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THE FIPRONIL AFFAIR: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

*An analysis of online interactions about the Fipronil
affair*

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ABSTRACT

At the end of July 2017, the so-called 'Fipronil affair' occurred in the Netherlands. The Fipronil affair is a new food safety scandal of last year, as chicken eggs were contaminated with the forbidden substance fipronil. The question 'Who is responsible in the Fipronil affair?' is being played back and forth in debate between the poultry farmers, the government and the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (VWA). By using a discursive psychological perspective, online interactions from four discussion forums were analysed in order to find the identities that poultry farmers and civil society actors constructed for themselves or ascribed to the government or the Authority in the affair. Two identity constructions for poultry farmers were found: 'How could we have known' to show their innocence in response to accusations of naivety and 'We are practical' in response to what they treated as the theoretical nature of the Authority's actions. For civil society, also two identity constructions were found: 'We are down-to-earth' in response to the panicky government regarding eating contaminated eggs with fipronil and 'We are (rightfully) distrustful' regarding the intentions of the government in response to their lax and negligent performance in the Fipronil affair. Recommendations are made as to how perform a better dialogue to improve the relationship between the stakeholders and come to a joint solution to prevent similar crisis events in the future.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the so-called 'Fipronil affair', that started in the Netherlands in July 2017. The Fipronil affair concerns a food safety scandal, in which eggs were contaminated with the forbidden substance fipronil (Sorgdrager, 2018). Fipronil is a pesticide used for dogs and cats to combat ticks, fleas and lice in veterinary medicine. In poultry farms, red lice also occur and this is seen as a common problem in the poultry sector. These red lice are small insects, which suck blood from chickens. Therefore, pesticides containing fipronil have been used by poultry farmers to combat these red lice. However, fipronil is forbidden to use in the food production chain, as it contaminates eggs and chicken products. Therefore, eating contaminated eggs with fipronil might be harmful for public health (RIVM, 2017).

The observation of the presence of fipronil in eggs in July 2017 has had a significant impact on several stakeholders of the Fipronil affair. The following stakeholders were affected: consumers, as they did not know if eating eggs was harmful or not; poultry farmers, who experienced financial as well as emotional consequences; employees of the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA, henceforth: the Authority) as their organization was being criticized; and the government as their intentions were up for discussion (Sorgdrager, 2018). Therefore, public discussions arose about who is responsible for the occurrence of the fipronil affair. Especially the poultry farmers, the government and the Authority were under attack.

1.1 Liability of the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority

The Authority is the controlling organization that must watch over food safety in the Netherlands.

The Authority found the forbidden substance fipronil in chicken eggs, which was used to combat red lice in the stables of laying hens (NVWA, 2017). In the following subparagraphs, the course of the affair will be presented.

1.1.1 First anonymous signal and finding fipronil in Belgium

In November 2016, an inspector of the Authority received the first anonymous signal about the illegal use of fipronil in cleaning poultry stables. The informer, who was presumably also a pest controller, mentioned that the company ChickFriend illegally used fipronil in their products for cleaning poultry stables. However, the case detective of the Authority decided to not report this to the public, as he thought that one anonymous signal would be insufficient to start an investigation (NVWA, 2017; Sorgdrager, 2018).

On 19 June 2017, an inspector of the Authority received an informal email from Belgium that fipronil had been found in chicken eggs of a Belgian poultry farm (NVWA, 2017). The administration of the farm showed that products for combatting blood lice from the company ChickFriend had been used (Sorgdrager, 2018).

1.1.2 Investigation to ChickFriend

After receiving these signals, the Authority started an investigation to the Dutch company ChickFriend. The company produced products for cleaning poultry stables, so also products for combatting blood lice. Research showed that ChickFriend sold their pesticide called DEGA-16, which had been mixed with fipronil, to Dutch poultry farms. By selling it under that name, the company tried to hide that their product contained fipronil as DEGA-16 is an approved product for cleaning chicken stables. However, ChickFriend bought the pesticide from another company called Poultry-Vision, a provider of pest control in Belgium (BBC, 2017). Up till now, it is not known if the farmers were aware of the fact that the anti-mite agent contained fipronil (Nieuwe Oogst, 2017), as it was sold under another name 'fypro-rein'. After it was known that ChickFriend sold pesticides containing fipronil, egg samples were taken from seven poultry farms that received a treatment of ChickFriend in July 2017. These samples confirmed the presence of fipronil, and consequently, ChickFriend was sealed as well as the seven farms which were blocked on 22 July 2017. This means that these farms could not transport their chicks, eggs or chicken manure. Thereafter, the Authority continued sampling more than 181 farms on 26 July 2017. This was the start of the blocking measures of the poultry farms (Sorgdrager, 2018). Later research showed that ChickFriend was not even certified as quality mark provider of the IKB Egg label or as pest controller, as it was not registered at Knowledge and Advice Centre for Animal Pests (KAD) (Hart van Nederland, 2017).

1.1.3 Public warning and worrying statement CEO

The European Commission confirmed that eating contaminated eggs with fipronil would only be harmful if people eat enough of them. Based on this, the public was warned by a press release which advised consumers to throw away eggs from one egg producer on 31 July 2017, as these eggs exceeded the standard of 0.72 mg fipronil/kg egg. Furthermore, a list with egg codes was produced from eggs that exceeded the standard for children, which was made to advise parents to temporarily do not let their children eat eggs with that code out of precaution. More information about fipronil and egg codes would be provided during the course of the week (Sorgdrager, 2018).

However, the situation changed the moment that Freek van Zoeren, which is the COA of the Authority, made a worrying statement for egg consumers at the television program Nieuwsuur on 1 August 2017 (Nieuwsuur, 2017). Van Zoeren warned that he was reluctant to eat eggs as long as the

investigation to the use of fipronil in poultry farms has not yet been completed. He literally said: “If someone says: well I can live without eating an egg until Sunday, I would recommend it” (Sorgdrager, 2018). This was in contrast with what the Authority and the European Commission recommended before regarding eating eggs. Therefore, Van Zoeren his statement caused alarm bells among egg consumers (Nieuwsuur, 2017), and as a result, the Authority was put even more under attack.

1.2 Consequences for the poultry farmers

The Fipronil affair had huge consequences for the farmers. First, the Authority produced a list with egg codes from eggs contaminated with fipronil, and supermarkets did not sell eggs for a while. This is accompanied with a lot of emotions for the poultry farmers, as they could not sell their eggs, did not have an income for a while and the future of their farms depends on this (BBC, 2017). Second, the Authority introduced a ban on the transport of chicken products from several Dutch poultry farms (Horne *et al.*, 2017). It seems that 15 European Union countries, Switzerland and Hong Kong received eggs contaminated with fipronil for already a year. Moreover, poultry farms in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and France were shut down (BBC, 2017). Horne *et al.* (2017) estimated the economic damage of the Fipronil affair for the Dutch poultry sector based on data available at 22 September 2017. The direct damage for the entire poultry sector was estimated at 65 to 75 million euros. This concerns the damage for different types of organizations in the poultry sector, such as rearing farms, laying hen farms, egg packing stations and manufacturers of egg products. In total, 3.5 million chickens were euthanized (NVWA, 2017). Thus, it is really important to improve the communication between the poultry farmers, government and the Authority to detect these crisis events earlier as it has huge emotional and economic consequences.

1.3 Problem statement and relevance

The Authority is the controlling organization that must watch over food safety in the Netherlands. Because of not reporting the first fipronil signals, poultry farmers experienced negative economic as well as emotional consequences, and civil society probably consumed contaminated eggs containing fipronil for more than one year already. Therefore, the intentions of the government and the Authority are up for discussion as their reliability is being questioned by poultry farmers and civil society. As a result of this, the role of the official experts from the government and the Authority are under attack, which will be investigated within this thesis.

Te Molder (2014) noted that experts are often presenting the provided information to the public as “these are the facts, you better deal with them”. This is what also happens in the Fipronil affair as the Authority as well as the government apply this statement to show that they have the monopoly of truth. For this reason, poultry farmers and civil society feel that their voice is not being heard by the

public regarding who they held responsible for the occurrence of the affair and how big the impact of the whole affair is on them. These stakeholders interact with each other about the affair by using online forums, and therefore, a discursive psychological perspective will be used in order to analyse online interactions of poultry farmers and civil society actors concerning the Fipronil affair, which will be explained more elaborately in the following subparagraph.

1.3.1 Discursive psychological perspective

Communication between the stakeholders seems very important in the Fipronil affair. People communicate with each other, and through talking people get the opportunity to primarily understand others actions, such as complimenting or accusing (Potter, 2012). Thus, language is not-neutral as people do things with their talk by performing certain actions, e.g. complimenting someone. However, what seems to be neutral can also be understood as an accusation. Discursive psychology focusses on these performed actions by participants during interaction. This minor thesis will use a discursive psychological perspective so as to analyse the online interactions of stakeholders concerning the Fipronil affair to completely understand their actions performed (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996b). 'Stakeholders' refers to people or organizations that could affect or could be affected by the Fipronil affair (cf. Fassin, 2009). The stakeholders include the poultry farmers, civil society, government and the Authority.

Discursive psychology focusses on 'naturally' occurring interactions in everyday life, which are produced independently without intervention of the researcher, such as conversations between peers or between parents and children during dinnertime (Potter, 2004). It is used to understand what people actually do in interaction by performing certain actions, and how this is understood/interpreted by the participant based on the actions they perform (Potter, 1996a; te Molder, 2015).

By using discursive psychology, it is possible to find out what is at stake for the stakeholders, even when this is hidden, and this is related to which identity they construct for themselves and for others in interaction. An example of what is at stake for participants can be found in the HPV-campaign, whereby mothers chose to vaccinate their child or not. Some mothers chose to vaccinate their children against HPV, because this seemed to be 'the right thing to do'. However, other mothers did more investigation into the topic and found out that vaccinating the child could potentially cause the child more harm than the disease itself. So, deciding to vaccinate the child or not seems to be a matter of having the right information, which displays good motherhood (Hobson-West, 2007). So, studying what is at stake for participants is an interesting field of research by looking where

participants could be accused of and how they defend themselves against these accusations, consciously or not. Besides this, people continuously construct, attribute and refute certain identities themselves for different reasons in a wide range of different contexts in everyday life. Identities are associated with particular rights or entitlements that makes it possible to claim knowledge or experience (Sneijder & te Molder, 2009). For instance, the study of Sneijder and te Molder (2009) investigates the relationship between identity and food choice with the help of an online forum about veganism. The results showed that the participants tried to resist the assumption that being a vegan is complicated, or the person who is vegan itself is seen as complicated. They used different approaches to resist against this assumption, such as informing people about their 'ordinary' vegan meals. They constantly tried to show that vegan meals are easy to prepare, and providing methods to prevent vitamin deficiency as daily routine. By doing this, the participants construct themselves as the category 'ordinary people'. Thus, the participants in this study established the identity of an ordinary person with an attempt to resist the negative aspects of being a vegan. No similar studies were found regarding constructing identities in the current Fipronil affair.

1.4 Research objective and research questions

The objective of the thesis is to gain insight in how poultry farmers and civil society actors reacted to the Fipronil affair, which identity they build themselves and which identity they ascribe to the government or Authority by looking at online interactions. For the government and Authority, it is important to find out how they could react to similar crisis events in the future by performing a dialogue. By performing a dialogue, it is possible to find a joint solution together, which could improve mutual trust as well as the relationship between the government, Authority, the poultry farmers and civil society. By improving this, the government and Authority could prevent that the crisis must be solved ad hoc again.

The research question of the thesis is as follows:

'Which identities are being built by poultry farmers and civil society actors in the Fipronil affair, and what purposes are consciously and unconsciously being served by these identities?'

The research question will be answered with the help of the following sub-questions:

- (1) What is at stake for the poultry farmers and civil society actors during online interactions about the Fipronil affair, i.e. where could they be accused of?
- (2) While managing stakes, which identities are being built by the poultry farmers and civil society actors themselves and which identities are being ascribed to others?

(3) How could the dialogue between the stakeholders of the Fipronil affair be facilitated?

