Differences in actual persuasiveness between experiential and professional expert evidence

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This study investigates the persuasiveness of different types of expert evidence. Following Wagemans (2011), two types of experts were distinguished that can be used in expert evidence: experiential experts (who base their expertise on personal experience) and professional experts (who base their expertise on professional knowledge). In a between-subjects experiment (N = 179), these different types of experts were included in a news report on a political issue. Results indicate that the perceived expertise and persuasiveness of professional experts was higher than that of experiential experts. Perceived expertise completely mediated the effects of the different types of expert evidence on persuasion. These results point towards a recommendation of using professional expert evidence over experiential expert evidence in reporting on political issues.

Keywords: expert evidence, actual persuasiveness, experiments, professional expert, experiential expert

In the movie THANK YOU FOR SMOKING (2005, dir. Jason Reitman), the movie’s protagonist Nick Naylor (played by Aaron Eckhart) is a lobbyist for the cigarette industry. In one scene, he explains his job to the school class of his son. After one of his son’s classmates responds by saying that her mother had warned her that “smoking kills”, Naylor asks the girl if her mother is a doctor or a “scientific researcher of some kind” (Reitman 2005). After the girl responds negatively to both questions, Naylor retorts by saying that that the girl’s mother is “hardly a credible expert, is she?” (Reitman 2005).

The exchange from THANK YOU FOR SMOKING is an illustration of the concept of expert evidence. The girl uses a source (her mother) to defend the standpoint that smoking kills, but Naylor questions her authority. Argumentation theory provides an excellent opportunity to assess the quality of expert evidence (cf. Hornikx 2005; Reinard 1991; Schellens 1985; Wagemans 2011; Walton 1997,
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These studies operationalize the quality of expert evidence with so-called “normative criteria”. The idea of these normative criteria is that when a criterion is flouted, the quality of the expert evidence decreases. Recently, however, scholars have argued for an empirical test of these evaluation questions to see if laymen also actually use these criteria (e.g., Schellens 2006; Šorm 2010). Results show that laymen indeed use some criteria, but not all in assessing expert evidence (e.g., Šorm 2010). An important question for argumentation scholars is thus to uncover the situations in which laymen are more or less persuaded by expert evidence. This study posits that the type of expert that is used in the expert evidence (cf. Šorm 2010, Wagemans 2011) may be an important predictor of the persuasiveness of the evidence.

In addition, the studies that have so far focused on uncovering the criteria that laymen use to assess the quality of argumentation have shown effects of the flouting of certain criteria on the persuasiveness of the evidence (cf. Hornikx 2008; Timmers, Šorm, Schellens & Hoeken 2008; Šorm 2010). These studies have gained the valuable insight that laymen indeed use some normative criteria in assessing argument quality. However, the experimental studies described above have found so-called direct effects of a violation of a normative criterion on the actual persuasiveness of a message. This means that participants who read a version of text in which a normative criterion is flouted find that text less persuasive than participants who read another version of the same text in which a normative criterion is upheld. Although this experimental evidence provides support for the claim that laymen consider at least some normative criteria when judging argumentation, we feel that another experimental perspective can provide even stronger support for the same claim. This is the case when it can be shown that the effects on message persuasiveness are actually caused by recipients’ perception of a violation of a normative criterion of evidence.

So, a direct effects approach looks for the direct effect of the flouting of a criterion on persuasiveness. In our approach, we argue that an underlying variable lies between the flouting of the criterion and the effect on persuasiveness. This underlying variable is the perception of the fulfillment of the criterion. In other words, the recipient perceives if a criterion is fulfilled (or not) which in turn has an effect on persuasion. This means that the perception of a violation of a normative criterion may be a mediator in the effects of a violation of a normative criterion on the persuasiveness of a message (see O’Keefe 2003, for a more general explanation of this line of reasoning). To the best of our knowledge, no study has yet shown that a different perception on a normative criterion can indeed be a mediator.

Furthermore, most studies that compare the persuasiveness of types of evidence do so in the form of textoids; small experimenter-generated texts (cf. Hornikx 2008; Timmers et al. 2008; Šorm 2010). In these studies, participants
were given short texts with only one standpoint and one argument. In contrast, natural texts are usually longer and have more additional context. To these types of texts, participants may respond differently. Hoeken (2005: 147–148), for instance, found that in texts with a few additional sentences, participants were no longer able to differentiate between normatively strong and normatively weak evidence. In contrast, Hornikx and Houët (2009) found that participants were susceptible to manipulations of evidence quality in a natural setting. These results indicate that more insight is needed into the persuasiveness of evidence in a natural setting. This study takes up on these challenges and tests a causal mediation model of the persuasiveness of expert evidence in a natural setting.

