

CAMmer in the Spotlight

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Getting to know... Moniek Buijzen

What are you currently working on? I am convinced that the social environment is crucial in moderating media effects and that social influences, such as parents, peers, and teachers, should always be taken into account in our work. In the research project '[MyMovez](#)' that we are currently conducting, we investigate how health campaigns can be improved by implementing them via children's social networks. To put it simply, we identify the influential kids in the classroom and train them to spread and endorse messages promoting a healthy lifestyle.

This simple idea has grown to become a monster project. Supported by the European Research Council, the project incorporates a core team of 8 researchers, 21 participating schools, 117 classrooms, and an army of extremely motivated undergraduate students. We have a brand name, a logo, a website, a promotion video, and a really fancy 'Wearable Lab.' This lab involves a smartphone application, combined with an activity tracker, that we use for data collection and

intervention. It also involves fun features for the research participants, like a personal avatar that can be customized, a fun game, and a social media feature. Preparations took more than a year and we are currently in the second wave of data collection. I would not know where we would be without the researchers in the team. I have officially apologized to them for designing this crazy plan. But then again, everybody seems to be having great fun--including the participating kids.



What has been your most memorable project so far, and why?

About 10 years ago, I started a research group focusing on the commercialized media environment and young consumers. Starting with a group of three, we soon started attracting other young scholars. The group quickly snowballed and grew in a natural way, totally based on intrinsic motivation, love for the topic, trust, and--perhaps most important: having fun working together. I totally agree with what Kris Harrison pointed out in her Spotlight interview: relations, that's what it's all about. Our 'young consumers' group is now a strong collaboration network, spread across different universities in the Netherlands. Yet, the most memorable times for me were the meetings we had in the early days, when we almost burst out of my tiny office in Amsterdam and enjoyed the heated debates, good laughs, and loads of coffee and cookies.

Which achievement are you most proud of, and why?

A couple of years ago, Esther Rozendaal and I initiated the website Bitescience.com, a portal for academic research on young consumers for professionals involved with youth. We created the website all by ourselves, got together the funding, set up a company, had strategic meetings with university big shots, and made barter deals with the website developers. We had such great fun in setting it all up, and we learned a lot about running a business, making a website, etcetera. Moreover,

we met very interesting people, including CAMmer Alison Bryant who was a great source of inspiration and advice. Five years after the start I guess we may call our website a success, many professionals as well as academics are using it to be informed and inspired. Our most popular articles get around 20,000 views, I am pretty sure that's a lot more than any academic article I wrote. Every time I look at our website I feel extremely proud, but most importantly: I remember the fun and the wonderful experiences we have had over the past years in making this happen. This website is really our baby.

Our previous CAMmer, Jan van den Bulck, would like to know: What is your view on the "positive communication science paradigm" that is advocated on your website? What does it mean? Does it require us to change our theories, our methods, our attitude towards our research or what we do with our results?

Under the label "Positive Communication Science" we bundle research focusing on the question how mediated communication relates to the mental, physical, and social wellbeing of individuals, groups, and societies. This may include research on, to name but a few examples, social marketing, health communication, constructive journalism, serious gaming, and positive media psychology.

We are not the only ones taking this positive turn, it is really in the air, part of the Zeitgeist. As such, this paradigm is not new nor unique. We labeled it

explicitly as a plea to shift our focus to the more positive and constructive side of communication-- to restore the balance in media effects research. All of us can make this shift in our own way. Personally, I changed my focus from studying the undesired effects of advertising on children to the question of how we can use those insights to improve children's well-being.

Giving a couple of other examples from the Radboud group: My colleague Rebecca de Leeuw investigates the effects of prosocial content in media (and there are many examples!) on children's prosocial behaviors, Mariska Kleemans does very promising research on how "constructive journalism" can help children cope with negative news. And I guess many CAMmers know the work of Simone de Droog, who investigates how cartoon characters can increase young children's consumption of fruit and vegetables. What I also like about this kind of research is that it often ends up in real "products", and can easily be transferred to society. For example, Simone's research has resulted in an intervention that is being used in Dutch Kindergartens and Mariska's insights are applied by the producers of the Dutch youth television news.

As for theories and methods, the domain of Positive Psychology provides a useful theoretical backdrop. Rebecca de Leeuw and I wrote an essay in JoCAM NEXT, proposing to introduce positive media psychology to the field of children, adolescents and the media. Theoretically, a lot of insights and

theories from positive psychology can be applied to media processes and effects. Methodologically, we are increasingly developing interventions and testing them in randomized controlled trials.

I guess the core message for society is "it's not all bad!" In Spain, the audiovisual rating system not only informs the audience about possible adverse effects (aggression, fear, racism), but also about potential positive effects (prosocial, healthy, educational). I have been stalking the Dutch audiovisual rating system about this system since I learned about it. Without any success thus far, by the way. When spreading the positive message, you have to have a thick skin and a lot of perseverance.

What would be your work motto? Be inspired by everything and everyone, and do not let yourself be distracted by anything or anyone.



Which of your publications is your favorite, and why? Advertising and children's Christmas wishes... That's the first study I ever conducted and published, together with Patti Valkenburg. It was such a creative idea, visiting schools a couple of days before Christmas (actually, it was "St. Nicholas", the ancestor of Santa Claus) and asking them about their gift wishes. We gathered a wealth of insights, not only into the relation between advertising and the desired brands, but also about the type of gifts children asked for. I still talk about this study in class, students love it. They recognize the TV shows, the commercials and the advertised toy brands, because they were about the age of the study participants back then.

If you had unlimited resources, what kind of project would you want to do and why? For me that dream would involve human rather than financial resources. At this point I am fascinated by social networks, following the spread of messages, and how network dynamics influence media effects. A problem with social network analysis is that you never cover the complete network, due to nonresponse, troubles with parental consent, attrition, etcetera. In my dream world, I would have access to the complete networks. There was a project in Sweden a couple of years ago that included all pupils of all secondary schools in a midsized town. I am afraid we will never reach that coverage, due to ethical and practical issues.

If you had to give one piece of advice to young CAM scholars, what would it be? Find out what really makes you tick in this job and don't let go of that idea. Be very weary of extrinsic motivators, like doing it for the status or for what you think other people expect from you (no need to warn for the financial motivator here, haha). And always have a plan B, it will help you keep focus and perspective. I have always been "prepared to walk". It may sound contradictory, but I am pretty sure that helped me in following my own path in academia.

Who would you like to put in the spotlight next, and why? I would love to see an interview with Matt Lapierre, who is one of the most creative and humorous CAM scholars I know. Aside from his undoubtedly terribly witty and razor-sharp reflections on our field, I am curious to hear about his experiences as a man in this female-dominated domain.