

# Strategic Communication – Contemporary Perspectives



Sharam Alghasi, Ester C. Vanvik, Jens Barland  
and Jesper Falkheimer (Eds.)

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ÇAPPELEN DAMM AKADEMISK



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## CHAPTER 1

# New Perspectives on Strategic Communication

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Delving into the fundamental meaning of what strategic communication is, easily makes one both confused and dazzled. On the surface communication is easy to understand since it refers to almost everything that happens in everyday life; when we talk and listen, when we write, when we express feelings and emotions, we communicate. Communication then is about making sense of the world around us and making sense of our very being in relation to the world around us. However, one should also take into consideration that individuals, organizations, as well as societies and nations, all communicate at different levels in a myriad of ways, in different contexts, with different desires and purposes. We humans, in addition to communicating with one another, also communicate with things, like buildings, bridges and pictures, and we also communicate with dogs, cats and elephants. A natural question to ask in this publication is what sort of communication are we aiming for?

To answer this question, the point of departure is firstly, something as obvious as the relational quality of any communication, and secondly, the desire to achieve something with human communication. The social world is nothing without situations and contexts in which we engage with others to convey messages with the desire to achieve something. When we give gifts to our loved ones, we aim to convey the warm feelings and emotions we have for them. To put it metaphorically, we choose and wrap a gift for someone with the desire that it will convey our love and warmth, and that the person who unwraps the gift will understand our message of love and

warmth. If the recipient understands our intended message of love and warmth, this indicates successful communication. We act, by wrapping a suitable gift, and if the recipient appreciates the received gift, we have achieved our goal with that specific communication. Stuart Hall employs the terms, encoding, packing in a message, and decoding, extracting meaning (Hall, 1980).

This logic should not be limited to the exchange of gifts. When we give a university lecture, we have the desire to make students learn about something. When a newspaper reports on the war in Ukraine, it intends to provide information about the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. When Coca Cola makes an ad, the intention is to make people buy Coca Cola. However, one should take into consideration that regardless of who is communicating: teacher, chief editor of a newspaper, Coca Cola copywriter; communication does not take place in a vacuum, to the contrary, it takes place in a social space governed by complex content and structures. For a teacher, being able to teach students relevant knowledge is only possible if students recognize you as a teacher with relevant knowledge. For a newspaper editor, reporting on the war is only possible if readers recognize the newspaper as trustworthy. For advertisers, a Coca Cola ad is only successful if potential consumers pay attention to the ad and act upon it in a buying situation. In other words, the question of communication is firmly linked to the question of power (Hall, 1997), that is, the power to affect, or to have an effect on, a specific communicative situation or relationship.

The question of power in communication is highly evident in the relationship between media practices and society. A review of media history, for instance, indicates two distinct directions regarding media and society and the ways they influence one another (Gripsrud, 2015; Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Morley, 1992). The review testifies to a media evolution, from a collective-oriented era when media was considered to have total power over individual and societies, for instance injection theories, to the present day, where there is a strong emphasis on an individual-oriented media universe – for instance, online media and mobile communication, where individuals are both producers and consumers of media content (Alghasi, 2023).

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu uses the term symbolic power to describe the relationship between the social world, communication and power. Another core issue raised by Bourdieu regards communication as sharing meaning versus communication as influencing meaning. According to

Bourdieu, symbolic capital is nothing but the power you gain when others recognize your dominance in social relations, for instance in communication when you persuade others that your model of thinking, your logic of action is superior to others (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995). Communication philosopher Jürgen Habermas has another take; in his theory of communicative action, the force of the better argument is the cornerstone of a democratic setting for communication (Habermas, 2001).

This idea of the power to influence, and perhaps persuade, constitutes a fundamental dimension in the field of strategic communication. The word strategic is often equated with doing something in a planned, organized and goal-oriented way. Ideas about strategy stem from centuries-old military theory, and strategy has advanced as a scientific field in business, organization and management since the 1960s. In contemporary research, strategy is viewed as a process that is continuously created and realized through communication, rather than something an organization has. Marchiori and Bulgacov (2012), for instance, argue that strategy is a communicative practice that occurs at different levels in an organization, and is continuously created and reproduced in communications and interactions between people. Accordingly, using strategic communication means that your communication with others has a purpose. But is it possible not to have a purpose when you communicate? That is a valid question, not least if we replace purpose with its synonym intention. At a fundamental level, we can say that language always has a conative or intentional function – when we communicate something we want to share some form of meaning or at least be understood. This intention can include everything from the experience of being listened to, to convincing someone of an opinion. Christensen and Christensen (2022, p. 33) posit that “although strategic communication is not fundamentally different from communication that unfolds in other contexts, its focus on an explicit organizational purpose naturally foregrounds the communicative intentions of the senders, even when these are not achieved as hoped for or expected”.

As an institutionalized academic field, strategic communication is relatively new, with its development mainly taking place during the 2000s, even though strategic communication as such has been applied and researched in different areas for centuries (rhetoric is probably the first strategic communication theory). Academically, the institutionalization of strategic communication emerged as a response to the need for a holistic approach to public relations, organizational communication,

marketing communication and other sub-fields of purposeful communication. Strategic communication is also a trend in the creative industries, where, mainly due to the digital revolution, but also, at a macro level due to a new late modern social order, traditional divisions between functions such as PR, marketing, advertising, corporate communication and management communication have been challenged.

Several definitions of what strategic communication is have been developed. Heath et al. (2018, p. 1) define strategic communication as “(...) purposeful, normative use of functions and discourse processes by organizations to accomplish their missions, visions, and core values”. Another definition says that strategic communication is “(...) the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals” (Zerfass et al., 2018, p. 493). The first definition is a bit limited since it only refers to organizations, while the latter definition has a more open approach, referring to entities, which includes people (such as celebrities or individual politicians) as well as social formations other than organizations. The latter definition is normative, highlighting engagement and conversation, while the first one is more descriptive. In this anthology we combine these two definitions and view strategic communication from an open approach that has a broader focus than just organizations, and from a descriptive rather than normative perspective. In other words, strategic communication may be used for good (such as creating engagement, or positive social or organizational change), or for evil (such as propaganda, disinformation or other forms of distorted communication).

Based on the same reasoning as Falkheimer and Heide (2023), we think that strategic communication can be different things depending on the perspective and context.

First, there is practice. Similar to fields such as organization studies, marketing or social work, practice came first, and academics later. One may ask who executes strategic communication? A narrow answer would be: communication professionals in organizations who are educated and trained to plan and perform strategic communication. But this approach is limiting. We suggest that strategic communication is carried out by a multitude of actors in different social contexts. However, there are limits – strategic communication is conducted in a professional context, not as a private act, and more often than not there is an organization involved.

Second, there is theory. Strategic communication is not a theory, it is an interdisciplinary research field, mainly developed in the social and

behavioral sciences. As a young field, we mainly use and apply relevant theories from other fields or disciplines, such as public relations, organizational communication and marketing communication, but new theories have been developed and more will come.

Third, there is perspective. From an applied and normative standpoint, strategic communication is sometimes interpreted as a quest for managerial integration of communication aiming to increase efficiency. This would suggest that strategic communication is an instrumental approach for corporate communication, and yes, there is research with this in focus, but this is only one out of several possible perspectives. One might just as well apply a critical perspective, analyzing strategic communication as a means for propaganda or exerting power, or an interpretive perspective aiming to increase understanding about how strategic communication actually works. In this anthology, we allow a multitude of perspectives since we think that this will benefit further development of the field.

The anthology is divided into three parts that aim to structure the main focus of the different chapters according to three overall themes: politics and society, markets, and organization and leadership. These broad themes are obviously hard to keep apart, and strategic communication is, in fact, one of the dimensions or forces that connects them. But the themes are still valid as ways of structuring reading and understanding, since they all have different characteristics.

In the first part of the anthology, there are four chapters on societal aspects of strategic communication; two of them use the recent COVID-19 pandemic as empirical cases. First, Sharam Alghasi and Peder Laumb Stampe present a study on immigrants' media consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic in Norway. This topic is of general interest to and high relevance for many institutions at all levels – local, national and global. Through qualitative interviews with 60 immigrants in Norway, and a structured questionnaire, the study explores access to and consumption of different sources of media among the informants during the pandemic. The explorative study reveals that the immigrants use both Norwegian and international media, as well as media from the country of origin. Different from other studies, this study reveals the informants' relatively strong trust in Norwegian media, while they consider “non-Norwegian” media as less credible and reliable. The second chapter presents a study by Audra Diers-Lawsen and Nanna Alida Grit Fredheim on factors influencing vaccine confidence in Norway. They introduce different factors that impact vaccine



attitudes in Norway. Like Alghasi and Laumb Stampe, they emphasize a high degree of institutional trust in Norway under the pandemic. Third, Øystein Pedersen Dahlen looks back at the history of Norwegian strategic communication, or more specifically public relations, with an emphasis on how the Norwegian Public Relations Club was established in alignment with the state in post-war Norway. Dahlen describes how the Club was established as a kind of independent think tank for the Norwegian state in order to control, discuss and define public relations in Norway after the Second World War. This means that many of the core actors had backgrounds from war propaganda, and that this influenced their views on PR, which was argued to be something different from propaganda, a tool for the free world – against authoritarian communism. In the final contribution to this first part, Helge Hiram Jensen and Sigmund Valaker examine social movement communication in a historical conflict situation in Norway, the Alta Dam Conflict 1970–1982, in an area where the Norwegian state overlaps with the Sápmi homeland. This chapter demonstrates that strategic communication does not by default need to be a practice that is used by already powerful actors such as major corporations or governments. Instead, the study analyzes how strategic communication can be used as a tool for the empowerment of the disempowered. By connecting social movement theory and strategic communication research this study integrates both perspectives by one shared approach, “empirically grounded critical theory”, applying the empirical method comparative historical analysis, and suggests some empirically grounded amendments to existing theoretical concepts on social movement communication as democratic innovation.

The second part contains three chapters focusing on markets and business logic in strategic communication. In the first chapter Lene Pettersen and Faltin Karlsen enter the world of dating applications in the contemporary digital business ecosystems that saturate most of our social relations. The study applies critical discourse analysis to explore what 50 dating apps promise users and through which discursive means, as a form of strategic communication. The study reveals two main discourses: a romantic discourse, a narrative about finding the right one, and experiencing great and long-lasting love; and a discourse that presents an optimistic and magical image of technology that will assist the user in finding the “One” with reference to the apps’ successful “matches” in the past. In the second chapter in this part, Anders Nilsen, Jens Barland and Bård Blytt

Sandstad tackle the world of marketing communication and advertising in an analysis of how an advertising movie takes advantage of the public debate. The study analyzes the commercial campaign for the intimate soap *Asan*, which is linked to the public debate about whether porn on the Internet destroys the natural erotic intimacy of young people. Using theories of strategic communication, marketing and visual storytelling, the study analyzes how such an advertising campaign is developed in accordance with ideas of societal responsibility and social norms. The study analyzes both the strategic level and the more tactical means used in the visual storytelling. In the third and final chapter in this second part, Ester Conings Vanvik writes on sustainability communication and how the Norwegian energy corporation Equinor has tried to build and maintain trust through strategic communication in a time of increasing demands on contemporary corporations to adapt to sustainability goals. In the case study the legitimacy strategies of Equinor are analyzed by using critical discourse theory focusing on Equinor's annual reports from 2015 to 2021. The analysis shows how Equinor communicates paradoxes, disclaims liability for the current state of climate change, frequently uses modality (forward-looking statements) and presents an intertwining of performance-focused and sustainable development discourse.

In the final part the main focus is on organization and leadership dimensions of strategic communication. First, Lasha Kavtaradze and Bente Kalsnes deepen our knowledge about how solutions by AI-powered services may be used for countering mis- and disinformation, the dark side of strategic communication in our digital era. In the chapter they explore how six companies working on AI-powered services strategically frame mis/disinformation issues and what sort of moral judgments they use while making diagnostic inferences to find solutions to "information disorder". By applying Entman's framing theory, the study qualitatively analyzes the textual data from the websites of AI-powered services for information verification. The study finds that companies recommend using services identified as automated fact-checking, automated credibility assessment, and automated authenticity assessment. In the second chapter in this part, Tonje Merete Viken and Arne H. Krumsvik examine how various capital forms affect the influence of Norwegian NGOs on Norwegian policies and positions in international processes. As a result of a deductive-inductive process, nine distinct capital forms have been identified that may influence how successful an NGO is in influencing Norwegian positions and policies. Informants in senior

government and political positions have been interviewed to identify and reflect on the relative importance of competence/expertise, field projects and results, size, member activities, media visibility, personal relations, political stance and organizational form. A key finding is that competence and expertise seem to be the most important factors for successful advocacy. There are, however, also indications that government officials and politicians value capital forms somewhat differently. In the final contribution to this part and the anthology, Magne Johannessen and Lene Pettersen present a chapter on management communication from a complexity perspective. Management communication is defined as a form of strategic communication from managers to internal and external target groups where the goal is typically to create visions and establish trust in management. In the chapter they argue that the field of management communication rests on a positivistic foundation inspired by scientific management and system theory thinking, and that there is a need for another approach, found in the perspective of complexity theory. By employing complexity theory, management communication may promote communication themes that nurture people's sense of belonging to and identification with the organization.