1.5 Thesis outline

This thesis has five chapters. In the first chapter, some background information regarding the Fipronil affair will be provided, as well as the problem statement, objective and research questions. Chapter two contains the theoretical framework. Topics that will be discussed are the deficit model and the dialogue, the role of experts in society, the basic elements of discursive psychology, objective and subjective assessments and how to manage stakes and construct identities in interaction. Furthermore, chapter 3 contains the methodology of the thesis, whereby chapter 4 contains the results of the thesis which include the four constructed identities of poultry farmers and civil society actors in the Fipronil affair found. And finally, chapter 5 presents the main conclusions and discussion of the thesis, as well as some recommendations for further research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following chapter describes the theoretical framework of the thesis. First, the role of experts and their corresponding expertise in society will be discussed. Secondly, the topic will be shifted towards a discursive perspective of expert and civil society interactions, and the basic elements of discursive psychology will be described. Moreover, the difference between objective and subjective knowledge claims will be explained. Finally, an approach for managing stake and constructing identities will be discussed.

2.1 From a deficit model towards dialogue

In the 1980s, the term 'deficit model' was coined by social scientists based on the assumptions that this model underlies much of science interactions. This model is not really a model, but a bias of scientists, and it was applied in the case of risk perception studies about certain technologies. Scientists thought that civil society would agree with certain technologies if they would understand the risks in the exact same way as official experts did (Wynne, 2006). So, social scientists argued that communication problems between experts and civil society occurred because of the 'deficit' of the society, namely the lacking scientific knowledge of the society (Myers, 2004). Thus, the deficit model claims that ignorance is the basis for civil society's negative attitudes towards science or technologies (Ahteensuu, 2012). As a result, scientists thought that civil society was not able to assess risks in a rational way and understand the experts' assessments in the same way as experts themselves did (Myers, 2004). Therefore, scientists thought that society could not reject science or technologies as they would be informed by scientists properly (Wynne, 2006).

The deficit model includes four assumptions, so society: (1) Is ignorant of science, (2) has a negative stance towards science, (3) ignorance is the basis of these negative attitudes and (4) the knowledge deficit could be solved by using a one-way communication process for transferring scientific facts from scientists towards society (Ahteensuu, 2012). The deficit model is seen as a bias of scientists and attempts have been made by experts, as well as by non-experts, to find another way to communicate with each other instead of 'just correcting' the deficiencies of society. For example, experts should initially look at their own actions, which could be used to build reliability themselves.

2.1.1 The importance of trust

Trust in expertise is seen as important for the relation between the advice giver (e.g. scientific experts) and advice receiver (e.g. civil society) (Myers, 2004; Whyte & Crease, 2010). 'Blindly' trusting experts or institutions is seen as a huge risk in society (Sherry, 2011). Partly, it depends on the

experts' credibility and trustworthiness if civil society will 'blindly' trust the expert. For civil society, the experts' credibility depends on several indicators which are used as the basis for trusting the experts, whereas trustworthiness has to deal with several indicators which are constituting to the reason why an expert should be trusted, such as their competence (Craig, 1990; Fricker, 1998). Yet, this way of building trust with non-experts should not be a goal for official experts. Social factors, such as racism or class position, also have an influence on the credibility of experts (Whyte & Crease, 2010). However, this thesis does not focus on external factors but on how people build credibility themselves as official experts as well as 'lay-experts', which will be discussed in paragraph 2.2.

Thus, society could distrust scientists as mentioned previously. Scientists thought that providing information regarding the motives and intentions of scientists would help society to understand and trust the scientists again. In achieving this, scientists provided information and explained things to society to show that they were open and transparent. However, Wynne (2006) suggests another way to communicate between experts and society instead of 'just correcting' the deficiencies of society. Wynne showed that experts and organizations should not look at the deficits of society, but reflect critically on their own performed actions to find out how to improve themselves and build reliability as an expert or organization.

To conclude, it appears that scientists have a bias about how society evaluates science, and how this ensures that science is not accepted by society. Another alternative approach could be suggested to improve the communication between experts and non-experts, which is called 'the dialogue'. This approach will be explained in the next subparagraph as this could play a very important role in the Fipronil affair, and therefore, the third sub question of the thesis is: *'How could the dialogue between the stakeholders of the Fipronil affair be facilitated?'*.

2.1.2 An alternative approach: the dialogue

An alternative approach to communicate between experts and non-experts could be suggested to restore society's trust in science, which is called 'the dialogue'. The assumption for the dialogue is mutual education from experts to society and conversely to regenerate society's trust in science. The dialogue differs from debates and discussions since it is a special form of interaction as nobody is trying to 'win' something. The dialogue has a completely different entry point compared to debates, as in debates there is only one right answer, whereas in dialogue it is thought that all participants have to bring something in that will be combined to come to a joint solution together (Aarts, 2015). Therefore, Isaacs (1999) summarized dialogue as 'the art of thinking together'.

For achieving a successful dialogue, participants need to respect each other's differences, need to be able to connect with others and need to be willing to adapt themselves. In a dialogue, participants need to: (1) Talk about their uncertainties and dilemmas, (2) make assumptions explicit, (3) listen to other participants without judging, (4) develop and introduce new meanings and (5) search for institutions which are needed to facilitate the whole process (Aarts, 2015; Bohm, 1990; Isaacs, 1999; ter Haar, 2014). Consequently, consensus overlapping will occur, which means that participants with different views will accept solutions for different purposes (Nussbaum, 2006).

In the Fipronil affair, the stakeholders do not perform a successful dialogue. The official experts, such as the government and the Authority, are only providing more information instead of performing a dialogue to find a solution to fight the consequences of the affair with the other stakeholders. As a result, the non-experts in the affair could present themselves as 'lay-experts' because they do not feel themselves being taken seriously by the official experts, which will be explained in the following paragraph.

2.2 Official experts versus lay-experts: a debatable issue in society

The role of experts and their corresponding expertise is increasingly questioned nowadays as it seems that the distribution between official experts and 'lay-experts' is not really clear. But how could this distribution fade over time? Concerns regarding the legitimacy of experts and the corresponding risks they manage and sometimes create, as well as the growing number of people that participate to active citizenship and public engagement, grows extensively (Kerr *et al.*, 2007). More knowledge is being shared by the general public in society, which gives rise to a higher number of 'lay-experts' (Wynne, 1996). These experts claim and share their knowledge just as official experts. However, knowledge derived from 'lay-experts' is not always based on scientific research or facts, although they present themselves as credible by displaying a certain 'expert' identity. An example of this type of expert can be seen in the study of Versteeg and te Molder (2016), whereby participants used the idiomatic expression 'Listen to your body' (LTYB) in online interactions about aspartame and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The expression is used in contrast to 'blindly' trusting science and LTYB is seen as the alternative and more rational option. Thus, people do not have to be a doctor or scientist to claim expertise for instance, but participants in group discussions can also claim expertise. These participants can offer others their expertise that could be suitable for the matters assessed at that moment based on their scientific background. Yet, the difference between participants that claim expertise and the official experts, such as doctors or scientists, can be found in the fact that professional identities are permanently and certified, while the identities

built upon by participants during interaction are temporary and multiple as they can take different identities during the interaction (Myers, 2004).

2.2.1 Expertise becomes contested

Myers (2004) noted that some people think that experts expect that their opinions or views will finish the matters assessed by society as they do not allow other participants to evaluate their claims. Besides this, Myers showed that these people also feel that experts do not give other participants the opportunity to talk or take their claims seriously, and that they think that experts serve their own matters or interests even when they are not (always) involved in practice itself. Consequently, people can become sceptical towards official experts as they think that these experts consider themselves 'superior' to other participants (Myers, 2004). It becomes increasingly important for people to position themselves as an expert to be taken seriously. Thus, it feels like society says 'I do not feel myself be taken seriously by experts', so in return 'I do not take experts seriously either'. As a result, people present themselves as experts to be taken seriously, which makes the distribution between official experts and 'lay-experts' less visible. In addition, te Molder (2012; 2018b) noted that another reason for citizens to become an expert themselves is that they do not always have confidence in scientific activity or think it is a duty to be educated, which is seen as a new standard in society, and lazy to just 'blindly' trust experts. Expertise becomes contested (Giddens, 1994), and for society it becomes more and more important to position themselves as experts and use their scientific background to provide information.

Policy experts could feel threatened in the recent Fipronil affair as expertise is already contested. In response to this, experts start providing even more information etc. instead of starting the conversation with civil society (Wynne, 1996). Therefore, this thesis focusses on real life interactions between policy experts, poultry farmers and civil society in the Fipronil affair. As mentioned previously, this minor thesis will make use of a discursive psychological perspective to analyse online interactions between the government, Authority, poultry farmers and civil society, which will be explained more elaborate in the following paragraph.

2.3 Towards a discursive perspective of expert and civil society interactions

This thesis will focus on online interactions between stakeholders of the Fipronil affair. The reason that is chosen for online interactions is that these make it possible to analyse a larger amount of comments as well as interactions within the time frame of the thesis compared to interviewing a few stakeholders in detail for example. Thus, using online interactions increases the sample size per

stakeholder and makes it possible to study real life interactions, which is more difficult when conducting an interview because usually one person is interviewed at a time. Therefore, analysing online interactions potentially results in a less-one sided and more complete picture compared to analysing a few detailed interviews.

The concept discourse analysis includes a lot of different approaches to language. The approaches all focus on analysis of text and talk, but their main goal is focussing on language in use (te Molder, 2009). Edwards (1997) and Potter (1996b) are the founders of discursive psychology. It is derived from discourse analysis and studies a wide range of psychological issues and the way how these are made relevant in everyday talk (te Molder, 2009). People communicate with each other, and through talking people get the opportunity to primarily understand others actions, such as complimenting or accusing (Potter, 2012). Discursive psychology is used to understand what people actually do in interaction by performing certain actions, and how this is understood/interpreted by the participant based on the actions they perform (Potter, 1996a; te Molder, 2015).

Discursive psychology focusses on naturally occurring interactions in everyday life (Potter, 2004). To analyse this, discursive psychologists use detailed transcripts of naturalistic audio and video recordings, as it focusses on 'naturally' occurring data in institutional settings. Examples of this are phone calls between peers or conversations during mealtimes (Potter, 2012; te Molder, 2009; 2015), which are produced independently without intervention of the researcher. In addition, written conversations such as naturally occurring interaction on online forums can be used by discursive psychologists to analyse everyday talk in institutional settings (Potter, 2004). Discursive psychology is a non-cognitive approach, and therefore, it does not produce statements about underlying attitudes or mental states of people (Potter, 1996a).

2.3.1 Basic elements of discursive psychology

Discourse is the starting point of discursive psychology. Discourse is seen as the primary arena for human action, understanding and the psychological relationship between people (intersubjectivity) (Potter, 2012). Potter (1996a) describes three basic elements, or entry points, of discursive psychology. These basic elements are described below.

- (1) *Action-orientated*: Discursive psychology assumes that people do things with language, so it is action-orientated. Therefore, it is orientated to action rather than cognition (Potter, 1996a). People perform constantly actions with discourse, such as complaining, complementing, countering blame or accusing other people (Potter, 2012; Sneijder & te Molder, 2004; te

Molder, 2008). For example, people could treat angry behaviour of another person as a request to leave the room or people describing their own behaviour to imply blame (te Molder, 2008).

- (2) *Situated*: Discursive psychology takes the context of an action into account, which can be divided into three senses. Firstly, the rhetorical organization of talk plays a role in discursive psychology. This element focusses on why a particular phrasing is used instead of an alternative or counter version, and what is achieved or resisted by using this particular phrasing. Thus, it focusses at what is being countered/not said, what could have been said (Potter, 1996a). Secondly, the sequential position plays a role in discursive psychology. By using the turn-by-turn basis during conversation, speakers show an understanding of the prior speakers' action (Sneijder & te Molder, 2004). This provides the opportunity for conversation partners and analysts alike, to check **how** the other person has understood the prior speaker's action (Schegloff, 1992). Finally, the institutional context plays a role, whereby speakers embody certain identities, such as the identity of a veterinarian. The corresponding actions related to this identity will be understood by other people (Potter, 2012).
- (3) *Constructed and constructive*: Discursive psychology assumes that language is not neutral, but constructed (Potter, 1996a). Descriptions people make are selective, as it is not possible to represent the world completely (Sneijder & te Molder, 2004). It is possible to choose different versions for making a description. The chosen version depends on what we want to accomplish with using this particular version, consciously or not. For rhetorical and interactional purposes, people combine particular words, accounts and stories. Therefore, discursive psychology is constructed. Moreover, discourse is also constructive, as it constructs versions as factual and external to the speaker, and therefore, it seems to 'build' reality (Potter, 2012; Sneijder & te Molder, 2004).