The persuasiveness of different types of expert evidence

Both argumentation scholars (e.g., Šorm 2010; Wagemans 2011) and scholars from the field of Studies of Expertise and Experience (SEE, cf. Collins & Evans 2002) have argued that it is useful to distinguish various types of experts when analyzing expert evidence. In argumentation studies, Wagemans (2011) recently presented a new model of expert evidence and made a distinction between experts who gained knowledge through personal experience (experiential experts) and experts who gained knowledge through professional training (professional experts). Like Wagemans (2011), SEE also considers both experiential and professional experts and sees both as potentially bona fide experts. Collins and Evans (2002) see both groups as potentially equal and argue that one group (professional experts) can show certificates for their knowledge, while the other group (experiential experts) are experts without certificates. For instance, Climate Scientists can be professional experts and self-trained farmers can be experiential experts on the same topic. For the remainder of this paper, we will use the terminology as set out by Wagemans (2011).

In political discourse, citizens are confronted with various types of experiential and professional experts who make different, sometimes even conflicting, expert recommendations (see Collins & Evans, 2002, for an overview of various cases). Argumentation scholar Goodwin (2011) recently argued that one of the key future challenges for both SEE and argumentation studies is to unravel how citizens can figure out which of these experts to trust. We take on this challenge and provide a first step. After all, a first important question is determining whom citizens now actually trust. Does it matter for citizens if experts are experiential or professional?

To gain insight into the question if experts with or without certificates differ in actual persuasiveness, it is useful to further look at argumentation theory. As mentioned earlier, argumentation theorists have construed normative criteria that can
be used to assess the quality of expert evidence (e.g., Reinard 1991; Schellens 1985; Walton 1997). Hornikx (2005: 166) gives an overview of these normative criteria that can be used to assess the quality of expert evidence. The criteria formulated by Hornikx (2005) focus on the person of the expert and ask whether the proposed expert is reliable and has a high expertise in the field the claim is relevant to.

When looking at the criteria to assess expert evidence proposed by Hornikx (2005), it becomes clear that he argues that an expert should be judged on his or her trustworthiness and expertise. In the first criterion, the proposed expert should be reliable. This for instance means that the expert should not profit in some way from delivering his or her testimony or not have a (hidden) agenda in expressing the expert statement. Šorm’s (2010) focus group study also shows that laymen are susceptible to the flouting of the trustworthiness criterion (e.g., when a dentist recommends a certain toothpaste in a toothpaste commercial), which she subsequently confirmed in a follow-up experiment.

However, the difference between experiential and professional experts chiefly resides in the way in which they have gained their knowledge. This means that, all other things being equal, it is not expected that these two types of expert evidence differ on the criterion of trustworthiness. However, we do expect that the two types of experts may differ with regards to the second normative criterion related to the persuasiveness of expert evidence. This normative criterion is the perceived expertise of the proposed expert: if the expert has more expertise in the fields (s)he talks about, the expert evidence is normatively stronger. Šorm (2010) conducted a focus group study to investigate which types of experts were found to be better at defending political issues like the adoption of nuclear energy over other forms of energy. She showed that laymen noticed the flouting of this expertise criterion. In a follow-up experiment, however, she could not find additional experimental evidence that the flouting of the expertise criterion decreased the persuasiveness of the expert evidence.

Hornikx (2007, 2011) also investigated the perceived expertise (Hornikx, 2011) and persuasiveness (Hornikx, 2007) of expert evidence in argumentation on social issues. In contrast to the Šorm (2010) study, he did find experimental evidence that laymen are susceptible to flouting of the question whether the person is an expert in the field, but only in countries with a low power distance. In Hornikx’s (2007, 2011) studies, Dutch participants were able to differentiate between experts from relevant and non-relevant fields. In the Netherlands, people are taught to question authority and are sensitive to the flouting of the field of the expert.