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## CHAPTER 2

# Strengthened Trust? Immigrants' Media Consumption During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Norway

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**Abstract:** This chapter is about media-consumption among 60 Norwegian citizens with immigrant backgrounds during the pandemic (March 2020 – July 2021). Through qualitative in-depth interviews, and a structured questionnaire the study explores access to and consumption of different sources of media among the informants during the pandemic. The study investigates ways informants employed various media to orient themselves regarding the pandemic and sought out information about COVID-19 and infection control. The study further looks at what the target group focused on in terms of information and how overall information about the virus impacted their everyday lives. Firstly, a review of the aggregated data reveals a significant multi-consumption of media among the informants, including Norwegian and international media, as well as media from the country of origin. This finding is further confirmation of the marked multi-consumption of media among “immigrants” a number of other studies refer to. Secondly, the study reveals the informants’ relatively strong trust in Norwegian media, while they consider “non-Norwegian” media as less credible and reliable. This finding stands in contrast to studies in which immigrants consider media in their host country to be sources of exclusion and marginalization. Thirdly, the study reveals the relatively significant role that “resource persons”, in form of friends, neighbors, colleagues, etc., played in the informants’ search for relevant information about COVID-19.

**Keywords:** immigrants, pandemic, COVID-19, media consumption, multi-use, trust, premise suppliers

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## Introduction

Since the early 1970s, immigration has been a major source of contention in the Norwegian public debate. Norway has evolved into a multicultural society with a diverse population that has a wide range of interests, perspectives, and affiliations. In today's Norway, approximately 19 percent of the population is classified as having an immigrant background.<sup>1</sup> In Oslo, this share is 34 percent, and in parts of the city such as *Groruddalen*, *Stovner*, and *Søndre Nordstrand*, more than 50% of the population has an immigrant background.<sup>2</sup>

The situation in Norway is similar to elsewhere in Europe, where immigration is often seen as a challenge to the nation-state. Ian Buruma (2006), for example, emphasizes the changing face of Europe caused by immigration, raising the question of how it might be possible to create a *home* for all, despite the existing differences between the inhabitants of a new Europe. Vertovec (2007) launches the term *superdiversity* to describe a distinct diversity in Soho, England where people from many places around the globe live side by side. He raises the question of what *binds* people across different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds to gather around a common *We*. Both Buruma and Vertovec have a clear focus on what might characterize the conditions for a well-functioning European community across all differences.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic made its forceful and unprecedented entry to the global stage and Norwegian society, affecting almost every major aspect of everyday life. The pandemic led to many new challenges that needed to be met, many questions that needed to be reflected on, and develop measures for. One may assume the need for a strong sense of unity, collectivity, and solidarity under a global pandemic. Accordingly, this chapter focuses primarily on media-consumption, and the sense of community among Norwegian citizens with an immigrant background under the pandemic. The aim is to establish a better understanding of the conditions that affect a sense of unity and belonging in Norwegian society, an understanding of *the glue* that bound citizens from different backgrounds together under the pandemic. The chapter explores in what ways media consumption among the informants in the sample can be connected to a) strategic communication between the authorities and citizens with immigrant backgrounds, and b) the experience of trust, solidarity and togetherness among the same target group in an existence dominated by the pandemic.

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1 <https://www.ssb.no/innvandring-og-innvandrerer/faktaside/innvandring>

2 <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/statistikk/befolkning/landbakgrunn/#gref>

## Immigrants' media consumption under the pandemic

Media consumption among immigrants, both inside and outside Norway, is a well-explored topic (Alghasi, 2010, 2012, 2020; Aryal, 2018; Bakøy, 2006; Gillespie, 1995). For instance, research on media consumption has been linked to the question of the exclusion/inclusion of minorities in society at large. This link leads to several interrelated questions: What does media-consumption mean in the everyday life of citizens with immigrant backgrounds? What does media consumption tell us regarding the immigrants' experience of belonging to Norwegian society?

Some studies conclude that media consumption from the *host country* will increase immigrants' understanding of cultural codes and customs and promote language learning (Schudson, 1994). Other studies have concluded that media consumption from the country of origin is an exclusionary practice in relation to the host country, i.e., the more consumption of media from the *country of origin*, the less integrated in the host society (Eckhardt, 1996).

The perspective presented in this chapter does not consider media consumption as a measurable variable of either the exclusion or inclusion of Norwegian citizens with immigrant backgrounds in Norwegian society. This is simply because the picture regarding the question of effect in the relationship between media consumption and formation of meaning is complex and should not be reduced to either the inclusion or exclusion of citizens with immigrant backgrounds into Norwegian society. The idea, however, is that media consumption should preferably be understood as a cultural practice where individuals and groups negotiate *identity*, who they are, and their *position*, where they stand, in relation to society at large (Alghasi, 2009; Mainsah, 2011). Furthermore, the cultural practice of media consumption by immigrants, and the meaning they attribute to media messages is too diverse to be reduced. For example, Alghasi (2009) demonstrates extensive consumption of various media among Norwegian-Iranians, as well as different adaptation strategies in relation to Norwegian society and the experience of belonging as emerged in their media consumption.

## Media consumption and social integration

The question of social integration, solidarity, and sense of belonging has always stood as a fundamental question in social science: How can a society made up of people, preferably with different backgrounds and convictions correspond and hold together? What is *the glue* that binds people together

and forms a community? What are the conditions for the formation of community, togetherness, and sense of belonging?

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) saw society as an organism with various parts and functions as necessary for a functioning society, *organic solidarity*. Furthermore, Durkheim argued that *mechanical solidarity*, a common consciousness, was the key to social cohesion. Cohesion and togetherness were thus the result of functional parts assembled around a collective consciousness. By that he meant that people develop a common consciousness when they perform tasks of the same type. Ferdinand Tönnies (1894–1936) for his part, distinguished between a community based on strong social ties and dependencies between individuals, *Gemeinschaft*, and society built on commercial transactions, *Gesellschaft*. Another key sociologist, Talcott Parsons (1927–1979), was concerned with the integrative, functional role of structures, including value systems, as decisive for the community, and conditions for integration in the community (Aakvaag, 2008).

Ideas about social integration, solidarity, and sense of belonging, as presented above, are well represented in media studies, not least in studies on *audience*, and media consumption. For example, the media has been considered an arena for creating “symbols and sentiments about national identity” (Thompson, 1995, p. 50). A public broadcasting model, for instance, aims to cultivate members of society through, among other things, “transmitting values, habits (...) desirable by an enlightened minority (Alasuutari, 1996, p. 106). It has also been suggested that the media are central in the construction of what Stuart Hall calls the “community of consensus”, i.e., a reference to the media’s homogenizing ability (Hall, 2005, p. 64). Media consumption may be seen as integrative, part and parcel of community-building for individuals and groups with a shared cultural understanding and experience, strengthening their feelings of social belonging to different communities (Gillespie, 1995; Schudson, 1994). Various media events, from major global events such as the Olympic Games, to the daily news coverage can function as integrative in society (Dayan & Katz, 1992).

Following the line of thought presented above, the media consumption of immigrants, may be perceived to have an integrative function, that the media have the potential to absorb immigrants into an imagined “we” in a sense that they, the media, convey values and cultural codes, and immigrants learn about their new surroundings, values and codes, and adopt to new conditions and structures in the host society. As such, the media and media consumption can be considered to be tools for cultural assimilation (Cooley, 1909). Immigrants’ multi-consumption of media has also been a

source of focus, e.g. types of media they consume, and whether they consume media from the country of origin or not. Some studies, for instance, understand immigrants' "home media", meaning media from the country of origin, as inhibiting their integration into host societies (Ekhardt, 1996).

## Methodological-analytical procedure

This chapter aims to establish an understanding of media consumption among Norwegian citizens with immigrant backgrounds under the pandemic. The chapter investigates the interplay between media consumption among a group of Norwegian citizens under the pandemic, and their sense of social integration and belonging, as well their strategies for communication in Norwegian society. In this regard the study relies on data collected among 60 informants. All of the informants are Norwegian citizens with immigrant backgrounds, living in Oslo and the surrounding area.

**Table 1** Key information about the informants in the sample. N = 60

Variable	Variable groups	Numeric value
Gender	Female	20
	Male	40
Age	18–25 years old	4
	26–35 years old	17
	36–45 years old	22
	46–55 years old	9
	56–66 years old	6
	over 67 years old	2
	More than 12 years	34
Education	12 years	15
	0–7 years	9
	No answer	2
Years lived in Norway	0–7 years	16
	8–14 years	23
	15–25 years	13
	over 25 years	8
Infection pressure (based on country of origin). <sup>3</sup>	Low	21
	Middle	18
	High	21

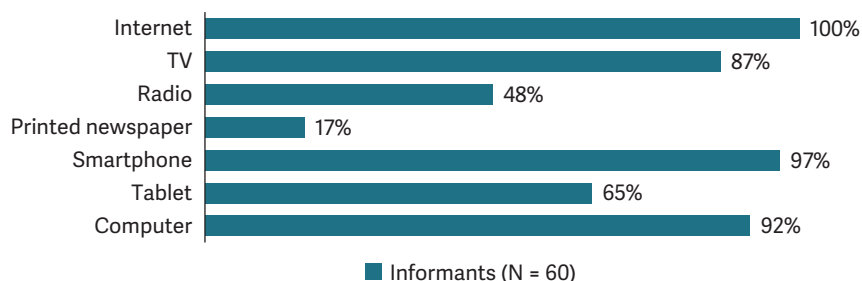
3 Low = includes countries in Western Europe, Brazil, Philippines, Thailand, and Chile. Middle = Syria, Vietnam, Iran, Nigeria, India, Bulgaria, Poland, Algeria, H = Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Eritrea, Morocco, Iraq, Somalia.



The data collection for the study is two-folded: initially, the informants were asked to answer a set of standardized questions about access to different types of media, their actual media consumption in relation to content, quantity, and the context of their consumption. Here, the results are illustrated by several tables, exclusively presenting a univariate frequency distribution among the informants. Furthermore, this stage made it possible to identify different types of media consumers, and accordingly invite informants with different media-orientations for the next stage in the data-collection process, namely qualitative in-depth interviews. By conducting interviews, informants could be asked about topics such as their media preferences, as well their interpretation of media content relevant for the study. The presentation of data will firstly emphasize which media and content the informants in this study have access to. The second part of the analysis will be linked to media consumption during the pandemic, with a focus on a) types of media consumed, and b) what the informants' media consumption during the pandemic tells us.

## Media consumption: A portrait

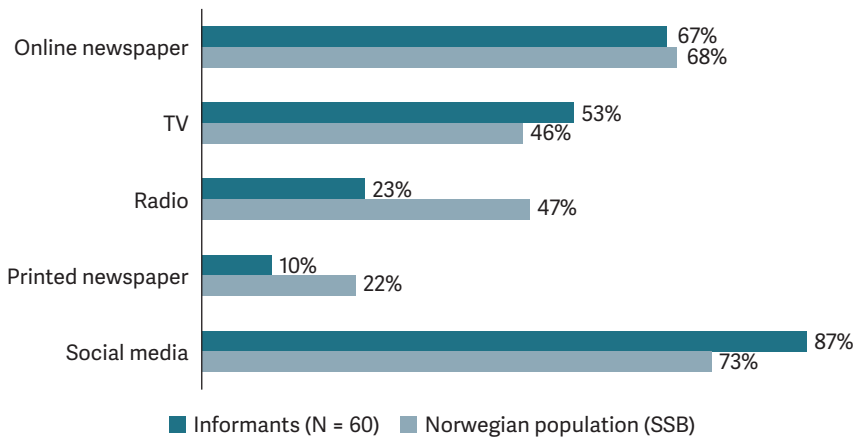
There are several elements that characterize media consumption among the informants in this study. One element is related to the *various media informants have access to*. Norway is a country with a widespread media landscape, and the majority of the population has access to a range of traditional and digital media. The same is the case with the informants in this study. Figure 1 illustrates the informants' access to various media at home.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 1** Percentage of informants with access to various forms of media at home.

<sup>4</sup> We do not have any directly comparable figures for Norway's population in general, but statistics on use (cf. Figure 2) indicate that access is relatively similar.

Secondly, it is clear that *online media* are the most important media for the informants. The only non-online medium that the informants describe as important is television; however, television viewing appears to be a far more passive way to access information than the other media, according to the interviews. There are also more people amongst the informants who state that they watch TV broadcasts and TV clips from foreign channels online.



**Figure 2** Percentage of informants who use the following medias daily, compared to the general population.<sup>5</sup>

As illustrated above, the informants, as a group or individually, to a greater extent than the rest of Norway's population, state that they consume social media on a daily basis (difference of 15 percentage points). These tendencies were further confirmed during the qualitative in-depth interviews, where online media appears as an integral part of the informants' everyday life, creating a commonality. Informants describe online media as flexible and more suited to their needs; online media are always available, you can "check your phone" when you get up, on the bus, at lunch, on the toilet, when you're bored, before going to bed, and so on. Online media have a presence throughout the day in a way that traditional media do not.

<sup>5</sup> Sources: Norsk mediebarometer 2021, Statistisk sentralbyrå; Bruk av IKT i husholdningen (2019), Statistisk sentralbyrå.

Most of the informants point to the smartphone as crucial for keeping in touch with their country of origin on different levels. They keep in touch with friends and family through chat apps, follow famous people and media channels on social media, read online newspapers, and orient themselves regarding important political or social issues. This portrayal of informants and their consumption of online content on smartphones is confirmed in other research, among others, research on refugees and their media consumption. Smartphones seem to be crucially important for people who are on the run, or refugees and asylum seekers, with great need to update themselves with relevant information (Eide, 2019; Mancini et al., 2019). However, it is important to emphasize that the samples in Mancini's and Eide's studies are limited to refugees, but the importance of smartphones for keeping in touch with family and friends in the country of origin is relevant for immigrants regardless of their residence status.