Thus, a discursive psychological perspective will be used to analyse online interactions of poultry farmers and civil society actors regarding the Fipronil affair. By using this approach, it is possible to find out what is at stake for the stakeholders and which identities are being build, undermined or ascribed to others by performing certain actions, which will be explained in the following paragraph.

2.4 Objective vs subjective knowledge claims

Evaluative statements are a common characteristic of interaction (Pomerantz, 1984). By making these statements, people show their knowledge about a topic, and also the entitlement to express their evaluation. Knowledge claims are not neutral, and can be used by the speaker to build up rights and responsibilities. Therefore, knowledge claims can also be used to construct people's identity in interaction (Wiggins & Potter, 2003).

Knowledge claims are distributed among two different types of claims, namely objective and subjective knowledge claims. Objective knowledge claims are stated as facts, and suggest describing a characteristic of a referent instead of the personal liking or disliking (Sneijder & te Molder, 2006). Thus, this claim will foreground the object (Wiggins, 2014; Wiggins & Potter, 2003). Subjective knowledge claims show a direct preference or dislike to a referent based on a personal experience (Sneijder & te Molder, 2006). This claim will foreground the subject rather than the object (Wiggins, 2014), and as a result the accountability is shifted towards the speaker (Wiggins & Potter, 2003). For instance, someone says 'This egg is tasty' or 'I like this egg'. The first statement is an objective evaluation, as it is described as a fact and foregrounds the object, whereas the second statement is a subjective evaluation as it is based on a personal experience and foregrounds the subject.

Thus, this shows that discourse is constructed and constructive as noted previously. Both type of knowledge claims can be used to construct the identities of the poultry farmers and civil society actors during online interactions regarding the Fipronil affair. However, knowledge claims can also contain hidden claims of accountability, which will be discussed more elaborately in the following subparagraph.

2.4.1 Footing

In discourse, speakers often use footing or accountability management. Footing is defined as in how far speakers construct themselves as accountable for their utterances. Speakers can distance themselves from their utterance, and prevent to take full responsibility for it. Therefore, speakers can shift footing when they want to achieve neutrality. So, if the speaker says something as a quote or more general information, the speaker does not have the full responsibility for his or her utterance (Potter, 1996b). For instance, there is a difference in the following two statements: 'It's three o'clock' or 'the clock says its three o'clock', as in the second statement the clock is held responsible for the utterance, whereas in the first statement the speaker can be hold responsible for the utterance.

2.5 Managing stakes and constructing identities in interaction

There are three major actions that people perform through language, namely (1) managing stake and interest, (2) establishing certain identities and (3) shifting responsibility/accountability in talk (te Molder, 2018a). In this thesis, the focus lies on managing stake and establishing certain identities by the stakeholders of the Fipronil affair. The research question of the thesis is as follows: *'Which identities are being built by poultry farmers and civil society actors in the Fipronil affair, and what*

purposes are consciously and unconsciously being served by these identities?'. This subparagraph will focus on managing stakes and establishing certain identities in interaction.

2.5.1 Stake management

Speakers have an interest or stake in something when the description's speaker has something to gain or lose. Thus, they are not disinterested and have a stake in a particular action which is related to the description. Sometimes also personal or financial considerations are important issues involved (Potter, 1996b). Stake management is used for dealing with the dilemma of stake. Anything a person or institution says or does could be discounted as a product of stake (te Molder, 2018a). The following extract refers back to a British political scandal. The expression 'well he would wouldn't he' refers to what was said in court in response to the denial of a member of aristocracy to sexual relationships between him and a woman named Rice-Davies. The example of the attribution of stake and interest is shown below.

Counsel: Are you aware that Lord Astor denies any impropriety in
 his relationship with you?
 (0.8)

Rice-Davies: Well he would wouldn't he

Jury, etc.: ((prolonged laughter))

(te Molder, 2018a)

By looking at what the counsel said, it is possible to see what is potentially at stake for Lord Astor. He can be accused of not wanting people to know that he had sex with Rice-Davies or other women. The delay of 0.8 seconds displays disagreeing of Rice-Davies with the counsel. Thereafter, Rice-Davies answers with 'Well he would wouldn't he'. In fact, this expression treats what was previously said as something that was expected. It predicts what someone with that background, interests or attitude would say, and it is displayed as shared knowledge: 'well he would wouldn't he' (Potter, 1996b). By saying this, Rice-Davies invokes the interest of Lord Astor and she builds credibility among the public. In this extract, the stake is explicitly formulated. However, this is not always the case. The following extract is taken from the study of Heritage and Sefi (1992), where a health visitor is visiting first-time parents who just had their first baby, and gives advice regarding feeding the baby. The study shows that giving advice to first-time parents is seen as a dilemma.

Health visitor: He is enjoying that, isn't he

Father: Yes, he certainly is

Mother: He's not hungry cause he's just had his bottle

(Heritage and Sefi, 1992)

In this extract, the health visitor says to the parents that the baby enjoys his bottle in an attempt to hide the advice given. When looking at the mother's response, she treats the health visitor's utterance as a blame about her not feeding the baby enough, as she is defending herself with responding that the baby just had his bottle. Therefore, it could be possible that the mother thinks she could be accused or blamed of being a bad mother, as the softened hidden advice of the health visitor may hear as a competence of bad motherhood. Thus, it is not always easy to recognize what is exactly at stake, as also hidden moralities play a role.

2.5.1.1 *Stake inoculation*

Stake inoculation is a participants' approach for managing stake (Potter, 1996b). This approach uses a counter-explanation to head off the damaging attribution of stake or interest someone has or might be accused of (te Molder, 2018a). This approach builds credibility for the speaker. The following extract is an example of stake inoculation. The extract is taken from the study of Smith (1978) and is called 'K is mentally ill'. The whole fragment of the study starts with describing the friendship between Angela and 'K', as they became really good friends about four years ago. The fragment continues with the following extract below. The details of the study are not relevant for this part (for full details see: Smith, 1978).

'K is mentally ill'

Angela: My recognition that there might be something wrong was very gradual, and I was actually the last of her close friends who was openly willing to admit that she was becoming mentally ill.

(Smith, 1978: 28)

In this extract, Angela uses stake inoculation. First, Angela uses the description 'mentally ill' for her friend K, which is negatively formulated. This description can be treated as Angela disliking K or being jealous of her. However, Angela performs a counter-description in the beginning of the extract to counter this. She does this by referring that she was 'the last of her close friends' that would admit that K was becoming mentally ill. As Angela categorized K as her friend, this evokes positive feelings and can be treated as companionship and loyalty between Angela and K. Therefore, the category 'friend' is not used to criticize the other person. Still, Angela describes K's problem reluctantly so as to display that she did not want this to happen for her friend (Potter, 1996b).

2.5.2 Constructing identities

Identity is treated as non-cognitive entity, which reflect people's personality, social category or even personal choices. In everyday life, people continuously construct, attribute and refute certain identities their selves for different reasons in a wide range of different contexts. Therefore, people can take different identities in different contexts, which can also come into conflict with each other (Sneijder, 2006). Sneijder and te Molder (2009) noted that people establish certain identities themselves determined by their lifestyle and actual practices, and not by other factors such as demographic characteristics. Especially in food practices, identities are seen as predictors of food consumption (Sparks & Shepherd, 1992). For instance, the study of Sneijder and te Molder (2009) investigates the relationship between identity and food choice in an online forum about veganism. The results showed that the participants resisted the assumption that being a vegan is complicated. Forum participants used different approaches to resist this assumption, such as informing people about their 'ordinary' vegan meals. They displayed vegan meals as easy to prepare, and presented methods to prevent vitamin deficiency as daily routine. By doing this, the participants constructed themselves as the category 'ordinary people'.

2.5.2.1 *Category entitlement*

Identities are also associated with particular rights or entitlements that makes it possible to claim knowledge or experience (Sneijder & te Molder, 2009). For instance, a doctor is entitled to make a diagnosis about a patients' disease. This is also known as category entitlement, whereby particular categories of people are treated as knowledgeable in specific situations. People need to work on this before achieving being treated as a certain membership category (Potter, 1996a). However, one person can be ascribed to a wide range of membership categories by different people in different contexts, such as a 'father', a 'doctor' or a 'friend'. Each category comprises its own category-bound activities (Sneijder, 2006; Sneijder & te Molder, 2009). The following extract is an example of using a category to account tacitly for a particular action. The extract is taken from Whitehead and Lerner (2009), where a male passenger requests another unknown passenger to trade seats with his wife in an airplane.

Passenger A: I wonder if you would mind trading seats with my wife?

Passenger B: Sure

Passenger A: Thank you.

(Whitehead & Lerner, 2009: 615)

In the extract, passenger A refers to another (third) person with the membership categorization 'my

wife'. This is an account for how the other person is related to passenger A, and how this relationship or third person can be seen by passenger B. The membership categorization 'my wife' is used as a tool for social action, namely trading seats with his wife, as (the categories) husband and wife belong together.

To summarize, this chapter started with the deficit model, the dialogue and the role of experts and expertise in society nowadays, which have become contested matters nowadays. Secondly, the concept of discursive psychology was explained, as well as the three corresponding basic elements, as discourse is action-orientated, situated, constructed and constructive. Thereafter, it describes how objective and subjective knowledge claims can be used to build up rights and responsibilities. Finally, a participants' approach for managing stake was explained, namely stake inoculation, as well as how to establish certain identities in interaction. This theoretical framework will be used in order to help answering the research question as mentioned previously:

'Which identities are being built by poultry farmers and civil society actors in the Fipronil affair, and what purposes are consciously and unconsciously being served by these identities?'

The research question will be answered with the help of the following sub-questions:

- (1) What is at stake for the poultry farmers and civil society actors during online interactions about the Fipronil affair, i.e. where could they be accused of?
- (2) While managing stakes, which identities are being built by the poultry farmers and civil society actors themselves and which identities are being ascribed to others?
- (3) How could the dialogue between the stakeholders of the Fipronil affair be facilitated?

3. METHODS

In the following chapter, the methods of the thesis will be described. Firstly, the data sources from the thesis will be described, which are online discussions on the forums *Boerenbusiness*, *GeenStijl*, *Pluimveeweb* and *Radar* that will be used for the corpus of the data. Thereafter, the data selection from this corpus will be explained. Finally, the two analytical principles of discourse – sequential and rhetorical analysis – will be explained in more detail.

3.1 Data sources

This thesis has employed online interactions for analysis. Online interactions can be seen as naturally occurring data, which are produced independently without the intervention of the researcher (Potter, 2004).

Discursive psychology is mainly applied to face-to-face interaction. Therefore, differences between face-to-face interaction and online interactions need to be taken into account while approaching the data. First of all, online forum interactions are not produced in real time as they contain written comments on forums. In contrast to face-to-face interactions, the production of an answer to a comment is not observable and can be written at any time on forums. Therefore, it is hard to compare the rhythm of turn-taking in online interactions with that of face-to-face interaction (Schönfeldt & Golato, 2003). In addition, other factors such as silence or interruption are not visible in online interactions. However, the functional properties of language as well as the two principles, rhetorical and sequential analysis, can be used to analyse online interactions (Sneijder & te Molder, 2005).

The online interactions for this thesis are taken from four online forums about the Fipronil affair, which included two forums for online interactions between poultry farmers and two forums for online interactions between civil society actors (citizens). For poultry farmers, online interactions on the forums of *Boerenbusiness* and *Pluimveeweb* have been used, whereas for civil society actors, online interactions on the forums of *Radar* and *GeenStijl* were drawn upon. Not many online interactions concerning the Fipronil affair were available and public. However, all used forums were public.

3.1.1 Boerenbusiness forum

The first forum is called *Boerenbusiness* and is a website especially constructed to inform farmers.

The website contains news articles about all kinds of farming topics such as arable farming, animal feed and milk production. Visitors have the opportunity to place a comment on news articles, and therefore, visitors can interact with each other. Thus, mainly farmers in general are interacting with each other about the Fipronil affair on the website.

