

How readers contribute to their knowledge and experience to The Correspondent's journalism: some typical examples.

By the editors of The Correspondent. Compiled by Jay Rosen, NYU.

1. Smartphones in the classroom: What it's like to have to check your cell phone at the door

Johannes Visser is part-time teacher, part-time Education Correspondent. He regularly uses student input (ages 15-18) in his journalism, including in his podcast *Listen up!*, which he puts together every other week with some of his students.

In a recent project, he asked his students to hide their smartphone for a week and write about what this was like for them. ([Dutch only](#))

This resulted in a string of articles that provided unique insight into the lives of teenagers and a weeks-long discussion engaging parents and teachers about the pros and cons of using smartphones in the classroom.

Johannes' students are contributing members of De Correspondent and actively engage in the discussion.

2. A thousand doctors know more than one healthcare correspondent

Primary caregivers in the Netherlands revolted two years ago against what they perceived as an excess of bureaucracy hindering their daily work. Our healthcare correspondent already had The Big Story on this emerging revolt because of the hundreds of stories health professionals had shared on De Correspondent when asked for examples of bureaucracy in healthcare.

This collaboration between reader-experts and our health care correspondent resulted in a series of stories, including this one, *What keeps your doctor up at night*, which was based on some of the best examples provided by readers. ([in Dutch](#))

Or take this one, *How sacred is doctor-patient confidentiality?*, an open-ended op-ed that asks to what extent doctors should respect patient confidentiality. The piece prompted a lively debate among professionals in the field. ([in Dutch](#))

3. UN employees transformed into sources

Our Conflict and Development Correspondent Maite Vermeulen wrote extensively on the UN in the year this institution turned 70. As always, she started with a call for expertise, which generated some 70 people who work or used to work in the UN system and who were eager to help. She decided to ask a group of them (17 people at UN missions around the globe) to keep a diary for a week and send it her way. Their varied experiences and insights resulted in a story about 'just another day at the UN'. ([in Dutch](#))

4. Fact-checking with readers

Our Clean Tech and Mobility Correspondent Thalia Verkade is currently researching batteries. She stumbled upon a statement by Elon Musk that he could meet the world's energy needs by building 100 megafactories around the world, and decided to fact-check his claim, with the help of three readers with relevant expertise. The story continued in the 17 contributions. ([in Dutch](#))

At the close of her piece, she credits the readers:

"In writing this piece, I was assisted by quite a few experts and members who proofread my work, and whose expertise exceeded my own. Yvo Hunink¹ guided me back from a dead-end involving diesel generators and pointed out the importance of peaks in energy demand, for which Luuk Veeken² then provided a mathematical model. Jan Derk Stegeman³ alerted me to the work being done by Mark Jacobson. Many thanks to all of you for your time and efforts.

Any mistakes in logic or calculations are purely my own."

¹ Yvo Hunink is working on a Master's thesis on processes of innovation in the energy market, to complete the Sustainable Energy Technology degree program at the Delft University of Technology.

² Luuk Veeken works for Dexter Energy Services, a start-up focusing on 'demand response' (increasing the flexibility of energy demand) among large-scale commercial consumers.

³ Thalia got in touch with Jan Derk Stegeman thanks to a previous contribution he made to a colleague's fact-check on wind turbines.

5. How a porn actress, a producer, a researcher, a porn addict, and a bunch of hackers helped us cover the Porn Industry

When we started out covering the Porn Industry we issued a call as we always do when launching a new project. In this case, we asked for assistance with scraping and analyzing data from the world's most popular porn sites:

Who are we looking for?

- We're trying to assemble a multidisciplinary group. We're looking for engineers who are good at scraping data, for example, and who know how to use APIs.
- We're looking for people who are versed in network theory and are skilled at using programs like Gephi and NodeXL.
- We're looking for people who are skilled at data scrubbing and analysis.
- We're looking for people who can contribute insights from a sociological perspective (preferably including quantitative skills).
- We're also very eager to have women on board to help drive and execute this project.

Source: [in Dutch](#).

In response to this call we received over 50 useful responses, ranging from a guy who was being treated for his addiction to porn to a reader who said she worked in the porn industry as an actress. Ten of these people (also including an academic researcher, a porn producer, and artists aiming to reflect on porn through art) showed up at the reader expert day in our newsroom and spent a whole day sharing their experiences with, and knowledge of, the industry.

While they talked, a group of 10 members with hacking expertise were monitoring the flow of information on and to the 100 largest porn sites. This all resulted in this article: ([in Dutch](#))

And here's the article about a contributing member who wanted to share her inside knowledge of the porn industry as an actress: ([in Dutch](#))

6. A critical reader of one story became a source for the next

Correspondent Arjen van Veelen set out to write on the many discontents in Dutch society today to try to understand the rise of populism. In his first article he mentioned most populist voters are low income families in old parts of town.

This resulted in some angry remarks by one reader who is an electoral geographer by profession. He showed Arjen some maps which paint a different picture. Instead of ignoring this reader and his comments, our correspondent decided to invite him to share what he knew, and Arjen went on a guided tour through one of his city's middle-class suburbs.

Admitting his blind spot for this considerable segment of Dutch society, Arjen then wrote a great account of the trip, with the geographer as his guide: ([in Dutch](#))

Afterwards we asked this geographer to publish a series of maps in the run-up to the Dutch election in March 2017. So from a critical reader he turned into a source and now a contributing correspondent.

7. New to the Netherlands: connecting readers and refugees

Some 2000 members of De Correspondent signed up to find a newcomer (a refugee who had arrived in the country sometime in the past year) and then meet up for six monthly questionnaire-based interviews. Nearly 400 pairs of members and newcomers have since formed.

Three months in, the New to the Netherlands project has already led to a wealth of new perspectives and a string of stories – from individual portraits to general pieces on what refugees run up against while trying to start a new life here – all based on the one-on-one interviews conducted by our readers, across the country. Here's [one piece](#), in English.

8. Dementia Diaries

Our Aging Correspondent Heiba Targhi Bakkali wanted to interview people with Dementia, because Dementia is rapidly becoming the #1 disease in the Western world. But how do you interview someone with Alzheimer's, when you can't know for sure whether their recollections and memories are reliable?



She decided to hand out phone-like devices (see photo) to people with dementia, specifically designed to record a diary and send it over to our editors. Around 25 members of De

Correspondent responded to her call because they either have dementia or know someone who does. These readers now contribute to what we call the Dementia Diaries: [\(Dutch only\)](#)