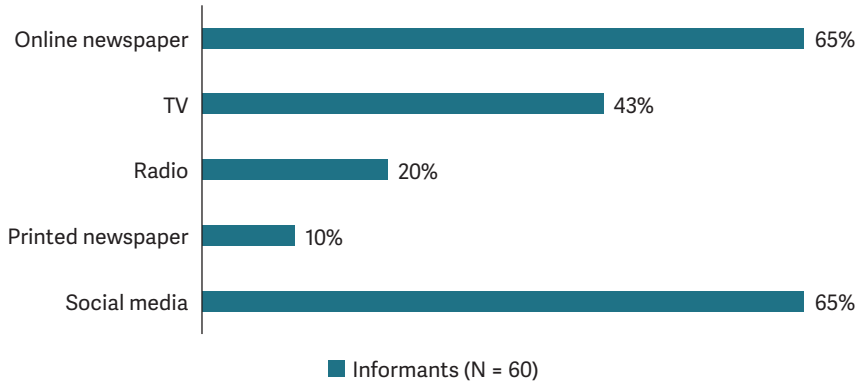
For many, social media are the arenas where they establish a sort of virtual relationship with others and engage with the exchange and sharing of relevant information, experiences, and entertainment. There are many who state that they mainly keep up to date with news from their country of origin through media such as *WhatsApp*, *Facebook Messenger* or other similar chat applications that are popular in their country of origin. The informants often use several such media to keep in touch with people in different countries. In this way, the informants illustrate the importance of media in the formation of transnational and diasporic exchange. Social media, and particularly *Facebook*, are important sources for the informants' acquisition of information and news. It is difficult to say anything about the extent of the news the informants consume through social media, but what we observe is that many are unsure of exactly who publishes what they read, while others consciously follow actors such as *Aftenposten*, the *BBC* or smaller actors who publish news stories about more specific topics.

Many of the informants are active users of *YouTube*. The most common use of *YouTube* is for entertainment and learning, including series and films from the country of origin, documentaries, resources for learning Norwegian and hobby-related content about, among other things, gardening and cooking. *YouTube* is also an important source of news and information about the country of origin. Many state that they spend a lot of

time on *YouTube* to find out about news and information related to various topics including politics and economics, or other global and local topics.

To a large extent, the informants' consumption of media mirrors what we see in the general Norwegian population when it comes to consumption of online media compared to traditional media. Online newspapers and social media are clearly the most important form of media the informants consume, while more traditional media such as TV and paper newspapers are less popular (SSB, 2021). It is nevertheless worth noting that the proportion of informants who state that they read newspapers and/or listen to the radio daily is roughly half the Norwegian average. It is difficult to say whether this is an indication that the immigrant population in Norway has a clearer preference for online media than the rest of the population, or whether it is a consequence of barriers, such as language, that exist for immigrants in accessing Norwegian media.

Thirdly, the informants appear to be very much *information-oriented*. They are highly exploratory in their relationship with the media, something that is illustrated by their marked search for news regardless of consuming online- or traditional media. It is also worth adding that the informants' interest and desire for information is not limited to news, but also largely includes niche and hobby information. This orientation towards information and news is further evident in the qualitative in-depth interviews where an orientation towards entertainment and related themes emerged as a secondary focus. Obviously, the informants seek out entertainment while consuming media, but time spent on, or attention paid to entertainment is significantly less than the time and attention they pay to information and news. To put it differently, the attitudes of informants towards entertainment and information appear to be in no way equal – neither in terms of time, nor in terms of attention. In fact, the qualitative interviews also reveal a strong tendency among informants to *monitor* daily news and current affairs across different media. Several of the informants go even further and follow individual journalists, and smaller media houses or professionals that focus on particular topics the informants find important and attractive. This tendency applies in particular to those who seek information from their country of origin and is explained by the fact that they do not always trust the larger media corporations when it comes to sensitive topics such as conflicts.

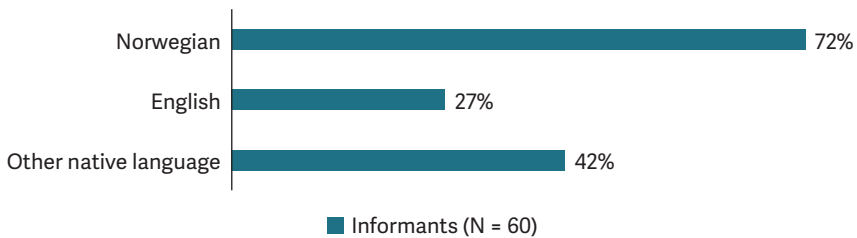


**Figure 3** Percentage of informants who use the following media daily – to follow news.

Fourthly, the informants prove to be *multi-consumers* of media, i.e., they often consume different media sources, among others, media from their country of origin, media from their host country, and international media sources. This multi-consumption is an exemplary illustration of *transnational practice*, where citizens with immigrant backgrounds make use of Norwegian, diasporic, international, and country of origin media sources. The informants consume many of the most common Norwegian sources of news, such as online newspapers, especially *VG*, *Aftenposten* and *NRK*'s online news, but in addition they often consume foreign online newspapers such as the BBC or newspapers from the country of origin. The in-depth interviews reveal that the majority of informants regularly follow non-Norwegian media sources. This orientation, however, according to the University of Oxford's *2022 Digital News Report* is relatively unusual in Norway since the majority of the population in Norway consumes mostly Norwegian media, either traditional or online.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, while the same report indicates that the Norwegian population, to a great degree, follows their local newspaper, this study indicates far less consumption of local newspapers among Norwegian citizen with immigrant backgrounds. This difference in consumption of local newspapers is probably linked to the informants' views that the Norwegian media landscape is distinctively locally focused, and therefore does not meet the need for informants to catch up on more international and global topics.

6 <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022>

Obviously, this multi-consumption of media among the informants is a highly complex phenomenon (Alghasi, 2009). However, to mention an important dimension this study reveals, there is a clear interplay between the consumption of online newspapers among the informants and their language skills. Among those who are relatively good at Norwegian, the proportion who read online newspapers is very high, but many of the informants do not master the language well enough to read and understand online newspapers, despite the fact that they may have lived in Norway for quite some time. Traditional media appear to be even less relevant among the informants in this survey compared to the Norwegian population in general. Several of the informants express a preference for traditional media but experience that a language barrier prevents them from consuming Norwegian traditional media to the degree they wish.



**Figure 4** Percentage of informants who follow news in the following languages daily.

Multi consumption of media by informants may be linked to new forms of communication caused by the growing impact of online media, as well as profound changes online media represents compared to traditional media. For instance, while the consumption of traditional media is largely limited to one geographical area at a specific time, online media enable immigrants to engage in diasporic and transnational communication without geographical and temporal limitations. Many of the informants have a strong international orientation and are eager to follow news and current affairs in the country of origin as well as on the global scene. This finding is quite consistent with similar studies that emphasize immigrants' marked search for information and news on many different media sources in Norway, the country of origin, and elsewhere (Alghasi, 2009).

Several informants reveal that their media habits and consumption link their international media-orientation to their "media socialization" in their past, and how they have grown up with media interactions characterized

by an international focus, to a much greater extent than what they find in the Norwegian media. Informants are great consumers of media such as *Al-Jazeera*, *BBC World* and *CNN*. These news channels have no exclusively national focus and cover regional or global issues to a significant degree. Several of the informants reveal that their international media orientation has led to a perception of local news as being more often politicized or otherwise unreliable. Other informants state that their international orientation is related to their view of Norwegian media as being strongly local.

The importance of being a multi-consumer of media in the lives of immigrants is a well-explored topic. For instance, Annabelle Sreberny criticizes the perspective where immigrants are seen as *either* consumers of media from the country of origin, *or* from the country they live in, the host country. Instead, she operates with a “both-and” perspective, i.e., that immigrants consume media from both the country of origin, the host country, and elsewhere, emphasizing the transnational nature of media consumption among immigrants (Sreberny, 2005). Multiple consumption of media is characterized as crucial for maintaining source-critical quality among immigrants (Alghasi, 2009; Sreberny, 2005). This source-critical quality is strongly present among the informants in this study, and clearly evident in the in-depth interviews.

## Media consumption during the pandemic

So far, we have presented some key elements that characterize the informants’ media consumption. As discussed above, the informants mostly consume online media, they are information-oriented, and are often multi-consumers of media. These findings are in line with other studies on Norwegian citizens with immigrant backgrounds (Alghasi, 2009b; Aryal, 2018; Mainsah, 2011). In what follows, we take a closer look at the informants’ media consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, the focus is twofold, where we explore a) strategic communication between the authorities and citizens with immigrant backgrounds, and b) the experience of trust, solidarity and togetherness among the informants towards Norwegian society under the pandemic.

In the in-depth interviews, the informants expressed concern about the pandemic. They often highlighted Norwegian media sources, particularly sources such as *NRK*, *TV2* and *VG*, as their primary sources for obtaining information about the pandemic through the Norwegian media.

In addition, they consumed international media sources such as *Al-Jazeera*, *BBC* and *CNN*, and media from the country of origin. Many stated that they got information about the pandemic through social media, especially *Facebook*, but *Instagram* and *YouTube* were also important news channels among the informants. During the in-depth interviews, we asked the informants whether their media habits had changed during the pandemic. Several of the informants stated that they updated themselves on news and information to a greater extent under the pandemic than before. These informants were mostly information-oriented individuals before the pandemic as well, however, they stated that during the pandemic they were much more concerned with news than before. They stated that they were mostly concerned about getting information and news about the number of infected, hospitalized and dead, while gradually their focus shifted to information about travel rules and vaccines.

Some of the informants revealed that the pandemic led to them searching for new media sources, usually online media. One informant told us that after the pandemic, he often used the municipality's website, which he had never used before. This sort of statement, as another informant stated, is interesting since it indicates a new type of involvement and interaction with Norwegian society and media than before the pandemic. When speaking about new media habits under the pandemic, several informants revealed that they searched for information about the coronavirus from public websites such as *helsenorge.no*<sup>7</sup> and *fhi.no*.<sup>8</sup>

Norwegian media, online or traditional, was the most important source for information for the informants during the pandemic. The informants expressed a great deal of trust in the Norwegian media regarding information about the pandemic. This is in line with the trust the overall population in Norway demonstrated towards Norwegian media during this period.<sup>9</sup> Informants in this study indicated that they felt that the Norwegian authorities handled the crisis in a good way, and that they received good information from the media. One informant pointed out that he gained more trust in the Norwegian media during the pandemic. Consumption of Norwegian media has also left its mark on informants with shorter periods of residence in Norway. Some stated that during the

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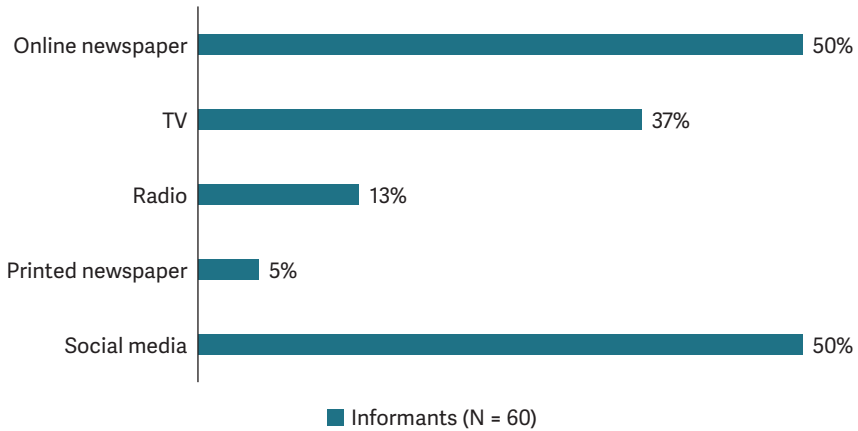
7 *helsenorge.no* is a national public health information service.

8 *fhi.no* is the website of the National Institute of Public Health.

9 <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022>



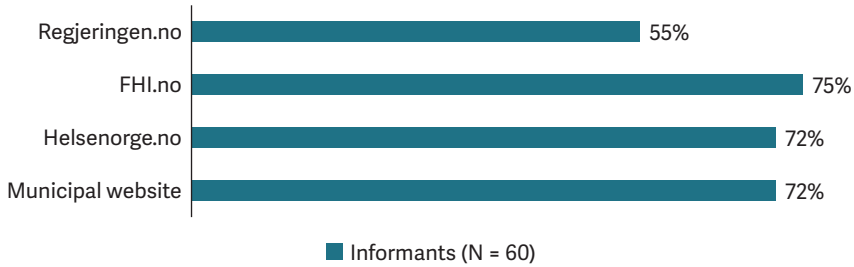
pandemic they accessed more Norwegian media, either because they came to Norway during the pandemic, or because they sensed a progression in their Norwegian language abilities as a result of greater consumption of Norwegian media, further resulting in a better understanding of the content of Norwegian media.



**Figure 5** Percentage of informants who use the following media daily – to follow news on COVID-19.

## Searching for public information on COVID-19

There are several important tendencies that characterize the informants' search for COVID-19 topics. The majority of informants were aware of and sought out information from the Norwegian public authorities, including *regjeringen.no*, *helsenorge.no*, *fhi.no*, as well as relevant websites in the municipalities and districts where they live. However, there seems to be a correlation between the length of time informants had lived in Norway at the time of the pandemic, and consumption of Norwegian public websites among the informants; the longer they had lived in Norway, the greater the consumption of Norwegian sources of information on COVID-19. For those with shorter stays in Norway, there was less consumption of Norwegian sources. However, those informants with shorter stays in Norway stated that they did follow public press conferences about the coronavirus situation in Norway. The press conferences were interpreted directly into various languages, including Arabic, English, Polish, Russian, Somali, Tigrinya and Urdu. The informants described this service as being very useful.



