

# IMMERSIVE JOURNALISM

## AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF 360° VIDEO

### JOURNALISM ON PRESENCE AND DISTANT SUFFERING

Kristin Van Damme @krisvdam, dr. Anissa All, prof. dr. Lieven De Marez, prof. dr. Sarah Van Leuven

“

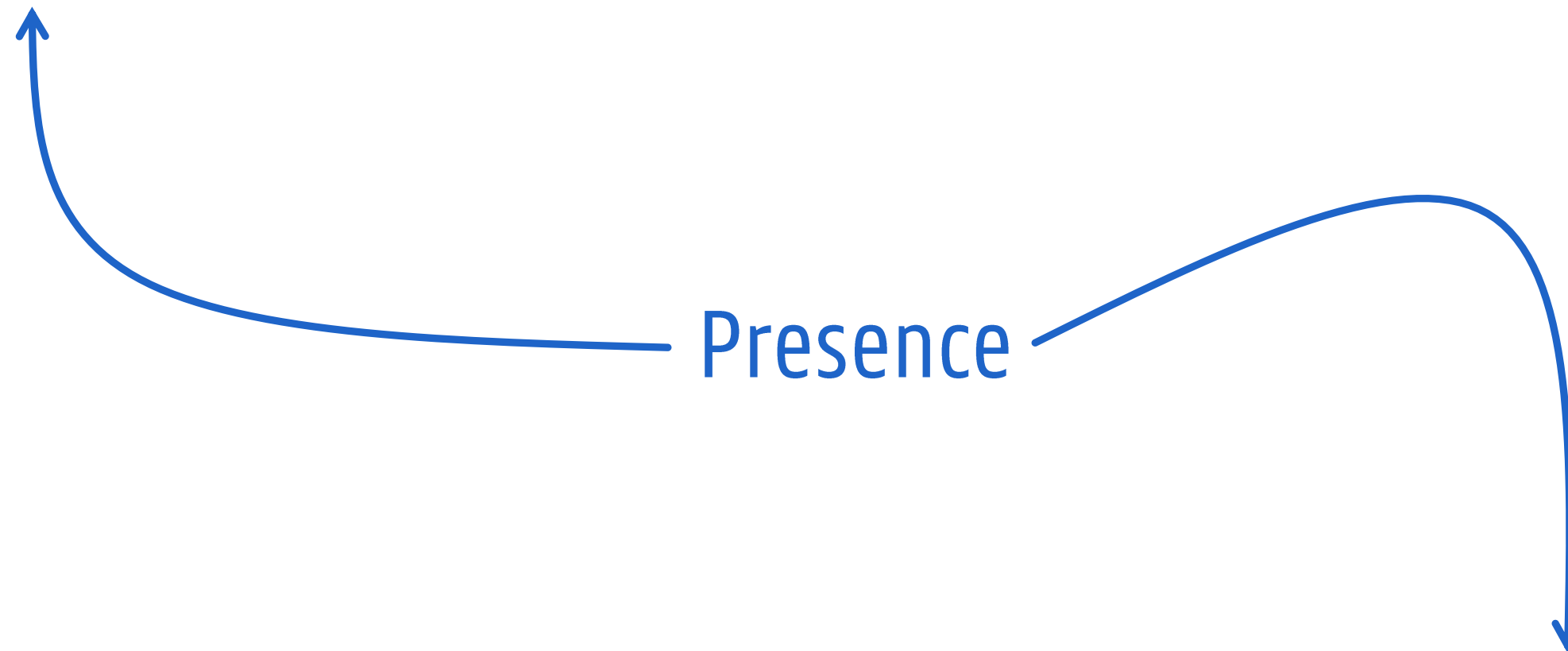
COMPARE IT WITH A PICTURE OF AN AMAZING VIEW:  
THAT PHOTO NEVER SHOWS HOW YOU REALLY FELT.  
VIRTUAL REALITY DOES THAT:  
IT ALLOWS YOU TO TAKE A PERSON TO THAT PLACE.