3.1.2 Pluimveeweb forum

The second forum is called *Pluimveeweb*, which is especially constructed to inform poultry farmers. The website contains news articles to keep poultry farmers up-to-date of what is going on in the poultry sector. It contains news articles about broilers, laying hens, symposia and theme evenings that poultry farmers could attend. There are a lot of articles about the Fipronil affair, and poultry farmers interact with each other beneath these articles in the comment section. Thus, mainly poultry farmers are interacting with each other about the Fipronil affair on the website.

3.1.3 Radar forum

The third forum is *Radar*, which is a platform that takes a critical look on consumer business and produces news articles to open up discussions about consumer problems. It contains news articles about a big range of topics, such as striking in regional transport, phishing emails and smoking bans. Visitors have the opportunity to interact with each other on the corresponding news article in the comment section beneath the article. *Radar* also has the television program AVOTROS at NPO 1 and a radio program at NPO Radio 1. Thus, mainly consumers in general are interacting with each other about the Fipronil affair on the website.

3.1.4 GeenStijl forum

The last forum is *GeenStijl*, which is a little bit a 'light-hearted', less serious website compared to the other three. The authors of the website write the following about it: "At *GeenStijl*, news facts, shameful revelations and journalistic research are alternated with light-hearted subjects and pleasantly disturbed nonsense" (*GeenStijl*, 2018). It contains news articles about a wide range of topics, such as the TT Assen, political parties and the MH17. This website is mainly used to interact with each other about particular topics, whereas the *Radar* forum is mainly used to inform consumer about particular topics by publishing news articles. *GeenStijl* is used more as a forum and visitors use the comment section beneath the article to interact with each other about the topic. Thus, mainly civil society actors are interacting with each other about the Fipronil affair on the website.

3.2 Data selection

The corpus needed to be of a reasonable size to apply discursive psychology. Not a lot of forums were found where stakeholders interacted about the Fipronil affair. However, several steps have

been taken in order to select the data for analysis. First of all, data sources were only selected if they were public. Secondly, data sources were selected on their relevance to the subject of the thesis, namely online interactions of stakeholders on the role of the government or the Authority in the Fipronil affair. Therefore, data sources were selected on the search terms *'fipronil'*, *'NVWA'*, *'Nederlandse Voedsel- en Warenautoriteit'*, *'overheid'*, *'Ministerie van Economische Zaken'*, *'consument'*, *'burger'* and/or *'pluimveehouders'* to search for threads. If consumers do not know that the Authority is responsible for controlling the fipronil status, they will point out to comparable terms such as *'controlerende organisatie'* or *'controleurs'*, and these terms were also selected in searching for threads. Furthermore, data sources were only selected if there was a discussion going on, containing two reactions of stakeholders or more. As the Fipronil affair occurred recently, there was no selection made for excluding articles with their corresponding comments if they would be too old for the adopted time frame (for example - only using comments that are less than four years old). Based on this, the corpus used for analysis will be elaborated on in the following subparagraph.

3.2.1 Corpus used for analysis

The data selection for poultry farmers resulted in a corpus of two threads from the *Pluimveeweb* forum, with 48 comments in total, and one thread from the *Boerenbusiness* forum, with 11 comments in total. For civil society actors, the data selection resulted in three threads from the *Radar* forum, with 26 comments in total, and two threads from the *GeenStijl* forum, with 292 comments in total. As there were not many data sources available that complied with the requirements in paragraph 3.2, the selection for the corpus was easy to make. The data sources which have been used for analysis are displayed in appendix 1.

3.3 Data analysis

The analysis of the data consisted of two different phases. First of all, particular patterns of building identities by poultry farmers and civil society actors in the Fipronil affair were discovered. This was done in order to answer the research question: *'Which identities are being built by poultry farmers and civil society actors in the Fipronil affair, and what purposes are consciously and unconsciously being served by these identities?'*. The data have been scanned for recurring situations in which something apparently was at stake for the participants. Managing these stakes resulted in poultry farmers and civil society actors to build certain identities in interaction. As a result, four patterns were found, which include two patterns for the poultry farmers, and two patterns for the civil society actors. The patterns found were as follows:

- (1) 'How could we have known': poultry farmers present themselves as innocent in response to accusations of naivety.

- (2) 'We are practical': poultry farmers present themselves as practical in response to the theoretical Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority.
- (3) 'We are down-to-earth': civil society actors present themselves as down-to-earth people in response to the panicky government regarding eating contaminated eggs with fipronil.
- (4) 'We are (rightfully) distrustful': civil society actors present themselves as (rightfully) distrustful regarding the intentions of the government in response to their lax and negligent performance in the Fipronil affair.

Table 1 provides an overview with the amount of comments per pattern, which are classified per website. Also, the total amounts of comments per pattern are displayed. The data sources which has been used are displayed in appendix 1.

Table 1. Amount of comments per pattern classified per website, including the total amount of comments per pattern.

	Pattern 1	Pattern 2	Pattern 3	Pattern 4
ANP, foodwatch, & the Telegraaf. (2017). NVWA adviseert voorlopig geen eieren te eten.	-	-	3	0
ANP. (2017). Tweede Kamer kritisch over functioneren NVWA.	-	-	0	3
ANP. (2018). 'NVWA kon Fipronil-crisis niet aan'.	-	-	0	2
Boerenbusiness. (2017). NVWA wist al maanden van fipronil in stal.	5	0	-	-
Feynman. (2017). Feynman en/of Feiten – NVWA komt uit een ei.	-	-	7	11
Paternotte, B. (2017). Bassiehof - Egg dripping from the ceiling: Fipronil, ChickFriend en de NVWA.	-	-	10	6
Schotman, T. (2017). NVWA wist in november al van fipronil.	7	2	-	-
Schotman, T., & the Volkskrant. (2017). Topman NVWA verbaast over naïviteit van pluimveehouders.	23	1	-	-
Total amount of comments per pattern	35	3	20	22

Per pattern, a few examples were used to illustrate that pattern. The names of the participants were changed so that they remain anonymous. Two analytical principles – sequential and rhetorical analysis – had been used to analyse the data and answer the research questions.

3.3.1 Sequential analysis

Sequential analysis will be used to show how utterances of a speaker are taken up by other participants. As conversations are organised on a turn-by-turn basis, it is possible to analyse the actions performed during conversation. An action of a speaker leads to next utterances, which can be used to see how an action is being understood and interpreted by the recipient in conversation. By looking at this uptake, the researcher avoids making his own interpretation of the first utterance. This is also known as the ‘participants’ proof procedure’ (Edwards, 1997; te Molder, 2018a; van Berkel, 2016).

The following extract is taken from the study of Heritage and Sefi (1992) to show how the participants’ proof procedure works. A health visitor is visiting first-time parents who just had their first baby, and gives advice regarding feeding the baby. The study shows that giving advice to first-time parents is seen as a dilemma.

Health visitor: He’s enjoying that isn’t he
Father: Yes, he certainly is
Mother: He’s not hungry ‘cuz he’s just had his bottle
(Heritage & Sefi, 1992)

In the extract, the health visitor refers to the baby who is drinking milk out of a bottle. The meaning of the health visitor’s utterance can be understood when looking at the uptake of the father and mother. The father responds with ‘Yes, he certainly is’ (line 2), which shows that he agrees with the health visitor’s utterance. However, when looking at the uptake of the mother, she responds ‘He’s not hungry ‘cuz he’s just had his bottle’ (line 3). By looking at this, it can be noticed that the mother treats the utterance of the health visitor as an accusation that the baby might be hungry. As a result, she does not agree with the health visitor and provides an account why the baby could not be hungry. The mother seems to treat the health visitor’s utterance as an accusation as she feels being evaluated and accused of being a bad mother as she did not feed her baby enough (Heritage & Sefi, 1992).

3.3.2 Rhetorical analysis

People design utterances to resist (potential) counter versions and alternatives of what is being said. Therefore, rhetorical analysis will be used to analyse why a speaker uses a particular phrasing at a particular moment, and what he or she achieves by this, instead of when using another phrasing (Potter, 1996a; te Molder, 2018a; van Berkel, 2016). By looking at this, the researcher can make sense of what is being said by a speaker and which corresponding action is performed with this particular utterance.

The following extract is an example to show how the rhetorical analysis operates. The extract is about a rape trial in court, where the witness is being questioned.

Counsel: It's where girls and fellas meet isn't it?

Witness: People go there

(Drew, 1992)

In the extract, the counsel starts to ask a question about the club where the witness and the victim have met. The formulation of the question is very relevant for the counsel, because it provides them a clearer picture of how the evening has looked like. By asking 'It's where girls and fellas meet isn't it?' (line 1) the counsel tries to obtain more information regarding that particular evening in the club. Instead of using the particular terms 'girls and fellas' he could also have used alternatives and said 'men and women' or 'visitors'. Thus, the counsel tries to obtain a clearer picture of the evening and the club by using this particular terms. In doing so, the counsel invokes the thought that girls go to the club to meet boys. However, the witness responds with mentioning 'people' (line 2) instead of confirming the terms uses in the counsel's question. By saying this, the witness provides a more neutral description of the people that visit the club, thereby resisting the sexual motive the counsel was suggesting, and avoiding being co-implicated in the responsibility for the rape (Drew, 1992; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008).

4. RESULTS

This chapter includes the main results of the thesis. Online interactions between participants on forums of *Boerenbusiness*, *Pluimveeweb*, *Radar* and *GeenStijl* will be analysed. The main research question is used to guide the analysis: ‘Which identities are being built by poultry farmers and civil society actors in the Fipronil affair, and what purposes are consciously and unconsciously being served by these identities?’.

During interaction, participants perform actions. Sequential and rhetorical analysis is used to analyse these actions. By analysing this, it is possible to find out what is at stake for the participants in the Fipronil affair, and which identity they build for themselves and ascribe to others.

For the poultry farmers, two significant patterns regarding constructing identities are found on the forums of *Boerenbusiness* and *Pluimveeweb*:

- (1) ‘How could we have known’: poultry farmers present themselves as innocent in response to accusations of naivety.
- (2) ‘We are practical’: poultry farmers present themselves as practical in response to the theoretical Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority.

For civil society actors, two significant patterns regarding constructing identities are found on the forums of *Radar* and *GeenStijl*:

- (3) ‘We are down-to-earth’: civil society actors present themselves as down-to-earth people in response to the panicky government regarding eating contaminated eggs with fipronil.
- (4) ‘We are (rightfully) distrustful’: civil society actors present themselves as (rightfully) distrustful regarding the intentions of the government in response to their lax and negligent performance in the Fipronil affair.

To explain the patterns, first, a short introduction of the article is given where the participants are responding on. This will be put into boxes, as well as the hyperlink to the article itself. For every pattern, a few examples will be displayed and analysed to find out what is at stake and which identities are being build, undermined or ascribed to others. If participants are interacting with each other, the first statement that started the interaction will also be displayed and analysed. Some lines of the extracts will be omitted if these are not relevant for the analysis. The entire extracts can be found in appendix 2.

4.1 Poultry farmers

Poultry farmers could be accused of 'blindly' trusting ChickFriend's pesticides with fipronil, so they can be seen as 'naive' by the other stakeholders in the Fipronil affair. It can be noticed that the Fipronil affair sits very deeply for the affected poultry farmers. It is accompanied with a lot of emotions as the poultry farmers must follow strict measurements on the farms and did not have an income for a long period as their eggs could not be sold. Poultry farmers are accusing the Authority of acting negligent, as they think they should have started an investigation immediately at the moment they received the first signal of the use of fipronil by ChickFriend in November 2016. For the poultry farmers, a lot of problems could be prevented if the Authority started the investigation back then. For this reason, poultry farmers accuse the Authority of being too theoretical. Thus, two significant patterns are found for the poultry farmers on the forums of *Boerenbusiness* and *Pluimveeweb*, namely 'How could we have known' and 'We are practical'.

In the following subparagraphs, both patterns will be discussed separately, including a few examples.

4.1.1 'How could we have known'

The first pattern, or identity construction, 'How could we have known' occurred at least 35 times on the forums of *Boerenbusiness* and *Pluimveeweb*.

The first pattern occurred in reaction to the article presented in box 1. From this article, two extracts are taken for analysis. The participants react on the article itself, and not on each other.

Box 1. Rob van Lint, the CEO of the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority, is surprised about the naivety of poultry farmers. He says that poultry farmers are aware of the fact that red lice is very hard to combat in poultry farms, and still the farmers believed in the pesticide that ChickFriend offered. Therefore, poultry farmers could have known that something wasn't right according to the CEO (Schotman & the Volkskrant, 2017).