**Figure 6** Percentage of informants who have used the following public websites to find information on COVID-19.

## Language in media consumption

For several of the informants, language was a significant barrier to keeping up with the news and understanding the information provided by the Norwegian media and authorities about COVID-19. This language barrier does not necessarily apply only to those with the weakest knowledge of Norwegian. It is also a significant factor for several of the informants who command the language relatively well, but not fluently. One of the informants, who apparently speaks and writes Norwegian well and had no problems conducting the interview in Norwegian, illustrated this challenge as follows: they are fully able to read a Norwegian newspaper and understand all the content, but they must actively read each sentence and cannot just look at a front page and acquire an immediate impression of the news picture. This means that they often miss out on important news even if they read the newspapers daily. Some of the informants with weaker Norwegian skills said that they became insecure and scared when they did not understand what was happening, and several said that they got help from family or friends to translate and understand information about the pandemic. It was also mentioned that children often functioned as translators for their parents, since children often have better Norwegian language skills than their parents.

## Trust in information from social relationships

The ground-breaking *two-step flow of communication* by Lazarsfeld (1948) emphasizes the importance of social relationships to process and convey media messages to us in a credible and comprehensible way. The qualitative in-depth interviews in this study confirmed the important role of social relationships among the informants regarding the search for relevant and

important information about COVID-19. In many cases, the informants demonstrated a high level of trust in certain social relations, groups and individuals, when obtaining what the informants interpreted as relevant information about COVID-19. For some informants, it was people they knew well, for example family members who had a better understanding of the Norwegian language and healthcare system, while for other informants it was colleagues or people who enjoy public respect and credibility, for example doctors on *TikTok* or *YouTube* such as Wasim Zahid.<sup>10</sup> One of the informants described the importance of trust in an individual person in the following way: “My family contacts me all the time to ask me about news. They know Norwegian but trust more that I can find out what is correct”.

Many of the informants who were in school, often as part of their immigration process, mentioned their teachers as an important source of information about the coronavirus, such as information about infection and prevention measures such as washing hands and keeping a safe distance. They also received help from their teachers on how to look up information on the coronavirus situation. One informant said that previously he found news and information about the coronavirus on Facebook, but after learning about source criticism at school, he used Norwegian online newspapers and public websites to check that the information was correct. Many of the informants also highlighted the workplace as an important source of information about the coronavirus situation and which rules applied. One informant felt that there were often rumors about changes and new measures, but that he did not trust them until they were confirmed at his workplace.

## Media and trust

As described above, many informants consumed Norwegian media sources, including Norwegian public information sources, during the pandemic. This is an indication that the informants demonstrate a high degree of trust towards Norwegian sources, something that was also confirmed in the qualitative in-depth interviews. Informants often singled out Norwegian online newspapers, or Norwegian TV channels such as *NRK* as being highly credible. One of the informants pointed out that *NRK* is a state channel available to everyone, without commercial interests, so that it is

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<sup>10</sup> Wasim Zahid is a Norwegian physician, author, politician and YouTuber who has made an effort to communicate medical advice to people with immigrant backgrounds.

not dependent on clicks and likes for the information they share, and that she therefore had confidence in the channel. Several informants described [helsenorge.no](http://helsenorge.no) and [fhi.no](http://fhi.no) as the most credible sources since these sites convey information from professionals and responsible authorities.

In their accounts on their media consumption during the pandemic, the informants expressed a sense of trust towards Norwegian media, and not least, Norwegian society. They perceive Norwegian society as a society where the population generally trusts public institutions such as the state and the media, and because of this, members of society are often inclined to follow the rules, including rules and restrictions imposed during the pandemic that they did not always agree with. This view was clearly expressed when one of the informants referred to Erna Solberg, Norway's prime minister during the pandemic, saying "[When Erna Solberg] tells us how to handle the situation, not everyone agrees, but almost everyone listens and follows the advice".

Studies such as Helliwell et al. (2016) indicate a greater degree of trust among immigrants in countries with a high degree of trust. Röder and Mühlau's study (2012) also indicates that immigrants often demonstrate a greater trust in institutions in "host societies" than their countries of origin. In their accounts on trust towards Norwegian institutions during the pandemic, informants often made negative comparisons to governing institutions and media sources in their countries of origin. Often, they linked this lack of trust to a lack of democratic institutions in their countries of origin, either because of undemocratic governments, or weakly developed management systems. This relationship of trust between people and institutions in Norway, the informants insisted, stands in sharp contrast with their relationship towards public institutions in their country of origin, which they do not perceive as benefiting the population. Although this is not always the case, there seems to be an attitude among the population in the countries of origin that one does not always follow rules and recommendations set by the authorities. This attitude results in the informants being constantly worried about their near and dear ones in their countries of origin. Even under the pandemic when they did not always understand how all of the rules and restrictions applied to them, they still trusted that the "system" was looking after them in Norway. This attitude is clearly illustrated by one of the informants: "[...] I have been thinking a lot about my family and friends at home. There is a completely different structure for dealing with the pandemic there compared to Norway".

The informants showed reflection regarding their own media consumption. Many of the informants consumed a variety of media sources, online, or traditional, Norwegian, international or from their country of origin, and drew comparisons between these sources. In the process, the informants gained a positive view of Norway's handling of the pandemic, something they believed was reflected in the media's coverage of the pandemic situation in Norway.

## **Strengthened community in times of crisis**

The informants' trust in the Norwegian media's communications on the pandemic gives good reason for reflection. A number of studies confirm a complex relationship between immigrants, their media consumption, and their relationship with the society they have moved to and are a part of. For example, the media consumption of immigrant populations has often been linked to questions of inclusion and exclusion, identity and belonging (Alghasi, 2009, 2023a, 2023b; Anthias, 1998; Gillespie, 1995; Mainsah, 2011; Nikunen, 2008). Several empirical studies reveal immigrants' skeptical relationship with the media. For example, in his study of Norwegian-Iranians and their media consumption in Norway, Alghasi (2009) highlights different ways of relating to Norwegian media. Several Norwegian-Iranians seem to develop a sort of *mental surveillance system* through which they evaluate media narratives, and they employ these evaluations in their processes of identity-work, leading to a sense of inclusion/exclusion. Alghasi's study reveals that in a considerable number of cases, Norwegian-Iranians experience Norwegian media as stereotyping and excluding. In another study, Nikunen (2008) focuses on Finnish school pupils with immigrant backgrounds and their relationship to Finnish media. According to Nikunen, these students experience Finnish media as strongly stereotyping, discriminatory and exclusionary. Trebbe and Schoenhagen (2011) examine the relationship between various Swiss citizens with immigrant backgrounds and the Swiss media. They underline the informants' experience of strongly exclusionary Swiss media practices. They conclude that: "A high discrepancy between the desire for more presence and participation on the one hand, and the wish to stand in the spotlight less often, on the other hand". (Trebbe & Schoenhagen, 2011, p. 1).

All of the studies above, as well as a large number of other studies, concern the media consumption of citizens with immigrant backgrounds in

multi-ethnic landscapes such as Norway. However, the study in this chapter demonstrates that media consumption during the pandemic had its own complexity. The COVID-19 pandemic was somehow *egalitarian*, i.e., a democratic condition in a sense that all Norwegians, regardless of background, were exposed to COVID-19 and its consequences.

In *Flerkulturelle scenarioer: Mur, bro eller båt?* (2023b)<sup>11</sup> Alghasi and Eirksen present three different scenarios, each representing an approach to dealing with multicultural Norway, a Norway comprised of citizens with variety of cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. They suggest that these three scenarios are types of narratives based on ideologically rooted representations that connect the past, present and future. These narratives about possible futures begin with descriptions of a historical course that has led to a specific present, and with such a starting point, it becomes possible to describe a scenario about a future Norway (Alghasi & Eriksen, 2023b, pp. 15–16).

Roughly described, in the first scenario *wall builders* indicates a practice, which is to construct an invisible wall against those outside, to protect Norway and Norwegianness against dangers caused by immigrants and immigration. A basic belief is that life is dangerous and threatened by “foreigners”, who are considered to be incompatible with Norwegian institutions, values and ways of being. In the second scenario, *bridge builders* represent in many ways the opposite of wall builders. Bridge builders assume that differences exist between Norwegians and immigrants, and they see these differences as a challenge for the formation of community, but believe that these contradictions can be resolved. This scenario is often referred to as *multiculturalism*, a term that gives different but related views on differences and how they should be handled. All forms of multiculturalism accept that society consists of several cultural groups that differ from each other in certain ways – language, religion, traditions. In this context, bridge building refers to a specific approach to multiculturalism in which one relies on the Norwegian welfare ideals of equal rights and duties for citizens regardless of background. The task then becomes to build a bridge between “us” and “the others”, to increase understanding and tolerance for each other’s ways of being, and to reduce social differences so that minorities can also be full participants in society, but often on the premises of the larger society (Alghasi & Eriksen, 2023b).

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11 Translated as “Multicultural Scenarios: Wall, Bridge or Boat?”

Finally, in a third scenario, *boat building*, there are *boat builders* who question the previous two scenarios. Boat builders problematize the current mechanisms in the two preceding scenarios. According to boat builders, building walls or bridges ultimately leads to reductionist categories about *us* and *them*; bridge building leads to a reinforcement of boundaries they wish to weaken, while wall building regards ethnic, cultural and religious diversity as dysfunctional and a threat to Norway and Norwegianness. Boat builders do not want to build walls, nor do they see the need to build bridges as we all live on the same island. The challenges, in a boat building scenario, are related to social inequality, both globally and nationally, and the criteria for participation in an imagined community such as Norway. For boat builders, the fundamental normative basis is the equality of all people and the vital aim that everyone, regardless of where they were born, has the right to a meaningful life (Alghasi & Eriksen, 2023b).

Boat builders place the greatest emphasis on social integration, as opposed to cultural equality, as a condition for a well-functioning society. (Alghasi & Eriksen, 2023b). To put it more directly, we are all in the *same boat*, regardless of background. Returning to Durkheim, we are reminded of the integrative function extraordinary conditions can have on individuals and societies. Durkheim believed that times of crisis such as war or poverty and economic hardship can result in increased solidarity and sense of belonging to a community. The pandemic seems to have increased a sense of trust, community, and togetherness among a number of the informants in this study. The informants clearly expressed a sense of trust in the Norwegian media and the authorities regarding their different needs, from information to treatment linked to the pandemic. This integrative dimension of the global pandemic should be explored further.

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## CHAPTER 3

# Designing Strategic Communication Messages for Health in a High Trust Society: Analyzing the Factors Behind Vaccine Confidence in Norway

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**Abstract:** The chapter aimed to identify factors influencing vaccine confidence in Norway. The findings revealed that several key factors explain more than 50% of the variation in vaccine attitudes offering valuable insights for policy and communication strategies to support vaccination programs. The study identified three noteworthy findings:

1. Age and childhood vaccination status were significant demographics affecting vaccine confidence. Younger individuals who did not receive childhood vaccinations expressed lower confidence in vaccines than older individuals who did.
2. Building health efficacy and maintaining the credibility of official sources of health information were found to be crucial for boosting vaccine confidence.
3. Two primary factors were found to be driving vaccine confidence in Norway: appealing to collectivist values and trust in science.

The research emphasized that Norway's institutional trustworthiness remained positive despite the COVID-19 pandemic and it highlighted that there was no significant difference between vaccine confidence and skepticism in the population. This suggests that skepticism should not be equated with vaccine hesitancy. Moreover, the findings suggest that public engagement and credible information are essential – even in high-trust societies like Norway.

