

# **The construction of a media professional identity in political television talk.**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

This study shows how a media professional identity is constructed in (the production of) Flemish political television discourse and identifies how this construction is related to the dynamic operation of power. More concretely, it is the study's prime spur to identify the constitutive cornerstones of the performance of a media professional identity in political television talk. Therefore, it turns attention to the discursive mechanisms – i.e. the practices and processes – that underlie, support and facilitate the journalist-presenters' performance of a professional identity in political television talk. At a theoretical level, the study builds upon an integrated discursive and performative approach to account for the dynamism and reflexivity with which identity and power tend to occur in institutional contexts. At a methodological level, the study proposes a combination of conversation analysis and ethnography to concretise the dialectic and situated nature of identity and power. At an empirical level, the study turns to iterative analyses of on-air and off-air practices of media professionals and politicians in the frontstage and backstage settings of political television broadcasting to get a grip on the complexity of identity construction in political television broadcasting. It therefore builds upon a twofold corpus of (1) transcripts of 29 political television broadcasts of *De Zevende Dag* (The Seventh Day, Eén) and the series of VRT pre-election programmes in 2009 (*Vlaanderen 09* (Flanders 09, one-off broadcast, Eén), *Europa 09* (Europe 09, one-off broadcast, Eén), *Het Groot Debat 09* (The Great Debate 09, one-off broadcast, Eén), *TerZake 09* (To the Point 09, a series of 15 broadcasts, Canvas), and *Kopstukkendebat* (Leading Figures Debate, one-off broadcast, Eén), and (2) fieldnotes from 6 weeks (3 x 2 weeks) of ethnographic observations in the backstage settings of the political television programme *Terzake* (Canvas).

This study brings to light that the journalist-presenters' construction of a media professional identity in (the production of) political television discourse is contingent upon the articulation of four central aspects: (1) interactional resources; (2) formats; (3) production standards; and (4) team collaborations. The repetitive and performative articulation of interactional resources and format components in the on-air context of political television talk, and of production standards and team collaborations in the off-air context of political television production, show to be the crucial constitutive cornerstones of a media professional identity in this context, both in enabling and disabling ways. Overall, the study arrives at a holistic, kaleidoscopic look that embraces the complexity, dynamism and contingency with which media professional identity tends to be performed in political television discourse.