Jens Franssen (2016)

war journalist VRT NWS and VR-documentary maker

# THE LITERATURE REVIEW

[In] virtual environments (VEs) ..., it is common that a certain  
**sense of being in the virtual environment**, or *presence*, develops - Schubert et al. (2001)



‘Presence research’ studies the phenomenon of **acting and feeling**  
that we are **in the world created** by computer displays - Sanchez-Vives & Slater (2004)

Immersive is a term that refers to the **degree to which a virtual environment submerges the perceptual system of the user in a computer-generated stimuli**. The more the system captivates the senses and blocks out stimuli from the physical world, the more the system is considered immersive. -

Biocca & Delaney (1995, p. 57)



Immersive Virtual Reality (iVR): the **science and technology required** for a user **to feel present**, via perceptive, cognitive and functional immersion and interaction, in a (computer) generated environment -

Small (2011)

News in a form in which people can gain **first-person experiences**  
of the events or situation described in news stories - de la Peña et al. (2010)



News outlets seek to use virtual reality and 360 video to  
**create deeper engagement and empathy** with their audiences - Sanchez Laws (2017)

Non-fiction VR can be distinguished from other forms of VR by trying to engage audiences with real-world stories, where sense of **presence** is **intended** to offer **audiences opportunities for empathic engagement and social transformation**. - Roberts (2017)

Authors are drawing attention to the fact that **VR** content is a **good way for engaging with news and triggering empathy**. - Brautović, John & Potrebica (2017)

## Distant suffering and VR

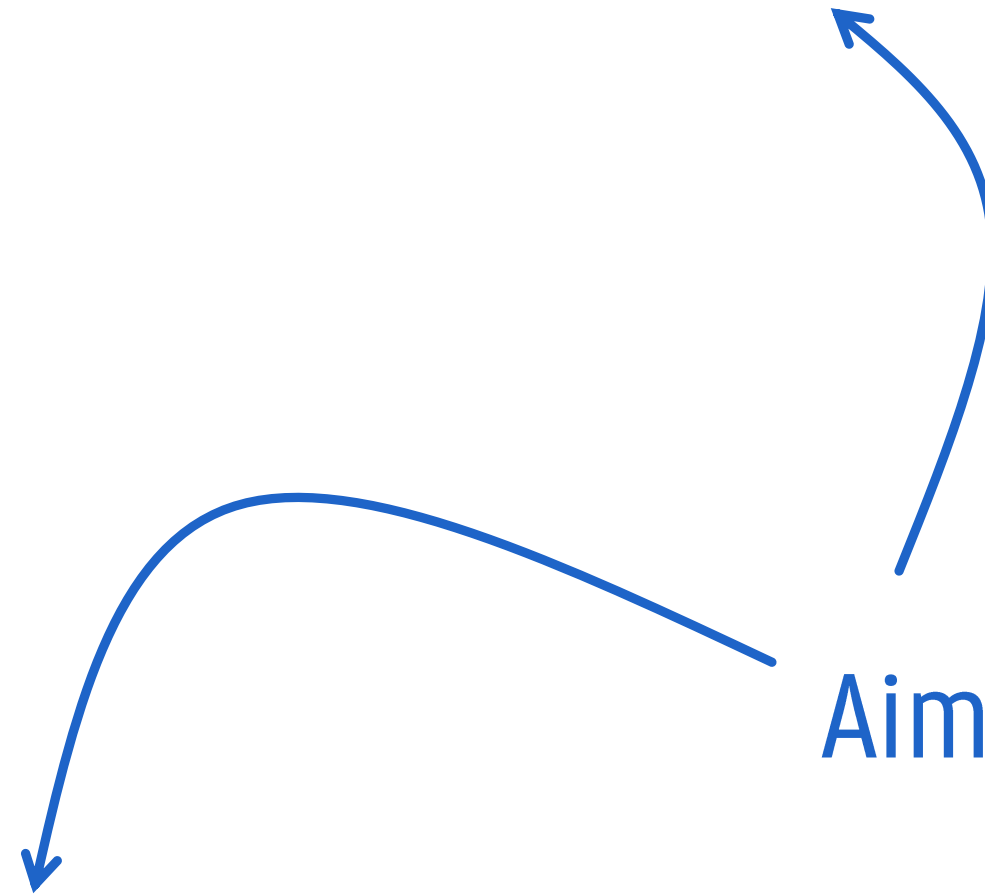


Immersive witness links the experience of **VR** with a **moral attitude of responsibility for distant others**. In accounts of media witness, the ability of the media to sustain an experience of presence has played an important, albeit often implicit, role linking the spectator spatially and temporally to distant suffering. - Nash (2017)