**Keywords:** vaccination, Norway, high trust society, COVID-19, vaccine confidence

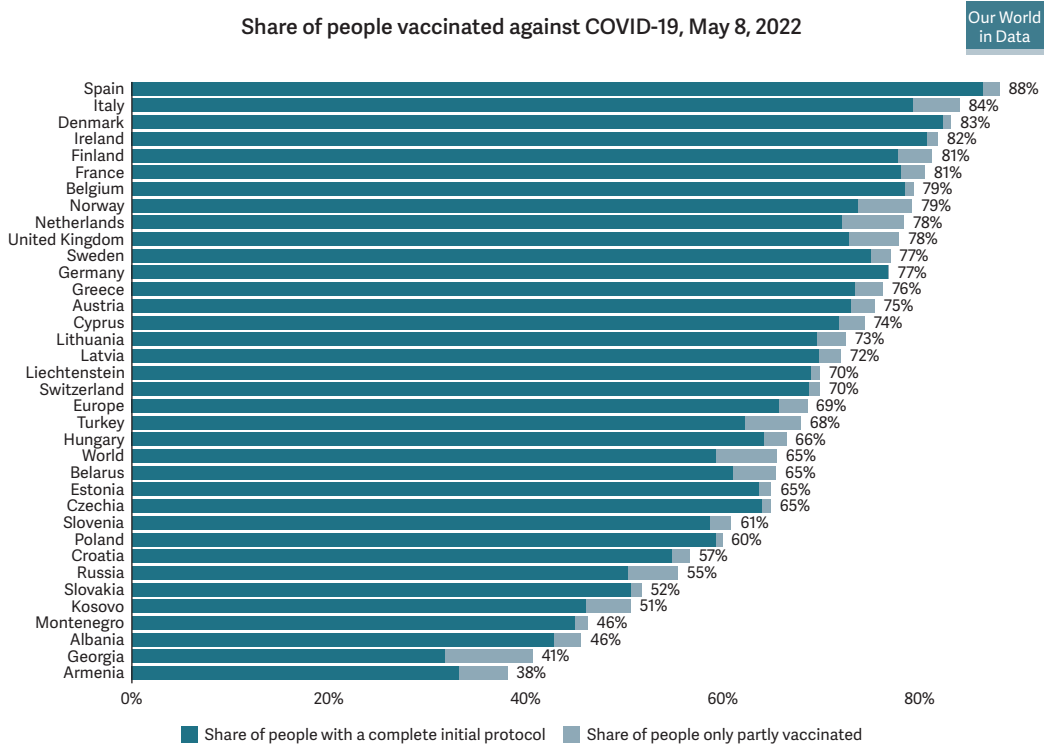
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The COVID-19 pandemic and the global priority placed on the development and distribution of vaccines to combat the spread and severity of the pandemic has again brought the topic of vaccination hesitancy to the forefront of people's minds. Despite the strategic communication efforts on the part of global public health agencies for vaccination, vaccine hesitancy was listed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as one of the top 10 threats to human health before the pandemic began (WHO, 2019). Within the COVID-19 context, reducing vaccine hesitancy through effective strategic communication campaigns has been identified as one of the critical threats to managing the disease globally (Palamenghi et al., 2020). Vaccine hesitancy and the anti-vaccination movement are often colloquially treated as more alike, with hesitant people being viewed as a milder version of the "anti-vaxxers". The "anti-vax" movement is often characterized as representing people on the fringe of society who believe in conspiracy theories and have an inherent institutional distrust (Allington et al., 2021; Featherstone & Zhang, 2020; Jennings et al., 2021; Sallam et al., 2021). Yet, the face of the vaccine hesitant are often parents who have concerns about vaccination safety for their children as well as ethnic minorities and people from poorer families (Poltorak et al., 2005; Robertson et al., 2021). Other research also identifies those who are younger, female, and consume higher amounts of information from social media as being more vaccine hesitant (Allington et al., 2021), so the assumed equivalence between them is both unfair and inaccurate.

This suggests there is a fundamental difference between people who are ideologically against vaccination (Kennedy, 2019; Wollebæk et al., 2022) and those who might be hesitant to take a particular vaccine out of concerns about safety, testing, and effectiveness (Kricorian et al., 2022; Mesch & Schwirian, 2015). Also, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the race to find, test, and roll-out vaccinations globally, we must acknowledge that the uncertainty of the situation and uniqueness of this experience might have changed people's perceptions of risk, consumption of information, and confidence in vaccination as well (Bendau et al., 2021; Breakwell, 2000; Breakwell et al., 2021; Breakwell & Jaspal, 2020). Therefore, it may be more precise to think of vaccine hesitancy in terms of the confidence that people have in taking vaccines. This is also aligned with the significant role that efficacy plays in health decision-making (While, 2021). In a "post-COVID" context, the better question to ask may be what drives vaccine confidence rather than vaccine hesitancy. *Therefore, the first objective in this chapter is to identify key factors influencing Norwegian attitudes about vaccines.*

Globally, vaccine attitudes are well studied with research emerging in large cross-national comparisons (Cataldi & O’Leary, 2021; Streefland et al., 1999; Wagner et al., 2019) and in a variety of countries around the world both before the COVID-19 pandemic (Dubé et al., 2013; Kennedy, 2019; Sobo, 2015) and certainly after (Allington et al., 2021; Ihlen, 2020; Weinzierl & Harabagiu, 2022). In a 67-nation study, Larson et al. (2016) found that while vaccine confidence varied between countries it was generally correlated with perceptions of importance, safety, and religious compatibility. Yet, they also found that, as a region, Europe had the lowest confidence in vaccine safety. The evidence about vaccine confidence globally is mixed; likewise, the uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine has been mixed – even in Europe (see Figure 1) vaccination rates for COVID-19 range from 88% in Spain to 38% in Armenia. Regionally, Northern Europe on average has a meaningfully higher vaccination rate for COVID-19 compared to the



**Figure 1** Summary of European Vaccination Rates Reported Relative to Population.

Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data, CC BY

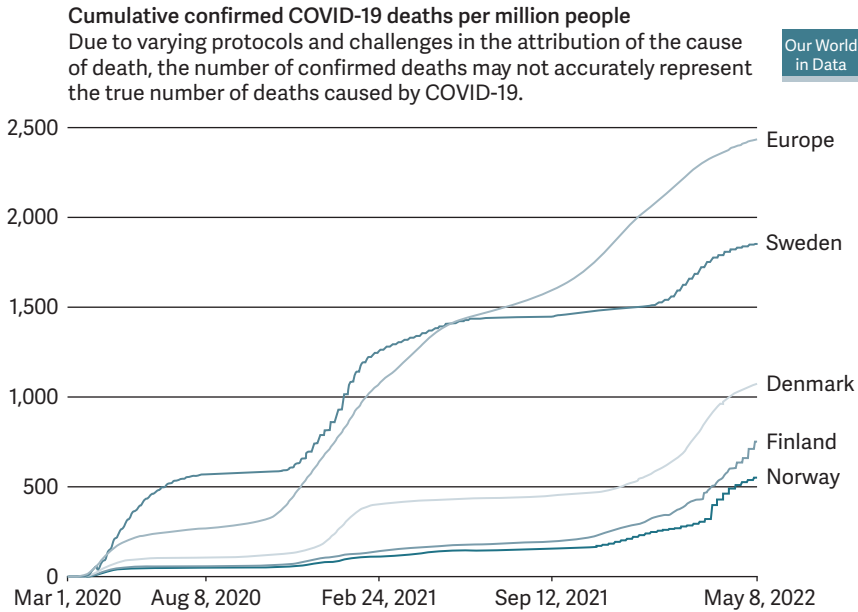
Note: Alternative definitions of a full vaccination, e.g. having been infected with SARS-CoV-2 and having 1 dose of a 2-dose protocol, are ignored to maximize comparability between countries.

rest of Europe and in the Nordics (i.e., Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) the vaccination rate has been very high with an average of 80% of the population vaccinated against COVID-19. *Thus, the second primary objective of this chapter is to make recommendations about possible theoretical perspectives to guide communication strategy about vaccines in a Norwegian context.*

Similarly, the Nordics experienced significantly fewer deaths per million compared to the European average throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 2). In part, this can be attributed to high levels of compliance with government recommendations and rules throughout the pandemic (Helsingen et al., 2020) as well as a general willingness to follow government and health agency recommendations for both pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions that were introduced throughout the pandemic (Helsingen et al., 2020; Juranek & Zoutman, 2021). Though there were significant differences in the death rates in Sweden that are attributable to less severe lockdown restrictions and more open government recommendations (Helsingen et al., 2020; Juranek & Zoutman, 2021), the principle that remains consistent across the Nordics is that they are high-trust societies (Andersen, 2018). Anderson (2018) points out that Nordic societies express the highest levels of institutional trust in the world, high levels of social cohesion, low corruption, and high levels of equality.

The conditions surrounding the pandemic, cultural attitudes, low COVID-19 death rates, and high vaccination rates make the Nordic region important for understanding positive vaccine attitudes. We suggest there are important lessons that can be learned for other countries about creating the conditions for improving health outcomes. Norway has the second-best vaccination rate in the Nordics, lowest number of COVID-19 related deaths, and highest levels of institutional trust (Norge, 2021) which makes it a potential model for building vaccine confidence. Traditionally, Norway has high levels of routine vaccination and especially high childhood vaccination rates (FHI, 2017; NIPH, 2022). There are also a number of recent studies that have explored vaccine “hesitancy” in Norway both independent of and related to the COVID-19 pandemic finding that demographics (Ebrahimi et al., 2021) concerns over vaccine safety and efficacy (Cataldi & O’Leary, 2021; Ebrahimi et al., 2021), vaccine-related information consumption (Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Fues Wahl et al., 2022), immigrant status (or family of immigrants) (Jenness et al., 2021; Skjesol & Tritter, 2022), perceptions of equity and social solidarity

(Skjesol & Tritter, 2022), institutional trust (Norge, 2021; Skjesol & Tritter, 2022), and values or ideological culture (Wollebæk et al., 2022) all have influenced Norwegian participants' attitudes and/or behavioral intention to be vaccinated. Yet, most studies focus on attitudes of vaccine rejection instead of confidence.



**Figure 2** Cumulative COVID-19 Deaths Per Million in Scandinavia Compared to Europe. Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data, CC BY

It is also evident that the Norwegian studies have not explored the predictive factors together nor have they explored other important factors like health efficacy (While, 2021) or attitudes about science (Palamenghi et al., 2020; Poltorak et al., 2005; Thaker, 2021), which previous research has found to influence vaccine attitudes in other countries like New Zealand, Belgium, and the UK.

Once a more complete picture of the factors influencing vaccine confidence are identified, then the question of how they inform communication strategy becomes relevant. Communication is inexorably linked to the processes of creating or overcoming vaccine hesitancy (Ihlen, 2020; Kricorian et al., 2022; Poltorak et al., 2005; Thaker, 2021). Yet, one of the challenges in creating effective communication strategy is that not only are there many possible factors that can affect Norwegians' vaccine attitudes, but there are

also many possible theories to guide communication recommendations (see Table 1). From a practical standpoint how to choose the best approach remains arguable.

## Literature review

Different studies have conceptualized factors influencing vaccine attitudes in different ways. In this section, we provide a brief background on each of the five factors we are exploring in this study. Initially, we argued that the rationale for including demographics, values, health attitudes, institutional attitudes, and trusted sources of information in a Norwegian context was because they are consistent with previous research both about vaccine attitudes in general as well as within Norway. However, there are factors that we are not measuring such as belief in conspiracy theories within low trust environments (Allington et al., 2021; Featherstone & Zhang, 2020; Jennings et al., 2021; Sallam et al., 2021). We do not include these factors because as Wollebæk et al. (2022) suggest, it is likely the underlying levels of institutional trust and social values that ground political attitudes. Therefore, in identifying stable factors that predict vaccination attitudes, we should examine the underlying factors, not indicators of them. As such, our objective was to focus on underlying attitudes and identities that were also appropriate within a Norwegian context. Moreover, because the question of vaccine attitudes is typically expressed in the negative (i.e., hesitancy), we know less about the factors contributing to vaccine confidence, which is essential in a post-COVID-19 context.

## Demographics

Across the study of vaccine attitudes, demographics that contribute to explaining or predicting vaccine hesitancy have been broadly inconclusive though there have been a few clear patterns emerging over time (Larson et al., 2016). For example, Ebrahimi et al. (2021) found that in Norway men, parents with children under 18, and those choosing to consume more information from unmonitored media platforms were more likely to be vaccine hesitant, whereas education and age did not influence vaccine hesitancy. Yet in recent studies other factors like whether people work in healthcare (Vergara et al., 2021) or have experience with other vaccines, like the flu vaccine, emerged as important predictors of vaccine hesitancy (Soares et al.,

2021). Within Norway, those who were born outside of Norway have also been found to be more vaccine hesitant (Jenness et al., 2021). However, in most countries, people from lower socio-economic status or who were economically unstable because of the pandemic were much more likely to be vaccine hesitant (Bendau et al., 2021; Deml et al., 2019; Kricorian et al., 2022; Soares et al., 2021; Wagner et al., 2019). Thus, the question remains in a high trust environment, what demographic factors contribute to vaccine confidence?

## Values

Political and religious attitudes have a great level of variance by culture and country and are often difficult to equate and measure (Froese & Bader, 2008). Therefore, as we previously discussed, exploring ideological attitudes underlying political and religious attitudes may be a more useful way of exploring attitudes towards vaccination in a Norwegian context (Wollebæk et al., 2022). For example, it has been long established that egalitarianism characterized by highly valuing the collective good and social welfare is core to typical Norwegian cultural values and recent research suggests that the pandemic has only strengthened these attitudes (Greve, 2007; Greve et al., 2021). Therefore, measuring values in a Norwegian population directly may provide a stronger causal connection to vaccine attitudes than other measures of political and religious ideology.

## Health attitudes

In Norway, health attitudes have also been found to influence vaccine attitudes where those who have a lower level of anxiety about disease, believe they have a higher level of natural immunity, or have lower levels of health efficacy (i.e., their belief in their ability to take action to improve or protect their health) are more likely hesitant to be vaccinated (Cataldi & O'Leary, 2021; de Vries et al., 2022; Ebrahimi et al., 2021). These findings are consistent with other research related to COVID-19, which suggests that vaccine hesitancy is reduced when people are more anxious about the disease and more generally health-related fears (Bendau et al., 2021), but increased when people have lower levels of health anxiety (Deml et al., 2019). For these reasons, health attitudes should be considered related to vaccine confidence.