Link: [Pluimveeweb forum – Thread: Topman NVWA verbaast over naïviteit van pluimveehouders](#)

In the first extract, John is reacting on the part of the article where the CEO says that it all starts with the poultry farmers taking their own responsibilities for their own farm, and that the Authority cannot fully guarantee hundred percent food safety. Thereafter, the CEO says that poultry farmers must be fully aware of the fact that it is their job to not endanger food safety.

Extract 1: John

1 Wij mogen de volksgezondheid niet in gevaar brengen, ik wist niet dat
2 er fipronil gebruikt werd door chickfriend. De NVWA wist dit echter
3 wel!!! Wie heeft nu de volksgezondheid in gevaar gebracht???

In reaction to the article, John displays the identity construction 'How could we have known' to prove his innocence. In achieving this, first, John tries to defend himself as a poultry farmer by saying that he did not know that fipronil was used by ChickFriend to resist the potential accusation that he is a naive poultry farmer (line 1-2). He takes full responsibility for his utterance as he produces subjective restrictions since he is talking in the 'I' form (line 1) (Potter, 1996b; Sneijder & te Molder, 2006). Thereafter, John continues 'The NVWA, however, did know this!!!' (line 2-3), which is stated as a fact to convince the other participants on the forum of his statement. He uses the words 'endanger public health' in line 1, which is negatively formulated, to make the statement and accusation he made in line 2 and 3 more serious. The exclamation marks show that it sits very deeply for him and that he wants to make a clear statement about the Authority. Note how John closes the extract with a question (line 3) to give the reader the chance to provide an answer which is leading into the direction he wants by providing the statements in line 1 and 2, namely accusing the Authority instead of the poultry farmers themselves. The question marks seem to be used to force other participants to answer the question on the forum.

Extract 2 is a reply to the word 'naivety', which the CEO used to describe the poultry farmers within the article.

Extract 2: Eva

1 Naïviteit? De pluimvee houder had het kunnen weten. NVWA wist het.
2 Met alle kunde aan boord. Wie is naïef!!

Eva uses almost the same accounts as John and builds the same identity 'How could we have known' as she could be accused of being a naive poultry farmer. In the extract, Eva starts with repeating the word 'Naivety' which the CEO used to accuse the poultry farmers (line 1). Thereafter, she immediately starts to defend the poultry farmers and accuses the Authority. Note how she says 'The poultry holder could have known it' (line 1) instead of saying that they did not know of the use of fipronil just like John in extract 1. This weakens her defending position regarding the poultry farmers,

as it is not clear whether poultry farmers did know of the use of fipronil or not. Still, she provides a statement regarding the fact that the Authority knew of the use of fipronil in line 1 and 2. Thus, stake inoculation is used as she provides a counter-explanation to head off the damaging attribution of stake she has or might be accused of (Potter, 1996b) by saying that poultry farmers could have known it and the Authority just knew it. Thereafter, she makes the statement ‘Who is naive!!’ in line 2, which is also used by John in a slightly different way. By saying this and using exclamation marks, she tries to put emphasis on the Authority being naive themselves.

The first pattern also occurred in reaction to the article presented in box 2. From this article, three extracts are taken for analysis. The first participant reacts on the article itself, whereas the second and third participant react on the first participant.

Box 2. Hennie de Haan, chairman of the Dutch Trade Union of Poultry Farmers (NVP), reacts on the fact that the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority already knew of the unauthorized use of fipronil in poultry farms (Boerenbusiness, 2017).

Link: [Boerenbusiness forum – Thread: NVWA wist al maanden van fipronil in stal](#)

In the following extract, participant “Common sense” (Gezond verstand) is reluctant to accept the innocent role of the poultry farmers in the Fipronil affair and wonders if they were really not aware of the use of fipronil on their farms.

Extract 3: Common sense

1 hebben de kippenboeren echt niet geweten dat chickfreund fipronil
2 gebruikte ? als alle haargroeimiddelen niet goed werken , en er komt
3 dan iemand met een groeimiddel wat wel super werkt , zou ik willen
4 weten wat er in zit !!! ??? ,

Common sense starts by asking the other participants if the farmers were really not aware of the fact that fipronil has been used by ChickFriend within their products (line 1). In line 2 to 4, he provides a rhetorical question in a completely different context to make the other participants alert of what actually happened in the affair. By asking this, he tries to provoke a reaction by other participants. His question is negatively formulated, and it looks like he is blaming poultry farmers of being naive and stupid for using ChickFriend’s pesticide as they were not suspicious regarding the product while all other products for combatting red lice did not work very well. By providing the hair growth

remedy example, he underscores that he himself would be suspicious regarding such a similar thing and would not be so naive as the farmers were.

In extract 4, Chris completely disagrees with Common sense.

Extract 4: Chris (reaction Common sense)

1 Doe je dat met alle zgn groeibevorderaars die in de akkerbouw gepushd
2 worden ook? man schei toch uit. Er zijn zelfs getroffen bedrijven die
3 bij hun certificeringsinstantie navraag naar het Barneveldsebedrijf
4 hebben gedaan of het wel okay was. En zij kregen daar bevestigd dat
5 het een prima bedrijf met dito methode was. Nou mag jij met je
6 gezond? verstand!

Chris reacts to Common sense with providing a counter-question regarding arable farming (line 1). He asks if Common sense would use or be reluctant regarding growth promoters in arable farming, something similar as the use of fipronil for poultry farmers, which also increases success rates. By asking this, Chris assumes that Common sense is an arable farmer. He immediately answers his own question by suggesting that it is not the farmer who is naive but Common Sense, who expects that farmers would be hesitant towards growth promoters that could increase their success rate in arable farming, and as a result, their business turnover. In line 2 to 4, he defends poultry farmers by saying that they actually checked with their certification Authority if the business of ChickFriend was okay and this was confirmed. Note how Chris tries to show that there are also not-naive poultry farmers that do not 'blindly' trust organizations. By providing these accounts, he constructs the identity 'How could we have known' as he could be accused of being a gullible poultry farmer. However, he uses footing because he does not take full accountability for his utterance when talking about 'affected companies' that checked ChickFriend's company with their certification Authority. So, he provides the information as more general information to achieve neutrality (Potter, 1996b). In line 5, he challenges Common sense to respond to his reaction by saying 'Now you can go with your common? sense!' to show that he does not think that Common sense is smart enough to name himself like that.

In extract 5, Farmer's son also disagrees with Common sense.

Extract 5: Farmer's son (reaction Common sense)

1 gezond verstand, als ik een product maak zou ik daar de samenstelling
2 van prijs geven als jij het ook zou kunnen maken, toch nooit want dat
3 is mijn handel jij weet toch ook niet hoe de samenstelling van
4 benzine is en hoe je het kan maken, het enige is dat je het niet in
5 de dieseltank moet gooien.
(3 lines omitted)

Farmer's son builds the identity 'How could we have known' in response to accusations of naivety. He says that if he would make a product, he would not give the composition of it to someone else as they then could also produce it (line 1-3). That would be naive! For this reason, he would not show the recipe of his own product to other people or companies, just as ChickFriend did not do with their pesticide containing fipronil. By using this example, it seems very logical that poultry farmers did not receive further information about the product offered by ChickFriend if they asked questions about the product to them. Here, Chris displays himself as a not-naive poultry farmer as he could simply not know. So, poultry farmers knew that ChickFriend would not just show or provide information about the composition of their successful product, as other organizations could steal their recipe and also produce and sell it. Therefore, it does not seem strange that poultry farmers were not sceptical against the fact that ChickFriend would not provide any further information about their product.

The previous examples showed how participants built the identity of 'How could we have known' to prove their innocence in response to accusations of naivety. While doing so, poultry farmers accuse the Authority of knowing that ChickFriend used fipronil and that they did not know themselves. Stake inoculation is used as a poultry farmer said that poultry farmers could perhaps have known that fipronil was used by ChickFriend, but that the Authority knew it for sure. Furthermore, footing and 'I' restrictions are used to take full accountability for an utterance or not.

4.1.2 'We are practical'

The second identity construction, 'We are practical', occurred at least 3 times on the forums of *Boerenbusiness* and *Pluimveeweb*.

The second pattern occurred in reaction to the article presented in box 3. From this article, one extract is taken for analysis.

Box 3. Since November 2016, it seems that the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority was already informed about the use of fipronil by ChickFriend. However, the authority did not consider it necessary to intervene at that time. They eventually intervened at ChickFriend on July 7 2017 after a second tip they had received on June 20th 2017 (Schotman, 2017).

Link: [Pluimveeweb forum – Thread: NVWA wist in november al van fipronil](#)

In the following extract, Kees is reacting on the article presented in box 3. He is a poultry farmer and wants to show that there is a difference in the way how poultry farmers and the Authority are being treated if they make a huge mistake, such as in the Fipronil affair.

Extract 6: Kees

1 Als ik een fout maak in mn bedrijf word ik er op afgerekend, als ik
2 een vinkje vergeet te zetten op een opgave, word ik er op afgerekend,
3 als ik een brief kwijt raak van de belastingdienst word ik er op
4 afgerekend. Als een ander een fout maakt, moet ik het meestal zelf
5 oplossen, zo werkt dat als je boer bent. Als de NVWA zulke grove
6 nalatigheid vertoond, moeten zij daar toch ook op afgerekend kunnen
7 worden? Waarschijnlijk niet, want ze hakken met een botte bijl,
8 gaan na een werkdag gewoon naar huis, het weekend is heilig,
9 maandag ben je pas weer aan de beurt. Het is alsof de brandweer bij
10 het blussen om 17.00 uur zegt:, tot morgen, onze blustijd zit er op.
11 Hier kan je alleen maar erg verdrietig om worden.

In the extract, Kees constructs the identity of being a practical, hardworking person, in contrast to the nine-to-five mentality of the Authority. In achieving this, he uses examples to show the difference between 24/7 hardworking poultry farmers and the theoretical employees of the Authority. Kees starts the extract with giving examples of mistakes he could make in his farm and where he needs to pay for (line 1-4). He continues with 'If another person makes a mistake, I usually have to solve it myself, that's how it works if you're a farmer' (line 4-5) to show the hard reality of being a hardworking farmer. He produces subjective restrictions as he is talking in the 'I' form and shifts the full accountability to himself (Sneijder & te Molder, 2006). This shows his personal involvement in the affair as a poultry farmer. From line 5, he shifts the attention to the Authority and starts to compare the theoretical work the Authority does with what he said previously about the hardworking poultry

farmers. He says 'because they chop with a blunt axe, just go home after a working day, the weekend is sacred, Monday is your turn again' (line 7-9) to put emphasis on the difference in working activities and the nine to five mentality that employees of the Authority have from Monday till Friday. In contrast to this, he tries to show that poultry farmers have a 24/7 job and work hard to maintain their farm every minute of the day, also in the weekend. Thereafter, Kees continues with 'It is as if the fire brigade while extinguishing fires at 5 pm says: see you tomorrow, our extinguishing time is over' (line 9-10). By saying this, he tries to show that the Authority is too theoretical and not from practice like the firefighters, poultry farmers and he himself are (Myers, 2004). By providing all these examples, Kees accuses the Authority of being too theoretical compared to the farmers which are standing with their 'boots in the mud'. Kees closes with 'You can only be very sad about this' (line 11), emphasizing that the Authority has no clue about how big the impact for the poultry farmers really is, whereas their whole income and the future of their farm depends on it.

The previous example shows how a poultry farmer builds the identity of 'We are practical' in response to the theoretical Authority. In doing so, the poultry farmers compare the working activities of the Authority with their own so as to show the huge differences.

4.2 Civil society actors

The Authority received the first fipronil signals in November 2016. In January 2017, the Authority lowered the fipronil standard, and at the end of July 2017, the government reported the Fipronil affair to the public and reacted seemingly panicky regarding eating contaminated eggs. In response to this, civil society actors display a down-to-earth identity, as in contrast to the panicky government and display distrust towards the intentions of the government. Thus, two significant patterns are found for civil society actors on the forums of *Radar* and *GeenStijl*, namely 'We are down-to-earth' and 'We are (rightfully) distrustful'.

In the following subparagraphs, both patterns will be discussed separately, including a few examples.