A similar line of argument may also be found for the differences in perceived expertise between experiential and professional expert evidence in political argumentation in the Netherlands. Since Dutch laymen are very sensitive to variations in the source of knowledge the expert has, it may be the case that, all other things
being equal, they favor professional knowledge over experiential knowledge when judging political argumentation. As our first hypothesis, we thus expect that:

**H1.** In political argumentation, the perceived expertise of professional experts is higher than that of experiential experts.

Additionally, Hornikx (2007) demonstrates that, for Dutch participants, normatively strong expert evidence is more persuasive than normatively weak expert evidence. Since experiential expert evidence is expected to be perceived as weaker than professional expert evidence, a similar effect may be observed. After all, if the second hypothesis is confirmed, this would mean that professional expert evidence is perceived as stronger than experiential expert evidence. Given the results found by Hornikx (2007) for the persuasiveness of normatively strong and normatively weak expert evidence, this would imply that the type of expert evidence can also have an effect on persuasiveness. Therefore, our second hypothesis is:

**H2.** In political argumentation, professional expert evidence is more persuasive than experiential expert evidence.

Of course, if professional expert evidence is indeed more persuasive than experiential evidence, an important question is what element exactly caused this difference in persuasiveness. In line with other studies on the actual persuasiveness of evidence types (cf. Hornikx 2008, Šorm 2010), this study posits that the perception of a violation of a normative criterion (in our case: the perceived expertise of the expert) is responsible for such a difference. This claim entails a so-called mediation model in which participants have a specific perception of the fulfillment of a normative criterion and in which this perception then causes the difference in persuasiveness. In other words, it is expected that

**H3.** Perceived expertise mediates the effect of the type of expert evidence on the persuasiveness of the message.

A final issue concerns the content of the expert evidence: does the actual claim that the expert makes also influence the persuasiveness of the expert evidence? When looking at the normative criteria proposed by Hornikx (2005), it becomes clear that the quality of the actual statement that the expert makes may seem less important than the person of the expert. After all, the normative criteria of expert evidence that Hornikx (2005) proposes all deal with the person of the expert and not with the actual statement that the expert makes. When considering the actual statement, laymen could wonder about the question whether the expert’s statement is backed up by empirical data, whether the expert gives a source on which he based his expert claim, whether the conclusion given by the expert is not formulated too strong, or whether the expert’s opinion leads to the advocated
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conclusion (Šorm 2010). The importance of the normative criteria related to the
person of the expert over those related to the quality of the specific claim is cor-
roborated by the studies by Burgers (2005) and Šorm (2010). These studies also
found that, unless a statement is objectionable to a person (and is thus in the lati-
tude of rejection, Sherif & Sherif 1967), differences related to the claim itself had
little effects on the persuasiveness of expert evidence (see also Petty & Cacioppo
1996: 236–237). This implies that laymen rely more on the person of the expert
than on the content of the proposed expert’s claim. For the claim, we thus only
expect that a weak claim is less persuasive than a moderate or a strong claim.
Therefore, our final hypothesis is:

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H4. \text{ A weak claim supported by expert evidence is less persuasive than a moderate or a strong claim supported by expert evidence.}
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Method

Participants and design

A total of 179 respondents participated in an online experiment in which they
were randomly assigned to one of the conditions in a 2 (type of expert evidence:
experiential vs. professional) x 3 (quality of claim: weak, moderate, strong) be-
tween-subjects design. Participants were recruited on social network sites like
Facebook and Hyves (a Dutch social network site). The average age was 31.00 years
(SD = 12.63). A small majority of participants (57%) was female. A large majority
of participants had the Dutch nationality (98.1%) and Dutch as their native lan-
guage (98.1%). Nationality and native language had no impact on results.

Materials

Participants were presented with a news report in one of six versions. In order to
increase ecological validity, this news report was presented as part of a newspaper,
with the surrounding articles blurred. The news report was related to an increase
of the speed limit on motorways to 130 kilometers per hour. This was a current po-
itical issue in the Netherlands at the time in which the experiment was conducted,
because the VVD (the Dutch Liberal Party) made this increase one of its key topics
in the 2011 Dutch Provincial Elections (NOS 2011).