# THE RESEARCH



Case study VRT NWS '[Ryad's War oil](#)'  
by Belgian PSB journalist Jens Franssen (VRT NWS)



Measure the **effect of 360°** video journalism on **sense of presence** and **distant suffering** towards victim, using a case study on a Syrian oil worker

RQ1: ... higher **sense of presence**?

RQ2: ... **decrease sense of distance** towards (victims in) the story?

## Research questions

Does immersive journalism lead to ...

RQ3: ... higher **enjoyment**?

RQ4: ... higher **subjective involvement**?

single viewpoint



360° cardboard



Method:  
experimental design four  
between-subject conditions  
+ qualitative debrief

Sample: 149 participants

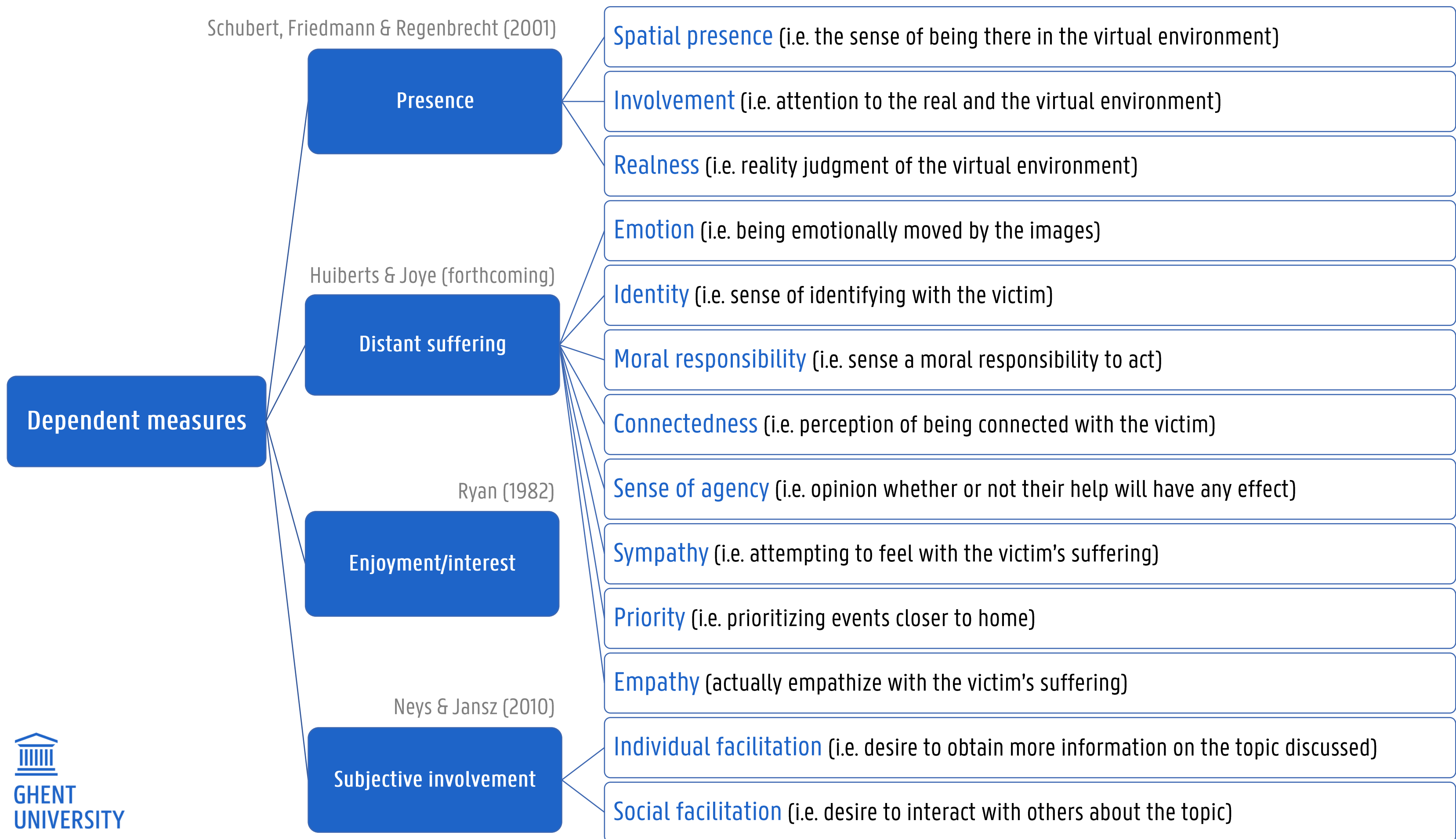


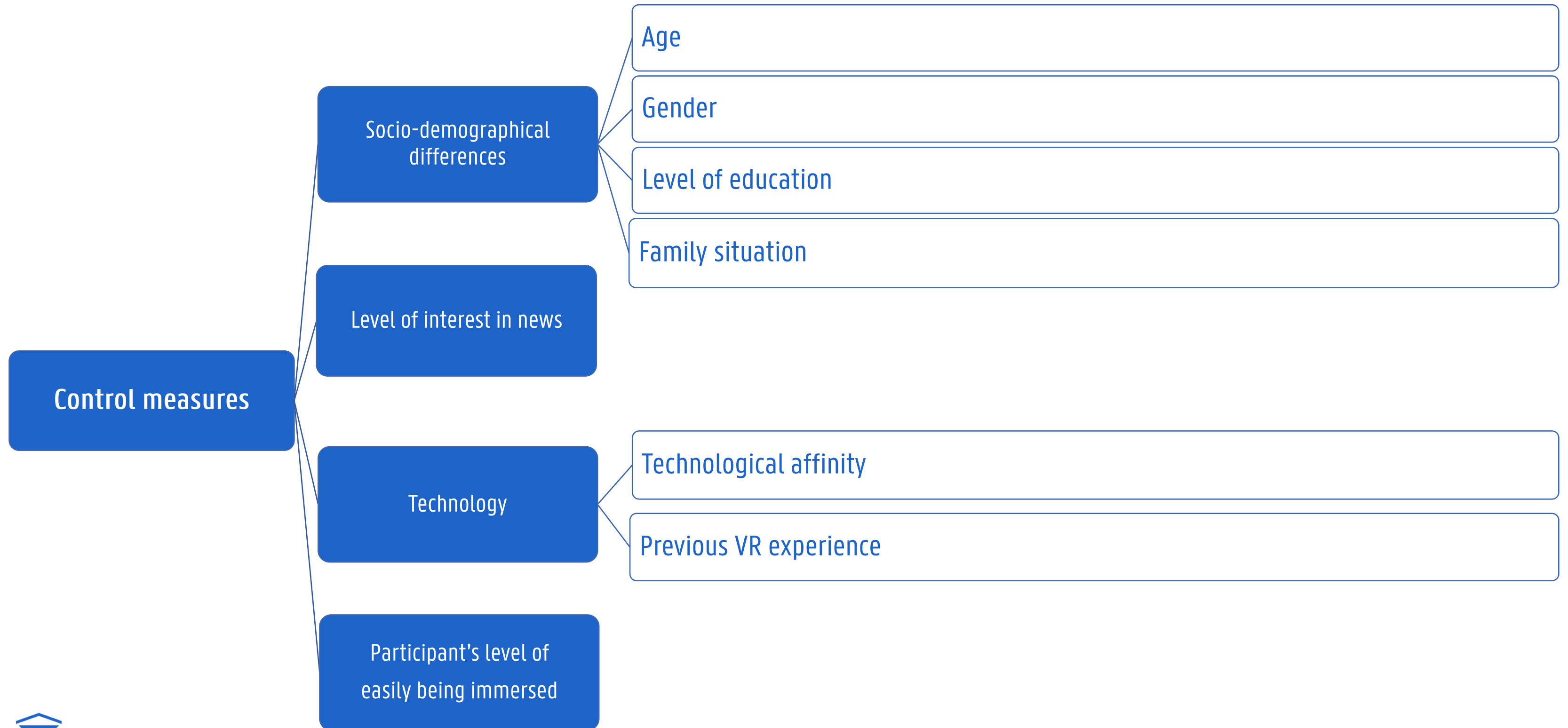
360° drag and drop



360° Oculus







# THE RESULTS

RQ1: Do audiences have a **larger sense of presence** when watching **news stories in VR**?