4.2.1 'We are down-to-earth'

The third identity construction, 'We are down-to-earth', occurred at least 20 times on the forums of *Radar* and *GeenStijl*.

The third pattern occurred in reaction to the article presented in box 4. From this article, two extracts are taken for analysis. The two participants react on the content of the article itself.

Box 4. The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority advises consumers to be cautious with eating eggs as it is not clear which eggs are completely free of fipronil yet (ANP, foodwatch, & the Telegraaf, 2017).

Link: [Radar forum – Thread: NVWA adviseert voorlopig geen eieren te eten](#)

In the following extract, Theo is making some calculations regarding the amount of fipronil people may receive before health risks occur. He uses information provided by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to make the calculation.

Extract 7: Theo

(7 lines omitted)
1 Oftewel: 100 kg lichaamsgewicht= 0,02 fipronil inname oftewel:
2 bij een ei met 0,021 mg/kg (en een ei van M (middel) 53-63 gram)
3 dus: 1 kg eieren opeten. DAGELIJKS. Bij...58 g per ei dus.. zo'n 17
4 eieren... PER DAG .
(11 lines omitted)

In the extract, Theo displays the identity 'We are down-to-earth' as he shows why the amount of fipronil in eggs is unlikely to affect public health. By making exact calculations, he shows that there is a lot of fuss being made of it by the government as it is only dangerous if a person eats about 17 eggs a day (line 1-3). By saying this, he uses stake inoculation as he uses a counter-explanation to head off the damaging attribution of stake he might be accused of (Potter, 1996b). Thus, he actually says that eating contaminated eggs is dangerous, but only if you eat 17 eggs a day. He emphasizes the word 'DAILY' by writing it in capital letters (line 3), which suggests the high improbability of people eating more than 17 eggs per day. Thus, Theo tries to show there is no reason for panic regarding eating contaminated eggs. Theo uses information to make his calculations and shows the identity of a well-informed, rationally acting citizen.

In extract 8, Dani underscores the fact that people have already been eating contaminated eggs for probably more than one year and are still alive.

Extract 8: Dani

1 Nu als we al ongeveer 1 jaar besmette eieren eten

2 waarom zou ik stoppen. Wij eten in ons gezin elke week 2 a 4 eieren
3 per week en dat blijven gewoon doen. Allemaal ophef om niets
 (3 lines omitted)

Dani also constructs the identity 'We are down-to-earth' as he shows that there is no reason for panic regarding eating contaminated eggs with fipronil. He starts the extract with a rhetorical question: 'Now if we have been eating contaminated eggs for about 1 year why would I stop' (line 1-2). He continues by telling how many eggs his family is eating weekly and they will not stop doing this. By saying this, he shows that his family has also eaten contaminated eggs and are also still alive. It can be assumed that Dani does not want to risk the health of his family, so if contaminated eggs could be dangerous he would not let them eat the eggs. Note that Dani uses subjective restrictions by using the 'I' and 'we' form, which keeps it very personal (Sneijder & te Molder, 2006). In line 3, he says that there is a lot of fuss being made about fipronil for nothing, so here he probably refers to the panicky government. This again displays his down-to-earth identity as he mentions again that there is no reason for panic regarding eating eggs.

The third pattern also occurred in reaction to the article presented in box 5. From this article, three extracts are taken for analysis. The three participants react on the content of the article itself.

Box 5. The article provides information about what happened regarding the Fipronil affair. The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority and the government are accused of acting negligently as they did not inform consumers about the contaminated eggs when they received the first signal in November 2016. However, they also did not investigate the signal by then and started to take samples from the eggs in Dutch poultry farms on 19 July 2017 (Paternotte, 2017).

Link: [GeenStijl forum - Thread: Bassiehof - Egg dripping from the ceiling: Fipronil, ChickFriend en de NVWA](#)

In the following extract, Rob shows that he is not reluctant to eat contaminated eggs.

Extract 9: Rob

1 Je moet wel een onmeunige hoop eieren vreten wil je er
2 ziek van worden. Nogal een kostbare storm in een glas water.
3 Ik eet morgen gewoon lekker een uitsmijtertje.

In the extract, Rob displays the identity 'We are down-to-earth' as he says that you can only get sick

if you eat a lot of contaminated eggs (line 1). By saying this, he uses stake inoculation as he uses a counter-explanation to head off the damaging attribution of stake he might be accused of (Potter, 1996b). So, he actually says that eating contaminated eggs is dangerous, but only if you eat enough of them. Thereafter, he continues 'Quite an expensive storm in a glass of water' (line 2), which shows that he is not worried about eating too much contaminated eggs and that the affair is kind of overestimated. Rob closes the extract with 'I just eat a bouncer tomorrow' (line 3), which shows that he does not make a lot of fuss about the contaminated eggs and does not think it will affect his health. By saying this, he again shows the identity of a down-to-earth person in response to the panicky government.

In extract 10 and 11, Esther and Odette are also showing that there is no reason for panic regarding eating contaminated eggs.

Extract 10: Esther

1 Overhyped toestand! Hoeveel zeurende mensen over de eieren zouden
2 zelf roken? Het risico van die eieren is nihil.

Extract 11: Odette

1 Hoeveel mensen zijn er inmiddels al in het ziekenhuis opgenomen...???
2 Inderdaad: NUL (0)

Both extracts show the identity constructing 'We are down-to-earth'. In extract 10, Esther starts with saying that the Fipronil affair is an 'Overhyped state' (line 1). In line 2, she provides an example of a much more dangerous thing to her, namely smoking. In line 3, she emphasizes again that the risks of the eggs is nil especially when compared to smoking.

In extract 11, Odette asks a question to attract the attention from other participants on the forum. She asks how many people have already been hospitalized (line 1) and adds three question marks to force people to think about her question and provide her with an answer. In line 2, Odette answers her own question with 'Indeed: ZERO (0)'. She uses the word 'indeed' as she probably assumes that people would know the answer or also had the answer in mind. She writes 'ZERO' in capital letters to emphasize that nobody was ended up so sick that they needed to go to the hospital. Thus, she uses this account to display her identity of a down-to-earth person in response to the panicky government.

The previous examples show how civil society actors build the identity of 'We are down-to-earth' in response to the panicky government. In achieving this, the actors are providing accounts to show that there is no panic needed regarding eating contaminated eggs, e.g. by making strict calculations or providing facts. 'I' restrictions are used to show the personal involvement of the participants regarding the affair. Stake inoculation is used as participants admit that eating contaminated eggs might be bad for public health, but only if you eat a lot of them daily.

4.2.2 'We are (rightfully) distrustful'

The fourth identity construction, 'We are (rightfully) distrustful', occurred at least 22 times on the forums of *Radar* and *GeenStijl*.

The fourth pattern occurred in reaction to the article presented in box 6. From this article, one extract is taken for analysis, in which the participant reacts on the content of the article itself.

Box 6. The evaluation report from the Fipronil Reporting Centre says that Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety was not prepared for a crisis like the Fipronil affair. The authority acted too late, which resulted in a bigger crisis than necessary. The moment the fipronil crisis was announced, the authority took too much time to answer the questions of the affected poultry farmers (ANP, 2018).

Link: [Radar forum – Thread: 'NVWA kon Fipronil-crisis niet aan'](#)

In the following extract, Hans criticizes the government for not acting up when foreign egg buyers raised the alarm about eggs containing fipronil.

Extract 12: Hans

1 Het waren voornamelijk buitenlandse eieren afnemers die
2 al rond de jaarwisseling alarm sloegen over deze ernstige
3 fipronil-crisis. Merkwaardig dat als buitenlandse loeiende sirenes
4 zijn aangezet, men in den Haag stokdoof blijkt. Misschien
5 hun top politieke religieuze oren een keer flink laten uitspuiten.

In the extract, Hans displays the identity 'We are (rightfully) distrustful' as he accuses the government of being negligent in the Fipronil affair. He starts the extract with providing information about the foreign egg buyers who alarmed the fipronil crisis around the turn of the year (line 1-3). By emphasizing 'foreign egg buyers', it feels like he is indirectly accusing the Dutch government of not

discovering fipronil in eggs themselves, as the contaminated eggs probably came from the Netherlands and it is not the consumers job to find out this kind of things. Moreover, Hans emphasizes the dangerous effect of eating contaminated eggs during the affair by describing the Fipronil affair as 'serious'. He continues with 'It is remarkable that when foreign wailing sirens are turned on, people in the Hague turn out stick deaf' (line 3-4) to show that he thinks it is really stupid of the government to not notice these signals from foreign countries. Hans mentions 'foreign wailing sirens', which makes it really suspicious that the government did not hear anything about the contaminated eggs because sirens are always used to make people alert of the situation going on, e.g. fire fighters who quickly drive towards the place of fire by using sirens to make people alert that they are on their way and that they need to let them through since the time they arrive at the fire is really important. Note how Hans uses the word 'remarkable' to attract attention of the other participants on the forum. The word 'stick deaf' is negatively used to describe a characteristic of the government. Thus, Hans builds the identity of a rightfully distrustful citizen regarding the intentions of the government in response to their lax and negligent performance in the affair as they did not listen to the fipronil warning signals of other foreign countries.

The fourth pattern also occurred in reaction to the article presented in box 7. From this article, three extracts are taken for analysis, in which the participants react on the content of the article itself.

Box 7. The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority is been criticized as they did not take sufficient actions the moment they received the signal about the use of fipronil in November 2016. Moreover, Belgium found out that eggs were contaminated with fipronil. Thus, the article blames the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority of not taking preventive samples and taking insufficient measurements of fipronil on the farms. Furthermore, the authority does not know how dangerous the eating of contaminated eggs is as they change from 'acute health hazard' to 'advising not to eat' within one week (Feynman, 2017).

Link: [GeenStijl forum - Thread: Feynman en/of Feiten – NVWA komt uit een ei](#)

In extract 13, the participant starts with accusing the Authority of being pussies as they are hiding for things like the fipronil crisis and lying against the public. Thereafter, the participants says that Schippers (of public health) and Van Dam (Ministry of Economic Affairs) also do this.

Extract 13: While the shit hits the fan

(4 lines omitted)

1 Ze zijn te arrogant om ooit toe te geven dat ze
2 'foutief' of nalatig gehandeld hebben. Het is zoals Feynman zegt in
3 het artikel, dat je niet briljant hoeft te zijn om
4 na de eerste berichten dit in de praktijk te laten onderzoeken. Dit
5 alles geeft geen goed gevoel, dat men echt en grondig naar ons
6 voedsel kijkt.

In the extract, the participant constructs the identity 'We are (rightfully) distrustful' as he is accusing the government of negligence in the Fipronil affair. He starts this extract with immediately calling Schippers and Van Dam 'too arrogant' as they would never admit that they acted erroneously or negligently in the affair (line 1-2). By mentioning this, he directly blames the government itself. In line 3 and 4, he agrees with the author of the article (Feynman) and he actually says that you do not have to be an expert to draw a conclusion on this (Myers, 2004) - every stupid person could know this. The participant closes the extract with displaying his concern regarding food safety. He indirectly says that if even the experts were not aware of the contaminated eggs, which have the expertise to detect such problems, who then is responsible for detecting these kind of things that endanger public health?

In extract 24, Omar start his comment with accusing Rutte, the head of the government, as well as the government itself.

Extract 14: Omar

(2 lines omitted)

1 Liegen en Bedriegen, met hoofdletters, dat is het enige nog wat
2 je kan verwachten van dat haagse zootje.

Omar starts with criticizing the government and describing them badly. He attributes the description 'Lying and Cheating' to them (line 1). Note how Omar writes the words with capital letters as well as mentioning this explicitly. He closes the extract with saying that he does not expect anything from the government, except lying and cheating. By mentioning the word 'mess' he again emphasizes that he does not have a positive stand towards the government (line 2). This all shows that he has a really negative image of the government and their intentions, and therefore, distrusts them even when

they are the experts (Myers, 2004).

In extract 15, Nienke writes a comment in which she tells what she expects from the government and that they failed in meeting her expectation.

Extract 15: Nienke

1 We leven in een tijd waarin gekken onze samenleving bedreigen en
2 daarvoor naar mogelijkheden zoeken.
3 Juist daarom een tijd waarin we mogen verwachten dat overheden over
4 ons waken, ook en adequaat over onze voedselveiligheid. Pijnlijk
5 om vast te stellen dat zij nu zo faalt, vermoedelijk zelfs na
5 signalen van inmiddels maanden geleden. Als een paar minmukels in
6 staat bleken om lange tijd achtereen eieren van miljoenen Europeanen
7 te vergiftigen houd ik mijn hart vast als niet economische maar
8 terroristische motieven de drijfveer zijn.