The news report consisted of three sections. The first section was equal in all
conditions and stated that the Dutch government wanted to increase the speed
limit on the Dutch motorway A59 to 130 km/ hour later that year.
The second section contained our argumentation. Evidence is always reported within a specific argument scheme in which a speaker makes a specific standpoint, which is then backed up by evidence (in our case: expert evidence). Hoeken and Hustinx (2009) have shown that the specific type of argument that is used may also influence the persuasiveness of the type of evidence. They compared the persuasiveness of statistical and anecdotal evidence and found that these types of evidence were equally persuasive in arguments from analogy, but that statistical evidence was more persuasive than anecdotal evidence in arguments from generalization (Hoeken & Hustinx 2009). In order to make our comparison as fair as possible, we chose to include the evidence in an argument from analogy, because, in this argument scheme, the two types of evidence tested by Hoeken and Hustinx (2009) were equally persuasive (and the argument structure thus did not bias preferences for one of the evidence types).

In our analogy, we referred back to a pilot of an increase of the speed limit on the A6, another (comparable) highway and stated that this pilot on the A6 was a success. To illustrate the success, the (fictitious) spokesperson Hans Kuiper was introduced. In the condition with professional expert evidence, Kuiper was a professor of planning and development at a Dutch university. In the condition with experiential expert evidence, Kuiper was a person who drove on the A6 every day to his work and thus experienced the effects of the increase of the speed limit firsthand. The third section then mentioned that Kuiper had started an online petition to rally support for an increase of the speed limit on other Dutch motorways.

For the manipulation of the quality of the claim, we manipulated the average time that was gained by the increase of the speed limit was manipulated. In order to show how these different data affect the strength of the argument, we look at the concept of the warrant in Toulmin's (2003) model of argumentation. In this model, the warrant is the connection between the data presented (in our case: An increase of the speed limit led to a specific gain in time on highway A) and the claim that is made by the speaker (in our case: Hans Kuiper who takes the standpoint that the speed limit on highway B should be increased). The warrant is often implicit, but can be made explicit, by connecting the data to the claim with an “if/then statement” (If an increase of the speed limit leads to a gain in time of X minutes on highway A, the speed limit on (comparable) highways should also be increased). In order to make the argument of high quality, the actual time filled in at the X should be true (i.e., the increase of the speed limit indeed leads to this gain in time) and justifiable (i.e., the gain in time should be sufficiently high to warrant the policy of changing the speed limit).

To find out what participants would believe to be a true gain in time because of the increase of the speed limit and what participants regarded as a gain that would justify the new speed limit, a pre-test was conducted among 24 participants who
did not participate in the main study ($M_{age} = 44.88, SD_{age} = 16.62, 54.2\%$ female). This pre-test revealed that participants believed that, on average, they would gain 17.88 minutes ($SD = 7.08$). On average, participants also believed that a gain of 18.42 minutes ($SD = 8.53$) would justify the increase of the speed limit. In the condition with a strong argument, the gain in time was estimated at 20 minutes. In the condition with a moderate argument, this gain in time was estimated at 10 minutes and in the condition with a weak argument, this gain was estimated at 5 minutes. It was expected that, in the latter argument (5 minutes of time gained), the impact of the measure was so small that participants would object and feel that this gain would not warrant the change in policy.

**Instrumentation**

A questionnaire was developed that measured the perceived expertise of the expert and the persuasiveness of the message (beliefs and attitudes towards the increase of the speed limit, and intentions to sign the online petition mentioned in the news report). As control variables, the perceived trustworthiness of the expert and the complexity and vividness of the message were tapped (cf. Hornikx & Houët 2009).

To measure perceived expertise, the six competence items from the scale by McCroskey and Teven (1999) were used. On 7-point Likert scales, participants were asked to which degree they felt the spokesperson to be intelligent, trained, an expert, poorly informed (reverse coded), competent and bright (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$).

The main dependent variable was persuasion, which, in line with other studies (e.g., Hornikx & Houët 2009; Kamalski, Lentz, Sanders & Zwaan 2008), was measured by asking participants about beliefs, attitudes and intentions. As a measure of beliefs about the increase of the speed limit, participants had to indicate on 7-point Likert scales if they assessed the chance the increase of the speed limit would decrease travel times to be large, probable, likely and realistic (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .97$).

An 8-item scale was developed to assess participants’ attitudes towards the increase of the speed limit. On 7-point Likert scales, participants were asked to which degree they believed the increase of the speed limit to be useless (reverse coded), important, necessary, smart, useful, good, negative (reverse coded) and attractive (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$).

Two 7-point Likert scales were used to measure the intention to sign the online petition. Participants were asked whether they intended to visit the web site with the online petition and whether they intended to sign the petition (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$).

