A personalised newsplatform for de Volkskrant

Discovering the possibilities of the collaboration between journalists and algorithms at de Volkskrant and DPG Media
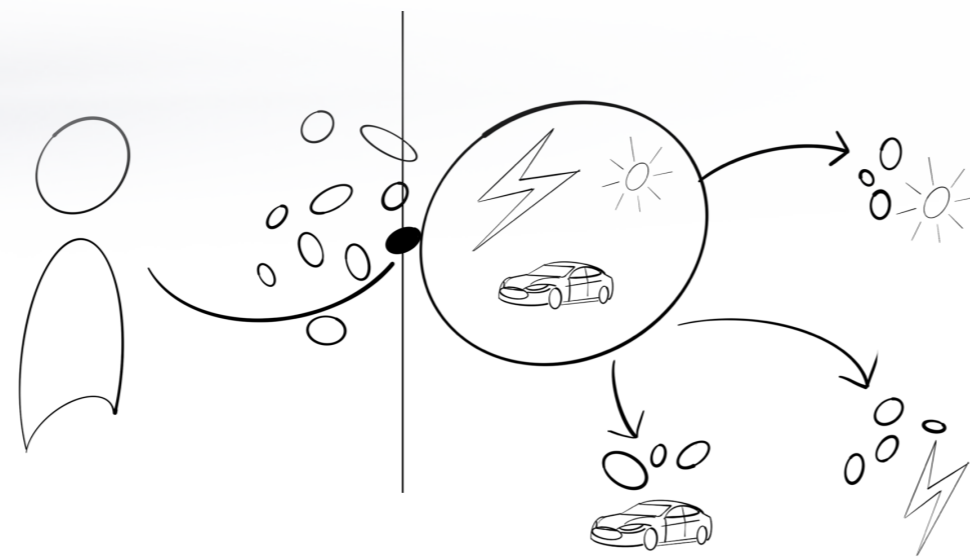

Figure 1:
The new home feed

Getting the right article to the right reader: the home feed

The newly designed home feed is co-curated. A horizontal scroll bar was added to the home feed it says 'de belangrijkste verhalen voor jou' - the most important stories for you. The horizontal scroll bar is clearly distinctive through its different scrolling direction, a distinct look and the decision to use the word verhalen explains the distinction from the normal news.

These decisions were based on three key principles for personalisation: transparency, autonomy and diversity. The horizontal scroll bar clearly communicates that it's something else than the latest news and the new form allows the users to dive into it or leave it out in their session. The diversity is the focus to display different stories from the standard news.