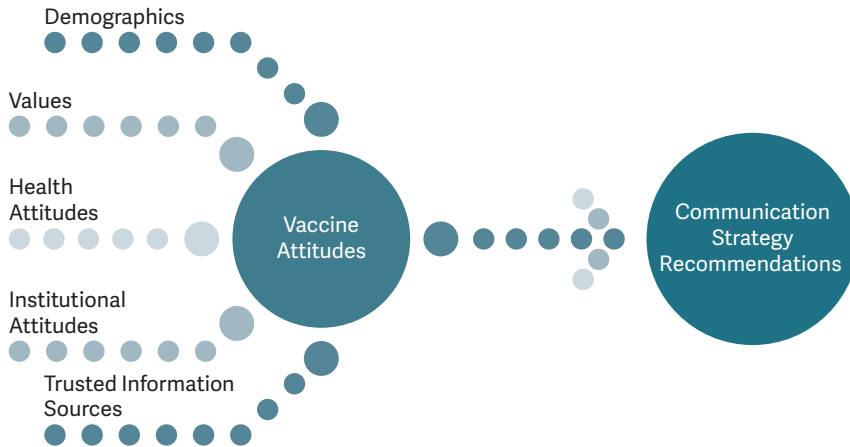
## Institutional trustworthiness

Overall, when key institutions like governments and health authorities are viewed as highly trustworthy, then people are less vaccine hesitant (Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Gilkey et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2021; Kennedy, 2019; Mesch & Schwirian, 2015; Raude et al., 2016; Skjesol & Tritter, 2022; Troiano & Nardi, 2021). One of the barriers to vaccination globally during COVID-19 have been perceptions that the vaccination development and approval process has been rushed (Troiano & Nardi, 2021; Wollebæk et al., 2022). As such, institutional trustworthiness needs to be seen within the broader context of science communication and how attitudes about “science” as an institution, influence vaccine attitudes. For example, recent findings suggest that the more effectively the science behind vaccination recommendations is translated for citizens it not only reduces vaccine hesitance but also increases trust in science and improves compliance with scientifically based recommendations (Goldenberg, 2016; Ihlen, 2020; Palamenghi et al., 2020; Poltorak et al., 2005; Xu et al., 2021).

## Trusted information sources

It is clear in Norway (Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Fues Wahl et al., 2022) and around the world that information quality and credibility are also key influencers of vaccine attitudes (see e.g., Bíró-Nagy & Szászi, 2022; Pierre, 2019; Šiđanin et al., 2021). This is the case for a host of reasons including: misinformation lingering in people’s memories (Pluviano et al., 2017); the refutational process surrounding correcting misinformation creating emotional reactions (Featherstone & Zhang, 2020; Gehrau et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2020), and leading to the conclusion that social media consumption is a significant predictor of vaccine hesitancy (de Vries et al., 2022; Jennings et al., 2021). However, one of the challenges is that crises cause uncertainty, which heightens information consumption, so while people may try to consume information from credible sources, they may also look for any information possible (Diers-Lawson, 2020; Puri et al., 2020). Therefore, exploring the sources of information that Norwegians trust for health information is likely critical to understanding vaccine attitudes.

Based on the state of research on vaccine attitudes, particularly in a Norwegian context, we propose the following conceptual model for this study (see Figure 3):



**Figure 3** Conceptual Model for Study.

Our research objectives and this conceptual model then leads to one central research question with several sub-questions we explore in this chapter:

- RQ: What factors influence vaccine confidence in Norway?
- RQ1A: To what extent do demographics (e.g., gender, age, education, etc.) influence vaccine confidence in Norway?
  - RQ1B: To what extent do values influence vaccine confidence in Norway?
  - RQ1C: To what extent do health attitudes influence vaccine confidence in Norway?
  - RQ1D: To what extent do institutional attitudes influence vaccine confidence in Norway?
  - RQ1E: To what extent do trusted sources of information influence vaccine confidence in Norway?

## Methods

To identify the most viable communication strategies for engaging Norwegians to support vaccine confidence this study takes a broad view of the factors that might influence attitudes about vaccination. However, the factors group into five categories: demographics, values, health attitudes, institutional attitudes, and trusted sources of information. In the methods we will operationalize these variables and their measures, methods for data collection and the sample, and methods for data analysis.

## Variable Operationalization

In the literature review, we have identified the central findings and gaps for each of the variables explored in this study. Table 1 summarizes the operationalization of the variables and reliability for each of them. We measured the following demographic factors in this study to determine their influence on vaccine attitudes: Norwegian nationality (i.e., born in Norway or not), gender, age, income, education, parental status of a child under 18, and whether people work in healthcare or a related industry. Each of these were tested for their influence on vaccine confidence. Second because we argue that values underlying concepts like belief in conspiracy theory, political ideology, and the like may be more effective measures of vaccine attitudes, we have used Schwartz's (2012) theory of basic values (see Table 1 for factor analysis results) to operationalize values in this study. Third, health attitudes driving vaccination confidence focus largely on people's belief that vaccines are safe and effective; therefore, we have operationalized health attitudes using Bandura's (1972) measures for efficacy to measure health attitudes. The factor analysis (see Table 1) revealed that health efficacy and health anxiety are viewed separately by Norwegians.

Fourth, we measured institutional trust using Diers-Lawson's (2020) scale for institutional trustworthiness (see Table 1). However, because Norway is a high trust context, we would expect high levels of institutional trust. To better analyze the data, we analyzed institutional trust as an overall measure, but we have also discretized the variable to categorize high, medium, and low trust individuals. Therefore, in the analysis, participants whose mean institutional trust factor score was 1.00–2.99 were rated as “low trust” ( $N = 60$ ), those from 3.00–3.99 were rated as “neutral trust” ( $N = 132$ ), and those from 4.00–5.00 were rated as “high trust” ( $N = 62$ ). We also operationalized institutional trust in terms of trust in science and used Roberts et al's (2013) measure for trust in science.

Fifth, to explore trusted information sources, we asked participants about a number of information sources they relied on for information about vaccination. The factor analysis (see Table 1) demonstrates that there is a clear delineation in the use of “official” sources and advocacy or influencer sources of information about vaccines.

Finally, vaccine attitudes were measured in terms of Gilkey et al's (2014) vaccination confidence scale. The factor analysis (see Table 1) identified that Norwegians consider vaccine confidence as being distinctive from skepticism, so even when reverse coded the negative attitudes did not group with the confidence measures.

**Table 1** Operationalisation of Study Variables

Variable	Questions	Author(s)	Eigen- value	Variance Explained	Factor Loading	Alpha
Values – Collectivist	Preventing pollution, protecting natural resources	Schwarz (2012)	5.54	46.17	.80	.92
	Equality, equal opportunity for all				.76	
	Protecting the environment, preserving nature				.81	
	Unity with nature, fitting into nature				.74	
	Helpfulness, working for the welfare of others				.78	
	Social justice, correcting injustice, care for the weak				.84	
	Peace, a world free of war and conflict				.82	
	Respecting the earth, harmony with other species				.80	
Values – Power/ Dominance	Authority, the right to lead or command		2.29	19.12	.89	.81
	Social power, control over others				.86	
	Influence, having an impact on people & events				.73	
	Wealth – material possessions, money				.66	
Institutional Trustworthi- ness	... are transparent	Diers-Lawson (2020)	4.35	39.57	.71	.90
	... provide all of the latest information with the public				.77	
	... share information freely with the public				.75	
	... give me a feeling of trust				.82	
	... demonstrate they are dedicated to being good				.84	
	... are typically truthful				.83	
	... give me a trustworthy impression				.79	
Trust in Science	...make our lives healthier, easier, more comfortable	Roberts, et al. (2013)	3.37	48.15	.75	.82
	...can solve nearly any problem				.72	
	...play an important role in economic and industrial development				.73	
	I would support the govt investing in more sci & technology				.75	
	Science is very effective in dealing with disease.				.73	

*(Continued)*

**Table 1** (Continued)

Variable	Questions	Author(s)	Eigen- value	Variance Explained	Factor Loading	Alpha
Health Anxiety	I often have anxiety about m/ my family's health	Bandura (1982)	2.84	31.53	.83	.81
	Given the state of the world, I worry about my/my family's health regularly				.86	
	I often worry that I/my family will get sick out in public.				.81	
Health Efficacy	I try to live a generally healthy life.	Bandura (1982)	1.73	19.23	.83	.65
	I encourage my friends/family to live a health life.				.68	
	When it comes to making decisions about healthcare, I am confident in my ability to make the right decision.				.74	
Source Trust: Advocates & Influencers	People on social media/ social media networks		1.74	21.73	.90	.78
	Social Media Influencers & Health-related advocacy groups				.89 .61	
Source Trust: Official Sources	Health-related non-profits or charities		3.21	40.10	.64	.72
	HelseNorge				.81	
	My local GP Government				.80 .68	
Pro- Vaccination	Vaccines are necessary to protect public health.	Gilkey, et al. (2014)	3.93	49.17	.86	.88
	Vaccines do a good job in preventing the intended diseases.				.90	
	Vaccines are safe.				.75	
	If I don't vaccinate my child, s/ he may get a disease & cause others to also get the disease.				.72	
	In general, medical professionals in charge of vaccinations have people's best interests at heart.				.81	
Vaccine Skepticism	People receive too many vaccinations	Gilkey, et al. (2014)	1.33	16.56	.80	.60
	If my child were to get a vaccination s/he may have serious side effects.				.86	

## Data collection and sample

Data were collected from a paid panel of participants in Norway using SmartSurvey, a paid survey panel, in January 2022. This yielded a total of 258 participants that were adequately representative of the Norwegian population. Because previous research found that Norwegian men were more likely to be vaccine hesitant, we ensured an adequate number of male participants, so have more men in the sample ( $N = 140$ , 54.3%) compared to women ( $N = 116$ , 45%), so men are slightly overrepresented in this sample. However, the median age in Norway is 39 (Review, 2022) and in our study sample it is 36. Similarly, the sample reflects Norway's relatively high level of education with approximately 35% of the population having at least a university degree (SSB, 2021) and in our sample it is 37.2%. Ethnically, 82% of Norway is Norwegian (Review, 2022) and in our sample 78% were Norwegian by birth. Therefore, the sample should be considered fairly representative of the Norwegian population with no meaningful systematic sample bias.

Moreover, in the sample 105 (40.7%) of the population were parents of a child under 18, 111 (43%) worked or had a family member who worked in a healthcare setting, and 228 (88.4%) of the population reported receiving routine vaccinations as a child. This suggests that there is both enough diversity in the sample regarding vaccination and health care experience to critically reflect on these factors.

## Data analysis

Test data were analyzed in SPSS using correlation to establish that a relationship existed between independent and dependent variables. Then those independent variables that were significantly correlated were analyzed using hierarchical stepwise regression to identify the most stable models. To analyze the low, neutral, and high-trust respondents, the same analytic procedure was used but with only those participants selected whose institutional trust scores were in those categories.

## Results and discussion

Our first objective was to identify the factors (see Figure 3) predicting Norwegian confidence in vaccination. Overall, these findings demonstrate that just a handful of factors account for more than 50% of the total variance in attitudes about vaccines (overall  $R^2_{adj.} = .53$ ). This provides government

and public health with a powerful set of findings on which to build policy and communication strategy for supporting the vaccination programs into the future. In this section, we will both report the results from the analysis and discuss their relevance to the literature.

There are three minor findings that provide context for interpreting the strategic interventions to support or improve vaccine confidence. First, these findings suggest that segmenting the public in terms of age and whether people were fully vaccinated as children are the two most meaningful demographics that have significantly different attitudes. Specifically, people who are younger and did not receive vaccinations as children are less confident in vaccination than those who are older and received all their vaccinations as children. Second, these data suggest that building overall health efficacy – supporting people’s belief they have a reasonable amount of control over their health outcomes – is also helpful in building confidence in vaccinations as a part of the control they have. Third, maintaining or improving the credibility in official (i.e., government and public health) sources of health information is also important for improving vaccine confidence.

However, there are two primary factors driving vaccine confidence in Norway. First, activating and appealing to collectivist values is the single most important factor driving vaccine confidence in these findings. Second, more than just institutional trustworthiness, trust in science was the other critical factor driving Norwegian confidence in vaccination.

This section will provide the detailed findings and then discuss these findings within the context of previous research, theory, and practice.

## **Vaccination confidence versus vaccine skepticism**

To put these findings into context, it is also important to note that by the “end” of the pandemic restrictions in early 2022, Norway’s institutional trustworthiness remained positive ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = .79$ ). This is not surprising given that Norway is a high trust society and the government’s transparency throughout the pandemic supported public trust (Ihlen et al., 2022; Skjesol & Tritter, 2022). However, one of the most surprising findings is that there was no significant difference between vaccine confidence ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) and vaccine skepticism ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = .63$ ) in the sample  $t(256) = 1.56$ ;  $p = .12$  suggesting that the Norwegian population is both highly confident and skeptical about vaccines.

Yet, given the success of the vaccination programs in Norway – both for COVID-19 as well as traditional vaccines – these data suggest that rather

than being on the opposite end of the spectrum from vaccine confidence, skepticism about vaccines should not necessarily be equated with vaccine hesitancy or a behavioral intention to reject vaccination. Instead, these data suggest that the public's positive disposition towards vaccination should not be assumed; rather, the public requires good information and consistent engagement. In combination with the high trust environment, these data also suggest institutional legitimacy, transparency, and credible information are vital to managing a skeptical public's view of vaccination. In short even in a high trust society, like Norway, there is a careful balance between vaccine confidence and skepticism that must be managed.

These data also suggest that future research should focus on scale development for vaccine hesitancy as distinctive from just the "negative" side of vaccine confidence. These data reflect previous research that establishes that positive and negative attitudes are not merely polar ends of a continuous scale, but fundamentally different constructs (Mal et al., 2018).