Four control variables were also included in the study. Firstly, five trustworthiness items from the scale developed by McCroskey and Teven (1999) were used to measure perceived trustworthiness of the expert: participants were asked whether
they believed that the spokesperson was honest, trustworthy, honorable, moral and ethical (Cronbach’s α = .93). Secondly, the perceived complexity of the message was measured by asking participants whether they thought the news article was clear (reverse coded), difficult to understand and comprehensible (reverse coded; Burgers, Van Mulken & Schellens 2012; Cronbach’s α = .77). Thirdly, the concreteness of the message was measured by asking participants whether they thought that the news article was concrete (Hornikx & Houët 2009). Finally, the vividness of the message was tapped by asking participants whether they believed the news article to be colorful and vivid (Hornikx & Houët 2009; Cronbach’s α = .90).

Results

Control variables

Control analyses revealed that the professional expert (M = 4.56, SD = 1.29) was regarded as equally trustworthy as the experiential expert (M = 4.33, SD = .93, F(1, 173) = 1.86, p = .18). Furthermore, the six news reports did not differ in perceived complexity (F(5, 172) = 1.71, p = .13), concreteness (F(5, 172) = 1.85, p = .11) and vividness (F(5, 172) < 1). This means that the two types of experts were perceived as equally trustworthy and that all texts were perceived as equally complex, concrete and vivid.

Differences between experiential and professional experts

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the perceived expertise of professional experts would be higher than that of experiential experts. We indeed found that the perceived expertise of the spokesperson was considered higher in the condition with professional expert evidence (M = 4.96, SD = 1.17) than in the condition with experiential expert evidence (M = 3.88, SD = .92, F(1, 173) = 47.46, p < .001, ηp² = .22). This indicates that hypothesis 1 is supported.

Effects of different types of expert evidence on persuasion

Hypothesis 2 stated that professional expert evidence is more persuasive than experiential expert evidence. The main dependent variable was persuasion, which was measured by asking participants about beliefs, attitudes and intentions. Table 1 shows the average scores and standard deviations of these variables per condition. For the analyses on the dependent variables that together comprise persuasion, multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were used.
There was a significant effect of type of expert evidence on persuasion (Wilks’ $\lambda = .95$, $F(3, 171) = 3.22$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$). Subsequent univariate analyses revealed that expertise had significant effects on beliefs about the increase of the speed limit ($F(1, 173) = 6.04$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$), the attitude towards the increase of the speed limit ($F(1, 173) = 5.77$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$) and the intention to sign the online petition ($F(1, 173) = 7.71$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$). Participants in the condition with professional expert evidence scored higher on the belief items, held a more favorable attitude towards the increase of the speed limit and expressed a higher intention to sign the online petition than participants in the condition with experiential expert evidence. This means that hypothesis 2 is also supported by the data.

### Mediation analyses

In order to test hypothesis 4 which stated that perceived expertise mediated the effects of the type of expert evidence on persuasion, mediation analyses were carried out in accordance with the method of Preacher and Hayes (2008). In line with Hayes’ (2009) recommendations, indirect effects were estimated with 5,000 bootstrap samples. With this method, the indirect effect is significant if the confidence level does not contain 0. Relevant descriptive information can be found in Figure 1. These analyses show that the indirect effects of perceived expertise on beliefs ($.77$, $SE = .16$, 95% CI = [.49, 1.09]), the attitude towards the increase of the speed limit ($.75$, $SE = .14$, 95% CI = [.52, 1.06]), and the intention to sign the petition ($.89$, $SE = .17$, 95% CI = [.59, 1.27]) were significant. This means that perceived expertise indeed mediates the effects of expert evidence on persuasion, thus supporting hypothesis 3.

### Effects of the quality of the claim on persuasion

Hypothesis 4 stated that manipulations related to the content of the claim of expert evidence have no effects on persuasiveness of the message. Table 1 shows the
average scores and standard deviations of these variables per condition. An effect of argument quality on persuasion was found (Wilks’ λ = .90, $F(6, 344) = 3.22$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .05$). Subsequent univariate analyses revealed that argument quality had no effect on the attitude towards increasing the speed limit ($F < 1$) or on the intention to sign the online petition ($F < 1$). However, argument quality did have an effect on the belief items ($F(2, 173) = 5.97$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2_p = .07$). A Bonferroni post-hoc test revealed that the condition with weak arguments scored significantly lower on the belief items than the condition with strong arguments ($p < .01$) and marginally significantly lower than the condition with moderate arguments ($p = .08$). No differences were found between the conditions with strong and moderate arguments ($p = .70$). Finally, no interaction between expertise and argument quality on persuasion was found (Wilks’ λ = .97, $F(6, 342) < 1$). These findings partially support the fifth hypothesis.
Conclusion and discussion