**YES**





I had never done that before. It really is impressive. My granddaughter had talked about it: “Granddad, you should try it”... well: you really are surrounded.

(participant on spacial presence, Oculus)

You are really there. At a certain point he says ‘here, next to your feet’ and then it really is next to your feet. That is completely different compared to normal video.

(participant on realness, Cardboard)

Oh my god! That is so creepy! Waaw, really insane. You really are there! If only air and temperature would match... Insane and creepy indeed. (participant on involvement, Oculus)

RQ2: Does increased sense of presence  
decrease sense of distance towards (victims in) the story?  
NO



It was the first time I saw this video. I had heard a lot about it.

I: *And what did you think?*

Crazy! And beautiful. Very moving. (participant on emotion, Video)

To me, it felt like a game. And that creates a certain distance.

(participant on distance, Drag and drop)

The sense of solitude is immense. You look around and there is... nothing. (participant on emotion, Oculus)

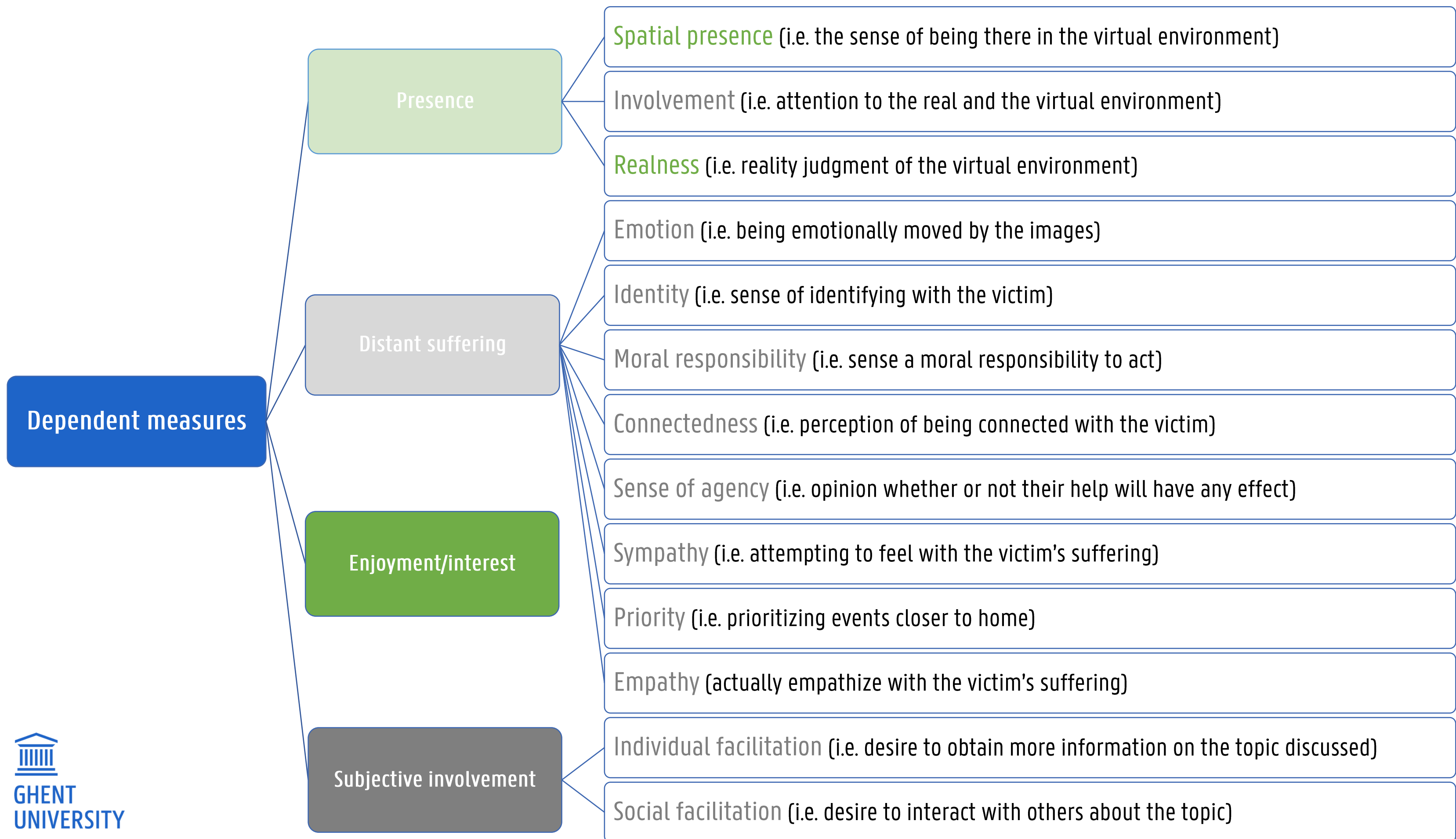
Maybe if it were a woman, I would have felt more involved? Even the oil... it is all so far away. I did not feel connected. (participant on empathy, Drag and drop)