Nienke displays the identity of a rational citizen that deservedly distrusts the government. She starts the extract with the description 'crazy people' that 'threaten' society which show her concerns regarding living in the society nowadays (line 1-2). She provides this account to support her expectation of the government 'That is exactly a time where we may expect governments to watch over us, also and adequately about our food safety' (line 3-4). By mentioning the latter explicitly, she emphasizes that watching over society's food safety is also part of their duty. Thereafter, Nienke immediately continues with saying that the government failed her expectation. Note how she uses the word 'Painful' to make the failing of the organization even worse. She provides the account about the government failing their duty even after several fipronil signals from months ago, which shows that she distrusts their intentions. By saying this, Nienke implicitly says that the government is stupid for not investigating the warning signals immediately when they received them. Thus, the identity of a distrustful citizen that accuses the government and its intentions is being built here. In line 5-8, she closes the extract with her concerns regarding the future. Note how Nienke uses the word 'nincompops' to show that even dumb and stupid people as the owners of ChickFriend are able to endanger public health. It feels like this really frightens her as she says 'I hold my heart', which shows her personal involvement (Sneijder & te Molder, 2006), and is talking about 'terroristic motives' instead of 'economic motives'.

The previous examples show how civil society actors build the identity of rightfully distrustful citizens, especially regarding the intentions of the government, in response to their lax and negligent performance in the Fipronil affair. In doing so, they turn themselves into rational, reasonable people, while the government is portrayed as naive (not responding to foreign warnings), acting silly, or even treacherous.

5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This thesis has focused on the kinds of identities that were constructed by poultry farmers and civil society actors in online interactions about the Fipronil affair. A discursive psychological perspective was used to find out which actions participants performed and which identities were being built or undermined by poultry farmers and civil society and ascribed to others. The aim was to uncover what was really at stake for the poultry farmers and citizens during this crisis, as a way into facilitating a better dialogue between the stakeholders and prevent similar crisis events in the future. This could improve the relationship between the poultry farmers, civil society, the Authority and the government.

The thesis aimed to answer the following research question: *'Which identities are being built by poultry farmers and civil society actors in the Fipronil affair, and what purposes are consciously and unconsciously being served by these identities?'*. Online interactions of four forums have been used in order to answer the research question and sub-questions.

In the following subparagraph, the main conclusions will be discussed. Thereafter, recommendations for facilitating a dialogue between the stakeholders will be presented. Finally, the limitations of the thesis will be explained and suggestions for further research will be given.

5.1 Main conclusions

In interaction, speakers can be accused of having an interest or stake in something (irrespective of whether they really have that stake), and when they talk, speakers consciously or not take that into account. They manage these potential accusations by for example providing a counter-'interest' or explanation (so-called stake inoculation; Potter, 1996b). Or they display indifference precisely at the point where they could be accused of having such a stake.

In this thesis I looked at what was potentially at stake for poultry farmers and civil society actors, by analysing what kind of accusations they defended themselves against, directly or indirectly. Firstly, poultry farmers acted as if they could be accused of naivety, as they had not been acting reluctant regarding the use of ChickFriend's pesticides, even when the results of the pesticides were 'too good to be true'. Similar products for combatting red lice only worked for approximately six weeks, whereas the pesticide of ChickFriend worked for approximately six months. This should have made the poultry farmers alert but it did not, and this was used in the interaction to make them stand out as naive. To resist this potential accusation, farmers present themselves as 'How could we have

known’.

Furthermore, poultry farmers accused the Authority of being too theoretical compared to the farmers themselves, which are standing with their ‘boots in the mud’. By saying this, they constructed the Authority as not knowing how deep the affair really hit the farmers and how big the consequences of the affair were for their farms. They are indirectly accusing the Authority for not investigating the contaminated eggs with fipronil after the first signal, as they are the experts of theory in detecting and reporting risks that endanger public health to protect the society.

In addition, civil society actors presented themselves as down-to-earth persons so as to resist the accusation of responding panicky regarding the eating of contaminated eggs. They also displayed themselves as rightly mistrustful against the government (that had been acting silly or even treacherous), thereby again making clear that they had not been naive or blindly trusting the responsible organisations.

So, the participants to the discussions built up four different identities, so as to manage the potential stake accusations of being naive and blindly trusting, or, reversely, being unjustly mistrustful or critical against the government.

5.1.1 Identity construction for poultry farmers and civil society actors

The poultry farmers and civil society actors construct certain identities while managing their stakes. In total, four identity constructions were found, whereas two identity constructions were found for the poultry farmers, as well as two identity constructions for civil society actors.

5.1.1.1 ‘How could we have known’

The first identity construction for the poultry farmer is ‘How could we have known’ to prove their innocence in response to accusations of naivety. This identity was being worked upon by performing several actions. First, poultry farmers defended themselves as they said that they did not know that fipronil was being used by ChickFriend to resist the potential accusation that they are naive poultry farmers. They also provided other accounts to resist accusations of being naive, e.g. poultry farmers checked with their certification Authority if ChickFriend’s pesticides were okay and this was confirmed. Secondly, poultry farmers put the blame on someone else as they accused the Authority of being aware that ChickFriend used fipronil. Once, stake inoculation was used by a poultry farmer by saying that poultry farmers could have known that fipronil was used by ChickFriend, but the Authority knew it for sure. Moreover, ‘I’ restrictions were used to make the utterances more personal, or footing was used to distance themselves from their utterance. In some fragments, which

are not included in the examples of chapter 4, poultry farmers displayed themselves as distrusting the intentions of the Authority. A couple of times, they described or mentioned the term ‘conspiracy theory’ regarding the role of the Authority in the Fipronil affair. The poultry farmers presented everything what happened in relation to the Authority and the Fipronil affair, e.g. not passing the signal in November 2016 on and lowering the fipronil standard in eggs from January 2017, had happened so as to destroy the poultry sector.

To conclude, the poultry farmers presented themselves as innocent in response of actual and potential accusations of having been naive in the Fipronil affair. Therefore, they do not attribute responsibility for the occurrence of the affair to themselves. Instead, the intentions of the Authority in this affair were questioned by the farmers.

5.1.1.2 ‘We are practical’

The second identity construction for the poultry farmers is ‘We are practical’ in response to what they treated as the theoretical nature of the Authority. In doing so, the poultry farmers emphasized the differences between 24/7 hardworking farmers and the bureaucracy of the Authority. The working activities from poultry farmers are very different compared to the working activities of employees of the Authority, e.g. poultry farmers are working 24/7 to maintain their farm compared to employees of the Authority that work from nine to five from only Monday till Friday. Moreover, they emphasized that the Authority does not know what it means to have your ‘boots in the mud’, as the poultry farmers have. Furthermore, the poultry farmers showed that the affair is accompanied with a lot of emotions, whereas the Authority does not know how big the impact for the poultry farmers really is.

To conclude, the poultry farmers emphasized that their whole income and future of the farm depends on the consequences of the affair. Therefore, they rejected responsibility for the occurrence of the affair. If they would have been aware of ChickFriend’s pesticides containing fipronil, they would not have used the pesticide, as it had a huge impact on their farms, e.g. farms were blocked for a while and their eggs were destroyed, which meant no income.

5.1.1.3 ‘We are down-to-earth’

The third identity construction for civil society actors is ‘We are down-to-earth’ in response to what they treated as the panicky government regarding the eating of contaminated eggs. In working up this identity, people made exact calculations or provided facts to show that eating contaminated eggs is only harmful for public health if you eat a lot of them daily. In doing so, they showed their down-to-earth identity as they were searching actively for information regarding eating eggs, which

shows that they are well-informed, active citizens. Stake inoculation was used when participants admitted that eating contaminated eggs might be bad for public health, but only if you eat a lot of them daily. Furthermore, people emphasized that they were already eating contaminated eggs for more than one year, and are still alive, which suggested the overreaction by the government: it would not be so dangerous for public health as the government thought it would be.

To conclude, the participants mainly showed that there was a lot of fuss being made about eating contaminated eggs by the government themselves. Normally, the government should take the role of being 'down-to-earth', reassure society and inform them properly. Creating this image of the government as acting disproportionately makes it easy to accuse the government of acting lax or negligent in the affair, and to attribute responsibility to them, as they are the ones acting panicky, whereas the citizens react self-controlled and rationally.

5.1.1.4 'We are (rightfully) distrustful'

The fourth identity construction for civil society actors is 'We are (rightfully) distrustful' regarding the intentions of the government in response to their lax and negligent performance in the Fipronil affair. In achieving this, several actions were performed which directly as well as indirectly allowed for accusing the government of acting lax or negligent. Firstly, the intentions of the government were questioned as they did not listen to the fipronil warning signals of other foreign countries, which makes the government look like they were lax or negligent in executing their duty, namely protecting public health. Because of this, civil society attributes responsibility to the government for the occurrence of the affair, and distrusts them even when they are the official experts. However, this distrust is seen as something positive, as society shows that they are critical and alert, and not 'blindly' trusting organizations. Therefore, it is not possible to put the label 'naivety' on the participants that constructed this identity. Secondly, civil society actors suggested that you do not have to be an expert to draw a conclusion on the basis of these first warning signals, and that even a stupid person could have known that something was going on. So, civil society actors indirectly said that if even the experts were not able to detect the contaminated eggs, who do have the expertise to detect these problems, who then is or can be held responsible for detecting these kinds of things that endanger public health.

The results suggest that farmers and civil society actors felt as if they were to 'blindly trust' the government in dealing with this affair, as they displayed the need to defend themselves against this possible accusation ('You think that I should be blindly accepting your ideas and measures but I am not naive'). Research by the sociologist Hobson-West (2007) showed a similar phenomenon with

regard to the rejection of a childhood vaccination campaign in the UK. The public rejected a particular vaccination, not because of the vaccination itself, but on the basis of what they felt was the expectation from the authorities, namely, that the society would just have to 'blindly' trust them and take the vaccine. Furthermore, this study showed that parents could be classified in two groups, namely the group that 'blindly' trusts and follows uncritically versus the group that showed active resistance and thinks critically. Parents that may be defined as 'good parents' were the parents that spent time on being informed and educated regarding vaccinating their child. Trusting experts is seen as passive behaviour and the least difficult option. Especially in public health issues, it seems that the moral imperative to become informed as a citizen, increases. This is what also can be seen in this thesis as poultry farmers and civil society actors display themselves as not trusting the intentions of the government and the Authority. However, Poltorak *et al.* (2005) noted that critical concerns will not be solved by simply wanting to restore trust in official experts. In the child measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine issue, parents are sceptical regarding the safety of the vaccination, which is linked to their perception that doctors are getting paid to 'immunise' and that scientific research to the vaccination is biased by the funding of a pharmaceutical company. For this reason, parents do not trust the official experts, such as the doctors. So, another approach needs to be used in order to resolve society's trust in the Authority as well as in the government in the Fipronil affair.

To conclude, all these identities are being built as the question: 'Who is responsible in the Fipronil affair?' is being played back and forth in the debate. Constantly, there are discussions going on about which stakeholder is responsible for the occurrence of the affair. However, how the stakeholders may share responsibility for what happened is no longer up for discussion. Therefore, it is important to make the affair a more collective problem and find out how to prevent similar crisis events in the future.

5.1.2 Facilitate dialogue

Improving the communication between poultry farmers, civil society, the Authority and the government is very important in the Fipronil affair. As current interactions can be characterised in the first place as a 'blame game', a different kind of conversation should be encouraged. Dialogue instead of debate, exploring each other's perspectives instead of trying to win the game, seems to be the way forward. However, how to proceed from a situation in which the different actors have already developed strong viewpoints?