This paper looked at the influence of different types of expert evidence on persuasion. Results of this study show that experiential experts have less perceived expertise than professional experts (H1). These results demonstrate that different types of experts are perceived differently by laymen. Furthermore, the results also demonstrate that these different types of expert evidence differ in persuasion (H2). With the use of a natural text (a news report on a political issue), this study shows that professional expert evidence is more persuasive than experiential expert evidence. Furthermore, this study tested a causal model which showed the difference in perceived expertise completely mediated this effect. In doing so, this study provides the first evidence that this difference in persuasion is caused by a different perception of expertise.

In other words, this study is the first study that provides causal evidence for the claim that the perception of a violation of a normative criterion of evidence can lead to a difference in persuasion of the message (H3). This means that this study bolsters the results of other studies that found that a violation of normative criterion from argumentation theory causes a difference in actual persuasiveness (cf. Hornikx 2008; Timmers et al. 2008; Šorm 2010). The fact that this study shows that the perception of this violation of a normative criterion is directly responsible for a difference in actual persuasiveness of the message is an important new finding for argumentation scholars.

Finally, this study provided additional evidence for the claim in other studies (cf. Petty & Cacioppo 1996) that only weak claims are less persuasive than moderate or strong claims (H4), but only on the belief items. On the attitude and intention items, we found no difference between the three claims. Our experimental findings thus imply that laymen who judge expert evidence mainly focus on the person of the experts (H2 and H3) rather than the actual contents of the claim (H4).

Some caveats about our findings should be noted. Firstly, we used a single-message design that focused on a political issue that was important at the time (an increase of the speed limit). It may be worthwhile for future studies to try to replicate our results with other political issues to see if these findings go for all types of political issues or for a sub-set of political issues.

Secondly, Hoeken and Hustinx (2009) demonstrated that the persuasiveness of evidence may differ between different argument types. For statistical and anecdotal evidence, they found that the types of evidence were equally persuasive in arguments from analogy, but that statistical evidence was more persuasive than anecdotal evidence in arguments from generalization (Hoeken & Hustinx 2009). The materials used in this study presented the different types of expert evidence in the context of an argument from analogy. Future research may indicate whether
the persuasiveness of different types of expert evidence also differs between various types of arguments.

Thirdly, this paper showed that experiential and professional experts were perceived differently by our participants. Next to this distinction, SEE offers a variety of other criteria on which experts can be classified. For instance, Collins and Evans (2002) introduce the distinction between interactional and contributory experts. Interactional experts are experts who have the knowledge to interact with experts on a given topic. Contributory experts, then, are experts with enough knowledge to actively contribute to a specific field. An interesting follow-up question would be if ordinary citizens perceive these two types of experts differently.

In addition, Hornikx (2007, 2011) showed that people from different cultures may respond differently to manipulations related to expert evidence. In low-power-distance countries such as the Netherlands, it was found that laymen were susceptible to manipulations related to the field of expertise of the expert: participants found normatively strong expert evidence more persuasive (Hornikx 2007) and ascribed a greater authority to normatively strong expert evidence than to normatively weak expert evidence (Hornikx 2011). This study confirmed these findings for the difference between experiential and professional expert evidence. In high-power-distance countries such as France, however, Hornikx (2007, 2011) did not find these differences between normatively strong and normatively weak expert evidence. It may be possible that such cultural differences may also exist for the persuasiveness of experiential vs. professional expert evidence. After all, in countries with a high power distance, people usually have more respect for people with experience such as elders (Hofstede 2001). This implies that in these cultures, experiential expert evidence may be more persuasive than in low-power-distance cultures. Future research may want to investigate these potential cultural differences.

This study investigated the difference between experiential and professional expert evidence in a natural context. It was found that both types of experts were equally trustworthy, but that professional experts were perceived as having more expertise than experiential experts. Furthermore, professional expert evidence was found to be more persuasive than experiential expert evidence. This effect was completely mediated by perceived expertise. Taken together, these results provide empirical evidence for using professional expert evidence over experiential evidence in reporting on political issues.

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