) - FMG, a.r.t.schuck@uva.nl. **Co-applicant:** dr. Alice Fleerackers (UvD) - FGw, a.l.fleerackers@uva.nl

3. Societal case

Solutions journalism offers a constructive alternative to conventional problem-focused news reporting, which tends to emphasize the news values of negativity and conflict. This project investigates whether and how solutions journalism can more effectively engage citizens with complex societal challenges that are central to the energy transition and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We focus on how news coverage of SDG-related issues—particularly those connected to clean energy (SDG 7), climate action (SDG 13), and inequality (SDG 10)—can activate public interest and mobilize audiences toward more informed and constructive engagement. At the same time, energy transition processes in Europe often involve trade-offs that affect people beyond European borders, such as resource extraction, energy inequality, or global supply chain implications (SDG 17). This project examines how journalistic framing of these issues may facilitate or hinder meaningful audience engagement with such trade-offs and synergies. Innovatively, the project integrates a dual perspective: it investigates both the audience effects of solutions journalism and journalists' perceptions of its professional appropriateness when covering SDG-related topics. It combines experimental and qualitative methods, integrates social science and humanities perspectives, and engages stakeholders through targeted outreach (e.g., workshops, blog posts, infographics for journalists), contributing to societal awareness and media innovation.

4. Scientific case

This interdisciplinary project addresses two central research questions. (1) How does solutions journalism, compared to standard news coverage, influence citizens' emotional responses, perceived relevance of SDG-related issues, and intentions to engage with energy transition challenges? And (2) How do journalists perceive the appropriateness, feasibility, and professional value of solutions journalism in covering SDG-linked topics? The project uses an integrated sequential mixed-method design bridging social sciences and humanities approaches (Fetters et al., 2013). A **media effects experiment** will assess how solutions journalism influences audience emotions (e.g., hope, empathy), perceived efficacy, engagement, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding SDGs and the energy transition, as well as the role of individual differences as moderators. Initial findings will be shared with journalists during **qualitative semi-structured interviews** to probe their perceptions of the feasibility, appropriateness, and professional value of solutions journalism for SDG reporting. Interviews will be analyzed using codebook thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The project contributes to research showing that solutions journalism can foster citizen engagement (Lough & McIntyre, 2023), especially in crisis contexts (Schäfer et al., 2024). Roundtables and workshops involving journalists, citizens, and scholars will integrate both strands, contributing to scholarship on constructive journalism, SDG communication, journalistic roles, and media effects.

5. Contribution to the aims and success indicators of ENLENS

A. How will your project evolve after the proposed research/activity. What is the long-term goal?

This project serves as a springboard for a larger interdisciplinary research agenda on solutions journalism and sustainability communication, to be funded through a broader NWO proposal (NWO Open Competition-SSH, L-grant) focused on media innovation, civic engagement, and SDG trade-offs.

Another longer-term goal is to form a consortium with international partners for a Horizon Europe proposal addressing key global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and the energy transition via journalism and citizen engagement.

B. Why and how does your project contribute to the UvA-community of interdisciplinary research, and ENLENS more specifically?

The project bridges the humanities and social sciences by connecting journalism practice and media effects and by integrating experimental and qualitative methods. The team will continue to collaborate and grow beyond the funding period (see Goal A), strengthening interdisciplinary ties between media studies and communication science and contributing to the interdisciplinary ENLENS community at UvA. We will involve student research assistants in interview work, programming the experiment, and knowledge dissemination, strengthening their academic and professional training.

C. ENLENS aims at broadening the community beyond the group of project PIs. Describe how your project will contribute to this goal

C1. Stakeholder collaboration: We will host workshops with national journalism organizations (e.g., Vereniging van Onderzoeksjournalisten VVOJ, Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten) and leverage existing contacts (e.g., Bonn Institute, Germany; Constructive Institute, Denmark; Public Communication of Science and Technology Network, global) to mobilize findings to journalists internationally. **C2. Education:** Student research assistants will gain hands-on experience in interdisciplinary research, stakeholder engagement, and targeted outreach. Findings will also inform applicant Schuck's new MA-Elective course *Journalism with a Mission: Challenges, Solutions and Innovations* at FMG and applicant Fleerackers' courses *Journalism Studies* and *Inleiding journalistiek en media* at FGw. **C3. Outreach:** We will organize a roundtable at SPUI25, bringing together journalists, citizens, and scholars; submit conference presentations (ICA, ECREA) and journal articles (*Public Understanding of Science, Journalism Studies, Environmental Communication*); and engage journalists by developing and disseminating workshops, blogs, and infographics with professional organizations.

6. Budget

Total requested: €41,663,50

FMG (€14.937): Teaching buy-out (€12,387): The Department has approved a buy-out of 115 hours for Dr. Schuck in Semester 1. This will enable dedicated work on the experiment, including stimulus development, questionnaire design, and manuscript writing. *Student research assistant (€1,800):* 100 hours (VADL). Supporting questionnaire programming, pre-testing, literature review, coordination of SPUI25 event. *Catering costs (€750):* To cover catering costs during the SPUI25 event.

FGw (€14.882): Teaching buy-out (€10.432): The Department has approved a buy-out of 115 hours for Dr. Fleerackers in Semester 2. This will support labor-intensive research tasks (e.g., synthesizing experimental findings for journalist interviews, thematic analysis of transcripts), co-developing outreach materials (e.g., workshops, blog posts), supervising research assistant, integrating findings into future teaching materials. *Remuneration for journalists (€1.250):* Compensation for interview participation (€50 x 25 interviews). *Honoraria for roundtable/workshop speakers (€2.400):* €120 per invited speaker for the roundtable and professional journalism workshops (4 events x 5 speakers). *Graphic design for infographics (€800):* Freelance design of infographics to share best practices with journalists based on the projects' findings (€40/hr x 20 hrs).

Additional budget to cover research and targeted outreach costs (€11.844,50): *Data collection costs FMG (€5.000):* A media effects experiment with 1,200 Dutch participants (via research company Dynata) will test how solutions journalism influences public engagement with SDG-related challenges, particularly the energy transition. It includes news stimuli related to different SDGs (e.g., clean energy – SDG 7; climate action – SDG 13; reduced inequalities – SDG 10) to explore whether effects vary by perceived personal relevance. It focuses on emotional (e.g., hope, empathy) and cognitive (e.g., efficacy) mechanisms, as well as moderating factors, that may explain increased engagement, policy

support, and sustainable behavior. *Research assistance FGw* (€6.844,5): A student assistant (scale 3, 0.3 FTE, FGw) with interest in journalism and/or climate communication will support the project for 11 months (plus one month for recruitment). Tasks are focused on data acquisition and preparation and include assisting with qualitative interviews (e.g., recruitment, interviewing, transcript cleaning) and outreach (e.g., co-developing blog posts, organizing journalist workshops).

Observation and Justification of extra costs: This interdisciplinary project requires intensive data collection, analysis, and collaboration between FGw and FMG, as well as relationship building and sustained engagement with external stakeholders (e.g., citizens, journalists, journalism organizations). These activities exceed what standard research budgets typically support. We therefore request an additional budget to cover essential data acquisition and preparation costs, including a media effects experiment and student research assistance to support the qualitative interviews and outreach activities. Interdisciplinary collaboration takes more time than disciplinary work, as it involves building shared frameworks, co-developing methods, and integrating findings. These processes are resource-intensive but crucial for high-impact outcomes (MacLeod, 2018; Moirano et al., 2020).

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