RQ3: Does immersive journalism lead to higher enjoyment of the news experience?

YES

RQ4: Does immersive journalism lead to higher subjective involvement?

NO



The close-ups feel strange. That man was standing so close to me that I wanted to step back. It felt like he was invading my personal space. (Participant on enjoyment, Oculus)

The (stretched) images are just weird! (participant on enjoyment, Video)

Well, (the clicking around) does not add value. I did start doing so, but then I stopped and just continued watching. (participant on enjoyment, Drag and drop)

Looking around in 3D is very distracting. Sometimes there is nothing to see and then you have to start seeking, clicking with that mouse. You also feel kind of obliged to do so.

(participant on enjoyment, Drag and drop)

Waaw, I had never imagined it would be so easy, VR! (participant on enjoyment, Cardboard)

# THE CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

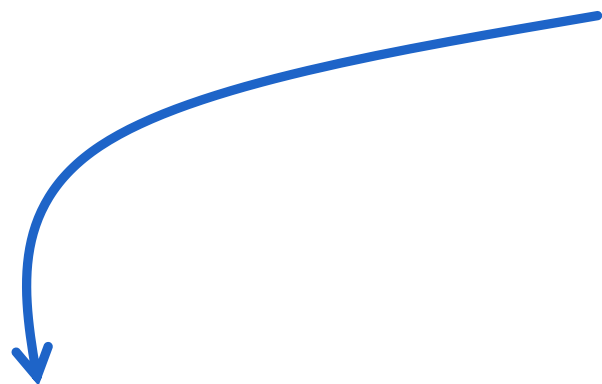




COMPARE IT WITH A PICTURE OF AN AMAZING VIEW:  
THAT PHOTO NEVER SHOWS HOW YOU REALLY FELT.  
VIRTUAL REALITY DOES THAT:  
IT ALLOWS YOU TO TAKE A PERSON TO THAT PLACE.

Jens Franssen (2016)

war journalist VRT NWS and VR-documentary maker



**Exactly what we found: VR-viewers feel more present (but that's it)**

## EFFECT

- VR-conditions show higher sense of presence
  - The more immersed, the higher the level of enjoyment

## NO EFFECT

- Presence: subscale involvement
- Same sense of distant suffering
- Same subjective involvement

Study is case-dependent (content and technical)  
Video also scores high on empathy and sympathy  
Drag and drop video: bad alternative for 360°

# Kristin Van Damme

PhD Candidate

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

E kristin.vandamme@ugent.be

M +32 487 57 27 64

[comwet.ugent.be/en](http://comwet.ugent.be/en)

 [facebook.com/UGentComWet/](https://facebook.com/UGentComWet/)

 [@krisvdam](https://twitter.com/krisvdam)

 [Ghent University](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ghent-university)