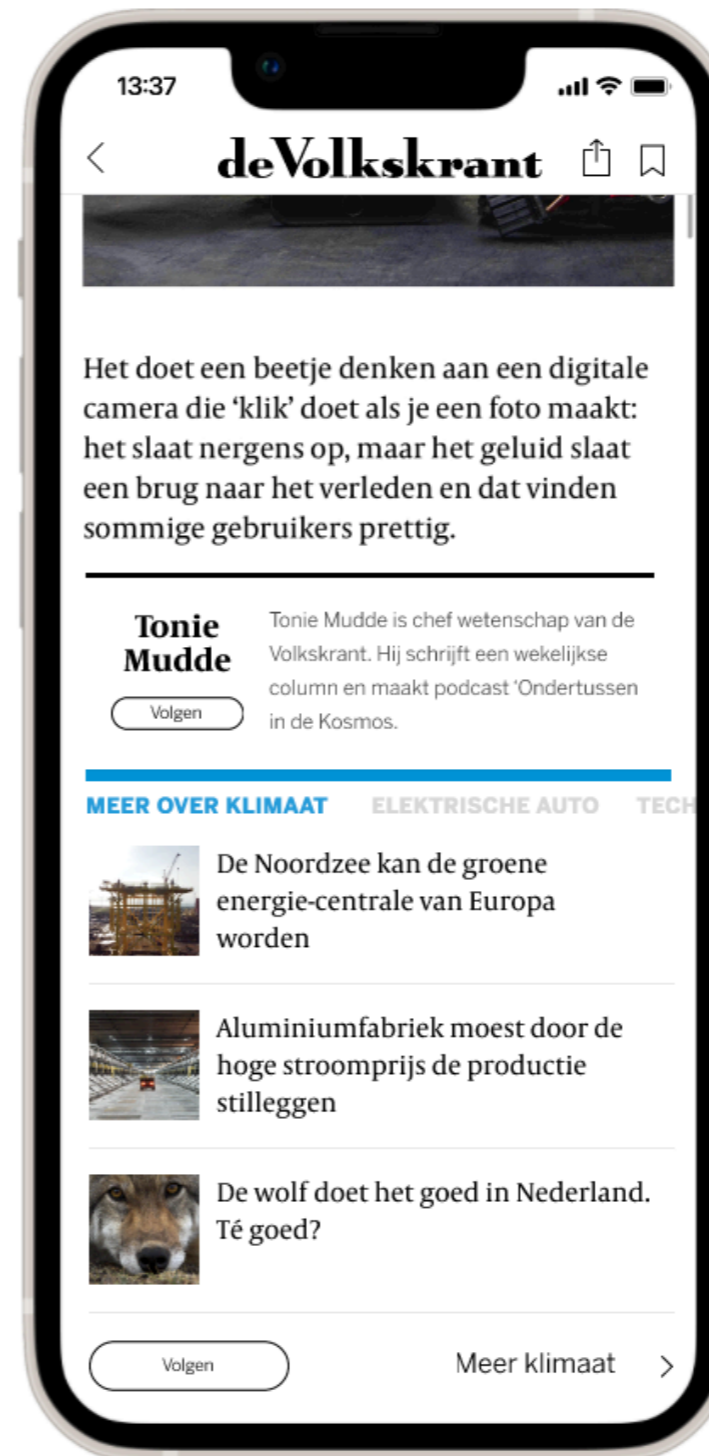*and allowing the reader to build a better understanding of the stories in de Volkskrant*

The possibility to save the article to a reading list, when clicking the archive button. This button is now placed in the header so it is available throughout the whole article.

A short profile of the journalist that wrote the article, adding a short introduction to the name of the journalist. It is possible to follow the journalist, to keep track of this author's stories in the future. The profile is clickable to find a more extensive profile and recent publications.

The 'meer over' section is based on themes. It allows the reader to select which theme they want to continue diving in. It also allows the reader to follow such a theme.

Figure 2:
The new interface at the bottom of an article
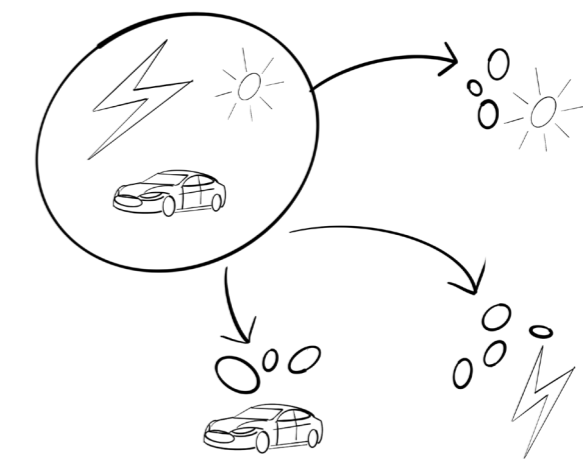
So personalisation:

Why?

During my whole project I have involved readers, journalists and the product developers at DPG Media. Within my theory analysis and the interviews and conversations I have had with these stakeholders I have identified four reasons for implementing personalisation in the digital news distribution product of the Volkskrant:

Facilitating the fulfilment of the diverse reader needs of the subscribers. In 2020 Dmitry Shishkin published the reader needs model for the BBC, shown in figure 3. This model proposed six different needs readers have when reading the news. During my reader interviews I found that the readers of de Volkskrant also share these needs when reading de Volkskrant. The current home feed of the app and website of de Volkskrant currently mainly focus on the update-me need. The current strategy of the journalists for deciding which articles should be in the home feed is to share the latest news.

Developing the platform of de Volkskrant into a product that takes full advantage of the possibilities of digital news distribution. The current digital news distribution product offer of de Volkskrant is often still seen as a digital translation of the physical newspaper.

As the physical newspaper offers very different qualities to a reader, it is time to look at what digital developments can offer something different.