## Identifying factors related to vaccine confidence

Table 2 shows the significant correlations for the two dependent variables of vaccine confidence. They are separated for the overall findings as well

**Table 2** Significant Correlations Between Test Variables

Independent Variables	Vaccine Confidence			
	Overall	Low Trust	Neutral Trust	High Trust
<b>Demographics</b>				
Age	-.27**	-.31**	NS	NS
Gender	NS	.31**	NS	NS
Income	.12*	NS	NS	NS
Work in HC	.15*	.27**	NS	NS
Vaccinated as child	.16**	-.34**	-.22**	NS
<b>Values</b>				
Collectivist	.52**	.72**	.40**	NS
Power/Dominance	NS	.33**	-.19*	NS
<b>Health Attitudes</b>				
Health Efficacy	.35**	.46**	.22**	NS
<b>Institutional Attitudes</b>				
Institutional Trustworthiness	.41**	NS	.25**	NS
Trust in Science	.64**	.65**	.50**	.49**
<b>Trusted Information Sources</b>				
Official or Institutional	.58**	.49**	.47**	.53**
Advocates & Influencers	NS	-.26**	-.25**	NS

Notes: All figures represent *r* values. NS = Not significant; \* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ .



as among low, neutral, and high trust participants. The only variables included were those that were significant for at least one test. For example, while all the demographics identified in methods were analyzed, only age, income, work in health care, and childhood vaccination were significantly correlated and thus discussed in this section.

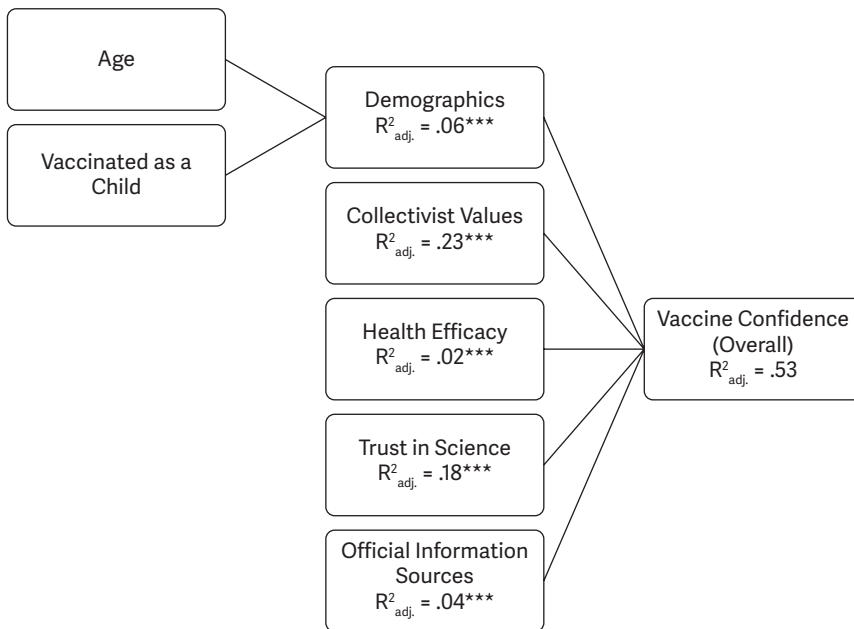
## **Predictors for vaccine confidence amongst Norwegians**

The significant correlations suggest that while demographics are important for vaccine confidence overall and amongst low trust participants, they have little influence amongst neutral and high trust participants. These data support the relative difficulty in identifying demographic factors that reliably predict vaccine attitudes or behavioral intention (Larson et al., 2016). In fact, for high trust participants, only trust in science and official or institutional sources influenced their confidence in vaccines. For both low and neutral participants, values, health attitudes, institutional attitudes, and information sources all influence their confidence in vaccines. This section provides the detailed results and discussion for Norwegians overall, and then for low, neutral, and high trust groupings of Norwegians. It should be noted that while the overall study sample is representative and large enough to be reliable within a 95% confidence interval, the smaller sub-sets are not. However, they point to the value of analyzing low, neutral, and high institutional trust publics separately. These data also suggest that categorizing people's institutional trust should be a critical factor for segmenting audiences for strategic communication endeavors. While previous studies have not analyzed institutional trust in this way, these findings and this approach is consistent with previous research identifying institutional trust as central to vaccine attitudes and behavioral intention (Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Gilkey et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2021; Kennedy, 2019; Mesch & Schwirian, 2015; Raude et al., 2016; Skjesol & Tritter, 2022; Troiano & Nardi, 2021).

### ***Overall findings for vaccine confidence amongst Norwegians***

In presenting the results in more detail, the data for the overall confidence in vaccines converged in a significant five-model hierarchical regression  $F(9, 247) = 32.65; p < .001$  with an overall adjusted  $R^2$  of .53 (see Figure 4) with all models significantly contributing the adjusted  $R^2$ . However, in the final model, only age  $t(247) = -2.53; p < .01, \beta = -.12$ ; being vaccinated as

a child  $t(247) = -2.02$ ;  $p < .05$ ,  $\beta = -.09$ ; collectivist values  $t(247) = 3.97$ ;  $p < .001$ ,  $\beta = .21$ ; trust in science  $t(247) = 5.84$ ;  $p < .001$ ,  $\beta = .34$ ; and relying on official or institutional sources of information about vaccination  $t(247) = 4.89$ ;  $p < .001$ ,  $\beta = .29$  were significant predictors of vaccine confidence. These data suggest that older Norwegians who were vaccinated as children, have higher levels of collectivist values, trust science, and mostly rely on official or institutional sources of information about vaccination had highest levels of vaccine confidence.

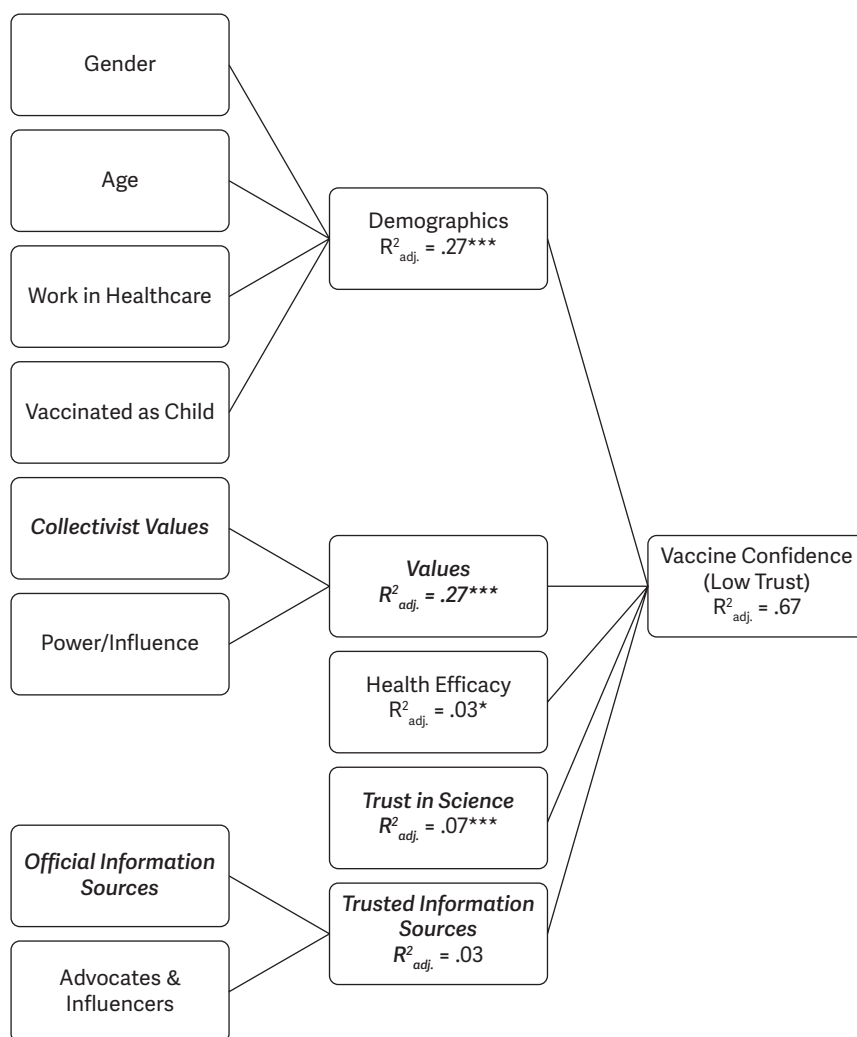


**Figure 4** Summary of Results for Overall Vaccine Confidence.

### ***Predictors of higher vaccine confidence amongst lower trust Norwegians***

These data suggest that while overall vaccine confidence amongst Norwegians is relatively straight-forward, when we focus on lower trust Norwegians, the big picture seems to become more complex. While these data suggest that a bigger mix of variables influences vaccine confidence including demographics, trusted information sources about vaccination, and trust in science all influence vaccine confidence, the single biggest predictor of vaccine confidence is whether low trust Norwegians have collectivist social values.

The data for low trust participants' confidence in vaccines also converged in a significant five-model hierarchical regression  $F(10, 48) = 12.54$ ;  $p < .001$  with an overall adjusted  $R^2$  of .67 (see Figure 5) with all models contributing the adjusted  $R^2$ . However, in the final model, only collectivist values  $t(58) = 2.67$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $\beta = .31$ ; trust in science  $t(58) = 2.38$ ;  $p < .02$ ,  $\beta = .24$ ; and relying on official or institutional sources of information about vaccination  $t(58) = 2.14$ ;  $p < .04$ ,  $\beta = .22$  were significant predictors of vaccine confidence amongst those with low institutional trust. The regression also demonstrates that it is the collectivist values that is contributing most



**Figure 5** Summary of Results for Low Trust Participants' Vaccine Confidence.

to changes in low trust participant vaccine confidence. Therefore, low trust Norwegians who are: more collectivist, trust in science, and more likely to rely on official or institutional sources of information are most confident in vaccination.

These data also demonstrate that low trust participants might be the most susceptible to misinformation. Those who might value collectivism less or have slightly less trust in science might be more willing to consider vaccine information from other sources because they are already looking at them. From a risk management perspective, building institutional trust, trust in science, and most importantly building social solidarity is vital for engaging low trust Norwegians to ensure future compliance with vaccine recommendations and minimize the impact of misinformation. This is aligned with the strategy that the Norwegian government used throughout the pandemic (Skjesol & Tritter, 2022); however, these data suggest that it remains a risk.

### ***Predictors of higher vaccine confidence amongst neutral trust Norwegians***

The data for neutral trust participants' confidence in vaccines tells a similar story. Although it also converged in a significant five-model hierarchical regression  $F(8, 126) = 13.38; p < .001$  with an overall adjusted  $R^2$  of .43 with four of five models contributing the adjusted  $R^2$ ; health attitudes did not. In the final model, though demographics significantly contributed to accounting for the variance ( $R^2_{adj.} = .04 p < .01$ ), none of the variables were significant. However, values both significantly contributed to the model's explanation ( $R^2_{adj.} = .18 p < .01$ ) and collectivist ( $t(134) = 1.97; p < .05, \beta = .17$ ) and power/dominance ( $t(134) = -2.46; p < .05, \beta = -.17$ ) were both significant predictors of vaccine confidence. Trust in science ( $t(134) = 2.96; p < .01, \beta = .25 (R^2_{adj.} = .12 p < .01)$ ) was a significant predictor of vaccine confidence. Additionally, trusted sources of information were also significant contributors to the model ( $R^2_{adj.} = .10 p < .01$ ) and both official or institutional sources of information about vaccination ( $t(134) = 3.98; p < .01, \beta = .31$ ) and advocates and influencers ( $t(134) = -3.32; p < .01, \beta = -.23$ ) were significant predictors of vaccine confidence amongst those with neutral levels of institutional trust.

These data suggest that, amongst neutral-trust Norwegians, collectivist values predict high confidence, so too does the rejection of values of wealth

and dominance. Furthermore, while trust in official or institutional sources also predicts high confidence, so too does the rejection of using advocate or influencer sources of information. While previous research identifies many different variables that lead to vaccine confidence or vaccine hesitancy, it does not talk about duality in values or information consumption. The neutral trust group represents a tipping point in vaccine confidence and may be pulled in different directions. Communication strategies for this group cannot, therefore, be the same as for low trust Norwegians because this groups needs more nuance. For example, building the credibility of official sources is not enough; they should also be more directly engaged on the risks of non-credible sources as well.

### ***Predictors of higher vaccine confidence amongst high trust Norwegians***

If significant persuasion is needed for low trust Norwegians and nuance is required for neutral trust Norwegians, the communicative efforts amongst high trust participants' is simpler – maintaining confidence in science and trust in official sources of information. This was because only these two variables significantly influenced their confidence in vaccines  $F(2, 59) = 13.58; p < .001$  with an overall adjusted  $R^2$  of .29. Though trust in science contributed significantly to the adjusted  $R^2 = .24$ , only official information, as a trusted source, significantly predicted changes in vaccine confidence for the high trust group ( $t(61) = 2.53; p < .01, \beta = .37, R^2_{adj.} = .07 p < .01$ ).

This suggests that for high trust populations, institutional trust is the key to maintaining positive attitudes about vaccination. However, by itself this also represents a risk. If institutional trust is the key to vaccine confidence, then it is possible that a counter branding or advocacy campaigns targeted at harming the reputation of “science”, public health, and the government could also influence vaccine attitudes, which is aligned with previous public health campaigns targeting trust for behavioral change (Farrelly et al., 2002, 2005).

## **Conclusions**

In pulling these findings and discussion together, there are two types of reflections that we can make. The first is about what these findings suggest about this study and future research on vaccine confidence. The second is

about the conclusions drawn about communication strategy to improve vaccine confidence and thus behavioral intention regarding vaccination.