5.1.2.1 Purpose of performing a dialogue

As mentioned previously, the question: 'Who is responsible in the Fipronil affair?' is being played back and forth in debate. Which stakeholders are responsible for the occurrence of the affair is

constantly up for discussion. However, how the stakeholders are responsible together to prevent similar crisis events in the future is not being discussed. Therefore, with a view to the future, it is important that the stakeholders make the affair a more collective problem. As the assumption for the dialogue model is mutual education from experts to society and conversely, so as to regenerate society's trust in science (Wynne, 2006), all stakeholders in the affair need to 'educate' each other. A study by Newell *et al.* (2010) noted that society, veterinarians, the government and food safety experts need to work together by using a dialogue to detect, understand and combat diseases or threats that endanger public health. However, another research showed that it could be difficult to apply a dialogue between stakeholders that think completely differently. Aarts (1998) studied interactions about Dutch nature between farmers and conservationists by the use of a dialogue. Results showed that this created more conflicts and less solutions eventually. So, this could also be the reason why the government chose not to start a dialogue with the other stakeholders. Currently, the Authority and the government are only providing more information to the public, but are not interacting with the other stakeholders to find a joint solution together to prevent similar crisis events. Te Molder (2014) noted that scientists are often presenting the provided information to the public as "these are the facts, you better deal with them". This is what also happens in the Fipronil affair as the Authority as well as the government apply this statement to show that they have the monopoly of truth.

To conclude, performing a dialogue afterwards might be hard as the affair is a sensitive issue for most of the stakeholders. Still, stakeholders are attributing responsibility and accusing each other of failing their duty as they did not detect or report fipronil, and a lot of emotions are accompanying the affair. However, the goal of performing a better dialogue is to focus on the future and not on the past, but this will bring some difficulties with it.

5.1.2.2 Difficulty of a dialogue

Broerse *et al.* (2010) showed that stakeholders dialogues are important, but stakeholders are still sceptical against it. In health research for example, expert stakeholders often think that involving society means that health research is put at risk. According to the study, firstly, patients do not possess much scientific knowledge. Furthermore, knowledge from personal experiences is seen as subjective. For this reason, stakeholders thought that involving them would make the dialogue much more complicated, which is a huge disadvantage. Because of this, the government is probably not involving poultry farmers and civil society in the dialogue regarding the Fipronil affair. However, it feels like the poultry farmers and civil society actors really want to be involved in the dialogue, as they feel that they are not being heard and distrust the intentions of both the government as well as

the Authority. Especially the poultry farmers feel like their story is not being heard by the public, and accuse the Authority of 'conspiracy theories' in the affair. Therefore, it is important that the dialogue should provide a more complete picture of what went wrong regarding the affair, and how they could prevent this together in the future.

However, it can be seen that not only scientific knowledge of experts but also non-scientific perspectives of 'lay-experts' are important in the affair. Research showed that only scientific knowledge is not enough to solve such huge problems. So, combining these two types of perspectives results in overall knowledge which is scientific but also incorporates non-scientific perspectives and helps to show the complexity of the problem. This is also known as transdisciplinary insight, which helps stakeholders to collaborate (Pohl, 2005). Currently, only knowledge of experts is provided in the affair, whereas the view of the farmers and civil society actors do not seem to matter.

Thus, a successful dialogue is needed to solve the disagreements between the stakeholders of the affair. But how could a successful dialogue be facilitated? First, the stakeholders need to respect each other's differences and be willing to connect with each other, and to adapt themselves. As a dialogue between the stakeholders has not been successful or even applied yet, the following five rules need to be applied. Participants need to: (1) Talk about their uncertainties and dilemmas, (2) make assumptions explicit, (3) listen to other participants without judging, (4) develop and introduce new meanings and (5) search for institutions which are needed to facilitate the whole process (Aarts, 2015; Bohm, 1990; Isaacs, 1999; ter Haar, 2014). By executing these rules, nobody 'wins' as all stakeholders participate to try and come to a joint solution by being open and transparent.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the main conclusions, two recommendations could be made. First of all, it has been recommended to start a dialogue to improve the relationship between the stakeholders and to come to a joint solution to prevent similar crisis events in the future. This recommendation is explained in subparagraph 5.1.2 in detail. Secondly, it has been recommended to make a new and clear responsibility distribution between the poultry farmers, civil society, government and the Authority for similar crisis events in the future.

5.2.1 The attribution of responsibility

As mentioned previously, the question: 'Who is responsible in the Fipronil affair?' is being played back and forth in debate. A lot of misunderstandings about the attribution of responsibility occurred

during the affair, and therefore, it is important to negotiate about this and redistribute responsibility between the stakeholders to prevent misunderstandings in the future.

Firstly, the Authority has a lot of responsibility now, but the organization is too small to investigate all warning signals thoroughly about food safety risks which they receive annually. Therefore, the poultry sector should get more responsibility as the farmers are the ones that used ChickFriend's pesticides without being critical of the product. By trusting the farmers with more responsibility, they should become more alert, and this hopefully helps them to detect such crisis events as the Fipronil affair earlier. However, the sector and the Authority still need to work together as they are as a unit responsible for the occurrence of future crisis events. If the Authority receives warning signals about food safety risks, they should as soon as possible warn the poultry sector as they did not do this in the current Fipronil affair. By doing this in the future, it is possible to prevent misunderstandings and search together for a joint solution.

Furthermore, the government should act more as a 'sparring partner' between the stakeholders. Consequently, the government does not have to be alert all the time to detect crisis events regarding food safety. This is the duty of the Authority. Still, the government should ensure that the sector does not fall, and support it when needed. However, the government should still be responsible for informing the public about food safety risks. In the Fipronil affair, they did not inform society properly about the concentration fipronil that would be harmful for public health. The government should really work on this in the future. It can be suggested that the government still needs to be the spokesman of the public, but they should cherish a more down-to-earth identity just as civil society actors did, instead of being panicky.

Thus, the responsibility of the stakeholders should be opened up and distributed again. This will help to prevent misunderstandings and false accusations between the stakeholders in future crisis events. However, the stakeholders should still be responsible together. By performing a better dialogue, the stakeholders have the opportunity to detect similar crisis events in the future earlier.

5.3 Limitations

This thesis has several limitations, which will be discussed in this paragraph. The limitations include using online interactions as data for discursive psychology, the differences between the used data sources and including two important stakeholders in the study.

Potter (2004) noted that discourse analysis has been used to study everyday talk, which occurred

without the interference of a researcher. Online interactions are naturally occurring data, however, discourse analysis has almost only been applied to face-to-face interactions. Therefore, analysing this kind of interactions differs from analysing online interactions. First, it is not possible to see if there is a delay in response when looking at online interactions as the production of an answer to a comment is not observable and can be written at any time on forums (Schönfeldt & Golato, 2003). In the data, participants interacted with each other, but sometimes suddenly stopped responding to each other. As a result, comments could remain unanswered. Also, it was not possible to study non-verbal communication, which makes it more difficult to see how a participant conceives something (cf. Snejder & te Molder, 2005).

Furthermore, the data sources used also had their limitations. The eight data sources used have different scopes and target groups (see: paragraph 3.1), which makes it more difficult to compare the data. The data sources that have been used were news articles were participants responded to. Therefore, the content of the articles could influence the identities being constructed by the participants. Nevertheless, it was still possible to find overlapping patterns while analysing the data. As the Fipronil affair occurred recently, not much research had been done on the problems that occurred during the affair.

Moreover, online interactions from two stakeholders were used, namely poultry farmers and civil society actors. Unfortunately, the perspective of two important stakeholders are missing. No online interactions were found from the Authority and government regarding the Fipronil affair, which would have been interesting as they play a huge role in the affair.

5.4 Further research

Based on this thesis, there are some recommendations for further research. As mentioned previously, discourse analysis is mostly applied to face-to-face interactions (Potter, 2004). It could be interesting to use face-to-face interactions from different stakeholders regarding the Fipronil affair to see if this will lead to different results compared to online interactions of this thesis. It is possible that different identities will be constructed, and therefore, important to study these face-to-face interactions as well.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to include the perspectives of the Authority and the government about the Fipronil affair within the study. This gives a more detailed picture about constructed identities and the attribution of responsibility between the four most important stakeholders.

Moreover, it could be helpful to apply relationship management to improve the relationship between the stakeholders, which will also contribute to performing a real dialogue. This approach could be especially important for the prevention of similar crisis events in the future as it helps them to work more efficiently together.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Data sources used for corpus

- ANP, foodwatch, & the Telegraaf. (2017). NVWA adviseert voorlopig geen eieren te eten. Retrieved the 10th of April, 2017 from: https://radar.avrotros.nl/nieuws/detail/nvwa-adviseert-voorlopig-geen-eieren-te-eten/?utm_source=dmdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=nieuwsbrief&cHash=f89cf9922fc5bf7d6c0b6561841ed25c.
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Appendix 2: Whole extracts

Extract 5: Farmer's son (reaction Common sense)

1 gezond verstand, als ik een product maak zou ik daar de samenstelling
2 van prijs geven als jij het ook zou kunnen maken, toch nooit want dat
3 is mijn handel jij weet toch ook niet hoe de samenstelling van
4 benzine is en hoe je het kan maken, het enige is dat je het niet in
5 de dieseltank moet gooien.
6 Nu heeft dit wel een heel vervelende uitwerking en hadden zij hier
7 wel wat meer over moeten vertellen t.a.z. van de (concentratie)
8 hoeveelheid maar ik blijf nog bij mijn vorige commentaar.

Extract 7: Theo

1 De Europese Autoriteit voor Voedselveiligheid (EFSA) test bij
2 proefdieren wanneer een dosis net geen schade oplevert, deelt die
3 waarde voor de zekerheid door honderd en bepaalt zo de veilige dosis.
4 Mensen mogen dagelijks 0,0002 milligram fipronil per kilogram
5 lichaamsgewicht binnen krijgen en in één keer 0,009 milligram per
6 kilogram, daarboven sluit de EFSA niet langer uit dat er
7 gezondheidsrisico's ontstaan.
8 Oftewel: 100 kg lichaamsgewicht = 0,02 fipronil inname oftewel:
9 bij een ei met 0,021 mg/kg (en een ei van M(middel) 53-63 gram)
10 dus: 1 kg eieren opeten. DAGELIJKS. Bij...58 g per ei dus.. zo'n 17
11 eieren... PER DAG .
12 Je zou er van gaan kakelen... Om die 0,009 te halen... dus voor een
13 100 kg wegende persoon: een inname van 0,9 g fipronil.. bij wederom
14 die eieren met 0,021 mg/kg...4,3 kg ei, oftewel: 74 eieren... in EEN
15 dag... En dan nog zitten we met marge van 100x ! Martijn Katan
16 (voedingsleer, Vrij Universiteit): 'Eigenlijk zou je de giftigheid
17 van zo'n ei moeten uitdrukken in glazen rode wijn per dag. Mensen
18 zouden ervan opkijken: het zou gaan om een heel klein drupje
19 per dag.' De paniek om de eieren is in dat licht ietwat
20 buitenproportioneel, vindt hij. Voelt u zich nu ook belazerd, op het
21 verkeerde been gezet, paniek aangejaagd enz... ? ?
22 zie <https://www.volkskrant.nl/w...>

Extract 8: Dani

1 Nu als we al ongeveer 1 jaar besmette eieren eten
2 waarom zou ik stoppen. Wij eten in ons gezin elke week 2 a 4 eieren
3 per week en dat blijven gewoon doen. Allemaal ophef om niets, kunnen
4 we wel Lidl of Aldi en AH de schuld geven allemaal onzin. stallen
5 gewoon terug naar af. Smakelijk ik neem nog een eitje. Iedere dood en
6 zijn andere Brood.

Extract 13: While the shit hits the fan

1 De NVWA is een bureaucratische dienst. En de leiding zijn 'roze
2 koeken' welke niet buiten komen. Als de 'poep de ventilator raakt',
3 weten ze van niks en verstoppelen ze zich met smoesjes en halve
4 waarheden. Dit geldt ook voor Schippers en van Dam.

5 Ze zijn te arrogant om ooit toe te geven dat ze
6 'foutief' of nalatig gehandeld hebben. Het is zoals Feynman zegt in
7 het artikel, dat je niet briljant hoeft te zijn om
8 na de eerste berichten dit in de praktijk te laten onderzoeken. Dit
9 alles geeft geen goed gevoel, dat men echt en grondig naar ons
10 voedsel kijkt.

Extract 14: Omar

1 Ach, zijn we iets anders gewend bij de roverheid, met opper, opper
2 roverhoofdman rutte, gelijkwaardig aan een paling in een emmer snot.
3 Liegen en Bedriegen, met hoofdletters, dat is het enige nog wat je
4 kan verwachten van dat haagse zootje.