Offering an extra service for the subscribers and users of the platform of de Volkskrant The rise of competitive platforms for news put pressure on the business model of de Volkskrant. So just creating quality news is no longer enough, as other platforms also use the stories of de Volkskrant on their platform. Personalisation could offer an extra service so that the readers will still access the news through the app of de Volkskrant, instead of a social medium.

Limiting the news overload that readers experience in current day and age. As mentioned in the previous point, a lot of news platforms have popped up. De Volkskrant is often not the only source of news for the subscribers. That is why de Volkskrant should help subscribers to limit their feeling of overload and help the readers find the articles they look for and offer a clear overview.
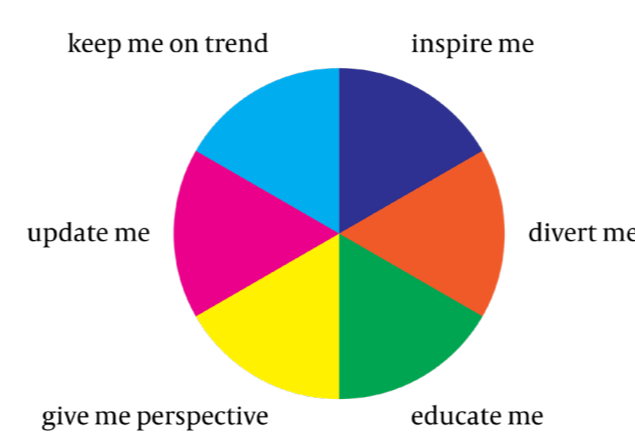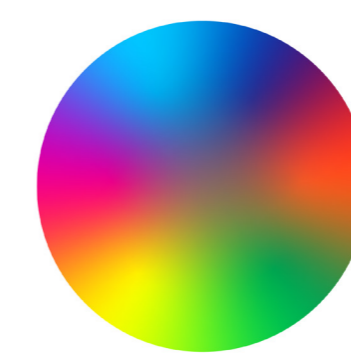
Reader needs   ...   are diverse   ...   and need:

keep me on trend — inspire me
update me — divert me
give me perspective — educate me

Needs-based co-curation

Figure 3:
The reader needs

How?

To create an algorithm that would facilitate more needs of the readers, I came up with co-curation of the news. This means that the news on the digital news will now be curated by both journalists and an algorithm. Within this curation the journalists and the algorithm will have a different responsibility:

Journalists:
Delivering on the promise of bringing the most important news.
The human curators of de Volkskrant are aware of what happens inside and outside of the editorial team and share that through the latest and most relevant news events and productions that make de Volkskrant stand out.
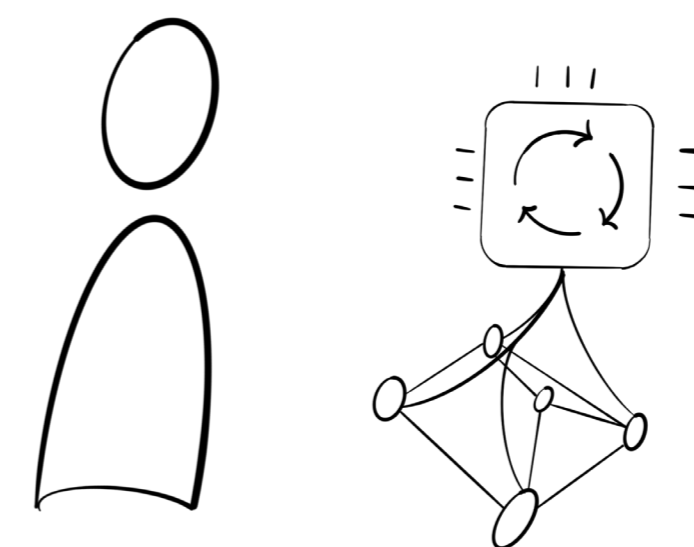
The algorithm:
Bringing the niche articles to the right surface
The algorithm behind 'De belangrijkste verhalen voor jou' knows the preferences of the reader and helps the reader in three ways. Fulfilling its habits, deepening one's knowledge in specific topics and every now and then surprising the reader through a suggestion out of one's filter bubble.

Abe Minnema
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Strategic Product Design

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