## Critical reflections and future research on vaccination

Throughout our discussion we have identified some limitations, such as the small number of participants once we segmented for low, neutral, and high trust populations or distinctiveness between vaccine hesitancy and confidence. As such, we would suggest there are three important lessons to be learned for future research on vaccine attitudes from this study.

First, vaccine confidence and hesitancy seem to be two distinctive concepts – not just on a continuum. This suggests that it is important to develop better measures of vaccine hesitancy itself. Why vaccine hesitancy? Because existing measures focus on vaccine confidence and as these data suggest hesitancy and confidence are distinctive concepts and not merely two ends of the same continuum. Moreover, the literature needs to better distinguish between vaccine hesitancy as an attitude and behavioral intention to be vaccinated. The Norwegian population demonstrates no significant difference between vaccine confidence and skepticism (hesitancy), yet clearly demonstrate high levels of vaccination. In the context of high trust environments, like Norway and the other Nordic countries this is likely attributed to citizens' willingness to follow government recommendations, even if they are not completely sure about the positive outcome of the action recommended (see, e.g., Anderson, 2018).

Second, while institutional trust is necessary, it is not a sufficient measure for individual attitudes about vaccination. In fact, these data suggest that trust in science is a better single measure for vaccine confidence. This does not mean that institutional trust is unimportant as these data suggest it emerged as a critical disposition that changed the predictive models for vaccine confidence. We suggest this may be a more effective way to use institutional trust than within the regression models themselves.

Third, and related to institutional trust, demographics have long been identified as inconsistent predictors of vaccine attitudes. These data suggest that rather than looking for predictable demographics, exploring identities that provide a better explanation to people's attitudes is more valuable in predicting health attitudes and behavioral intention. So, the analysis regarding institutional trust and values in this study provide stronger insights connected to vaccine confidence compared to measures

of ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, or political affiliation. Future research should explore values-based identities rather than demographics-based identities.

## **Inoculation for stronger vaccine communication strategy in Norway ... and beyond**

Taken together, these data reveal that while looking at an overall population provides important and useful insights, segmenting populations based on their levels of institutional trust reveals far more about factors that foster confidence in vaccines. These data suggest that moving beyond clichéd assumptions about people who are vaccine hesitant being merely conspiracy loving right-wingers is important if we are to authentically engage with people about legitimate questions and concerns, they may have about vaccination. Most importantly, these data align with research from across Europe (see Jacob et al., 2023) that suggest: (1) institutional trust is the most important factor in predicting citizen willingness to follow guidance for self-protective behaviors; and (2) that within any population better understanding the factors that differentiate group attitudes will allow for more tailored communication practice. As such, the Norwegian vaccination case provides valuable insights for improving strategic communication to promote vaccination across Europe.

Specifically, our findings suggest that low trust populations are much more likely persuaded by appeals to their values, bolstering trust in science, and the use of official sources of information while being mindful of demographics. If public health advocates can better enact this kind of communicative strategy, there is the greatest potential for impact because just these few factors predict almost two-thirds of the variance in vaccine confidence in low trust Norwegians. This also helps to explain why Norway has had such a high success rate in both medical and non-medical interventions during COVID-19 – their communication strategy centered on translating science and transparency (see e.g., Ihlen, 2020; NIPH, 2022). This suggests this strategy is likely to be useful in other populations where institutional trust is lower because the literature base clearly demonstrates the overall success of this strategy (Bíró-Nagy & Szász, 2022; Kojan et al., 2022; Jacob et al., 2023; Jørgensen et al., 2021). These findings coincide with other best communication practices to improve self-protective behaviors emerging after the COVID-19

pandemic across Europe and therefore provide insights into effective communication strategy for lower trust populations.

This strategy, in part, is also important for groups whose trust in government and health institutions is relatively neutral as well because these data found that bolstering trust in science and emphasizing quality sources of information about vaccines helps to account for nearly half of variance in their attitudes. So, to this point it means that communicating transparently, translating the science, and providing consistent access to quality sources of information addresses the two groups that the extant body of research finds are most likely to be vaccine hesitant. Additionally, findings for both the low and neutral trust groups also identify the importance of communicating that personal self-protection measures, like getting vaccinated, make a positive contribution to community and society.

However, the findings for the neutral trust group also point out the importance of offering two-sided argumentation, suggesting that an inoculation theory-based communication strategy that does not judge people with questions about vaccination but engages them meaningfully about both sides of the argument may be essential in changing behaviors (Featherstone & Zhang, 2020; Pfau & Bockern, 1994; Rosenfeld & Tomiyama, 2022). These data suggest that trust neutral populations need more engagement, and they need a more complex strategy that identifies the common arguments used against a behavior (e.g., anti-vaccination arguments) and then provides fair and *credible* information from *trusted* sources providing the information to help them make better decisions for themselves and their families (Featherstone & Zhang, 2020).

Finally, these data also suggest that while high trust Norwegians may not need as much attention in building vaccine confidence, they have specific information needs to maintain or improve their attitudes towards vaccination. In part, it is because vaccine confidence seems reliant on multiple levels of institutional trust – including information credibility and trust in science – this group seems particularly susceptible to counter branding attacks on institutions to shake their confidence in vaccination. Also, in part it is because Norwegians – despite generally being categorized as a “high trust” society and a poster for effective health interventions – are equally confident and skeptical about vaccination. This means that public health and governments must be able to consistently demonstrate that the public can trust them, remain transparent, and provide the best



information possible. In short, compliance today does not guarantee compliance tomorrow.

High trust populations are meaningfully different – while trust in science will bolster vaccine confidence, ensuring these populations trust official or institutional sources of information is the most vital key to strategic communication success. However, the factors tested in this study only account for approximately one-third of changes in their confidence in vaccines. These findings suggest that while different appeals will be more important to different groups the two most important factors to support vaccine confidence are appeals to collectivist values and improving trust in science.

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## CHAPTER 4

# Establishment of the Norwegian Public Relations Club in the Context of the Cold War

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**Abstract:** The Norwegian Public Relations Club was established as a kind of independent think tank for the Norwegian state in order to control, discuss and define public relations in Norway after the Second World War. Many of the central actors in the organization had backgrounds from Norwegian propaganda work during World War II, and the PR Club's early work can be linked to the international situation after World War II, with the start of the Cold War. This significantly influenced their views on PR, which they wanted to distinguish from what was perceived as propaganda and false (fake) information. PR was supposed to be a tool for the free world – against authoritarian communism. The establishment of the Norwegian Public Relations Club was strongly inspired by a corresponding British association, but from the start, the Norwegian association was more directly geared towards the international situation and Cold War propaganda.

**Keywords:** Norwegian Communications Association, Norwegian Public Relations Club, PR history, propaganda, Cold War, Scandinavian propaganda model

## Introduction

This chapter investigates the establishment of the *Norwegian Public Relations Club*, the forerunner of the *Norwegian Communication Association*, NCA. Today, NCA is the dominant organization for those working with strategic communication in Norway, with around 4,000 members. According to their website, it is “a professional community for those who work with or educate themselves in the field of communication”<sup>1</sup> The Association was founded in 1949, as the *Norwegian Public Relations Club* (*Den Norske Public Relations Klubb*). It changed its name to the *Norwegian Public Relations Association* (*Norsk Public Relations Forening*) in 1972, and to the *Norwegian Communication Association* in 2000.

This chapter explains why the Club was established and what role the Club had in the first decade after it was established. The chapter addresses the following research questions:

- What was the purpose (objective/intention) of the Norwegian Public Relations Club?
- What role did the Club’s members intend to play?
- What role did the Club have in the early years (1949–1960)?

In order to answer these research questions, the establishment of the Club is analyzed in the context of the political and historical situation, characterized by Cold War propaganda and the reconstruction of Norway after World War II.

## Methods

The *Norwegian Communications Association* has an extensive private archive of documents dating back to 1949, just before it was established officially. There are minutes from official meetings, copies of applications for membership, updated membership lists, statutes and drafts, and incoming letters. In addition, there is some information available in the Archives of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has been handed over to the *National Archives*.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the public debate

1 <https://www.kommunikasjon.no/>

2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1945–1957): Information Office, London, RA/S-2057/2/D/Db/L0022.



on public relations from 1949 to 1960 in *Journalisten* and *Dagspressen* is reviewed and analyzed. *Dagspressen* was the newspaper of the *Norwegian Newspapers Association*. *Journalisten* was published by the *Norwegian Press Association*. All of these documents have been analyzed with the aim of finding out 1) who was involved in the Club's work, 2) what topics were discussed, 3) how did the members understand public relations, 4) where did this understanding come from? The discussion is set in a political and communications historical context, both nationally and internationally, where the backgrounds of the people involved are given particular scrutiny. Furthermore, changes in the way the Club functioned during the 1950s is carefully examined.

The history of the Club has not previously been scientifically investigated. Until today, we have relied on an anniversary outlet (Mørk, 1994) to understand the development and role of the *Norwegian Public Relations Club*, without putting it in the context of the public debate, or social developments. In order to understand how propaganda or intentional communication was perceived at the time, we will first take a look at the rise of propaganda in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Propaganda in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

With the development of mass society and the conflict between the great powers at the beginning of the 20th century, political leaders were forced for the first time in history to draw on the collective power of individuals' enthusiasm to defend the nation (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 209). They discovered that the masses could be manipulated, and that war propaganda could mobilize the masses with patriotic and ethnic nationalism. The masses were to be mobilized for a total war that involved both private homes and the masses as shapers of a nationalist policy that had not been seen before (Stråth & Wagner, 2017, p. 160).

The British government pioneered this form of propaganda, and other European leaders soon learned that PR practitioners and politicians could create news that was then disseminated by journalists (Kunczik, 2014, p. 102). In the conflict with the IRA in the 1920s, it was the British tactic to spread lies and half-truths that seemed like truths, which they called "propaganda by news" (quoted from Miller & Dinan, 2008, p. 16). It was claimed that the routine news production gave them a grip on the press and that journalists took their version of reality as fact. The director of *Public Information*



at *Dublin Castle*, Basil Clarke, stressed that it “must look true and it must look complete and candid or its ‘credit’ is gone”, and claimed that journalists believed everything he had to say about the conflict (Miller & Dinan, 2008, p. 16). British propaganda was also commented on in the Norwegian Parliament, when the chairman of NTB, C. J. Hambro (Conservative), on 5 November 1923 pointed out that the British Chief Secretary for Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood, sent messages to Norwegian media about Irish conditions, “which were not based on any reality”.<sup>3</sup> Britain continued to develop its propaganda machine into the Second World War, also inspiring Hitler’s propaganda (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2019, pp. 200–201).

During World War II, the British Ministry of Information managed to convince its government that the truth was the best means of fighting totalitarianism, even if the whole truth was not revealed to the public. This emphasis on truth became the basic philosophy for the BBC, and proved to be an extremely powerful propaganda weapon, especially toward German civilians towards the end of the war, but also to mobilize efforts at home (Jowett & O’Donnell 2019, p. 234). This British “Strategy of Truth” also became a model for American propaganda during the Second World War, relying on facts to ensure credibility (Bull, 2008, p. 14).

Norway was not involved in the hostilities during World War I and therefore did not have the same need to mobilize the population. In connection with the dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905, however, some unofficial communication work was organized to influence the European powers. A secret press office in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was also established from 1909 to 1911 (Dahlen, 2017). From 1919 to 1940, the MFA had an open press office, which tried to influence the Norwegian and foreign press (Dahlen & Werenskjold, 2022A).

In the 1930s, the political propaganda of the Norwegian Labour Party was strongly inspired by the Nazis, as well as Russian propaganda. Russian-born Social Democrat Sergej Tschachotin, who claimed that the Social Democrats in Germany had to fight the Nazis with their own propaganda methods, was particularly influential (Bang, 2013a, 2013b; Jensen, 2002). Finn Moe, editor of the Norwegian labour journal *Det 20de århundre* quoted Tschachotin, arguing that the fight against fascism “was primarily a psychological fight, a *propaganda fight*” (own translation, Moe, 1934, p. 1).

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3 Parliamentary proceedings (1923). *Stortingstidende* 1923, November 5. Norwegian Parliament. Kristiania, pp. 3266–3267.

Moe was also a journalist for the government's mouthpiece, *Arbeiderbladet*, before the Second World War, a press consultant for the Norwegian government during the war, and a parliamentary representative for the Labour Party from 1950.

With the Nazi occupation of Norway in April 1940, the Norwegian government went into exile in London, and Norwegian journalists were almost forced into the state's information activities, as they could no longer conduct normal journalistic activities in Norway. In close cooperation with representatives from the Norwegian government and press, Norwegian information activities were organized in London, the USA and Stockholm.

The MFA press office became a separate information office for the Norwegian government in London (Sverdrup, 1996, p. 236). It disseminated information over *BBC radio networks* to Norwegians in Norway about allied warfare, as well as information from the exile authorities and the resistance movement (Lange, 1998, p. 111). At the Norwegian legation in Washington, a larger press office was established, with a separate branch in New York (Sverdrup, 1996, p. 240). In Stockholm, a press office was established at the Norwegian legation, where many Norwegian journalists contributed. This activity was conducted to counter Nazi propaganda in Norway and other countries – and to mobilize resistance against the Nazi occupation.

While the tone of both Nazi propaganda and Labour Party propaganda before the war was loud and accusatory, a more subdued and calm communication style was established during the war. The first BBC radio speech from London to the Norwegian people by King Haakon on 8 July 1940 was delivered in a calm and balanced tone (Johansen & Kjeldsen, 2005, p. 456). His speech was followed up with factual and sober information about the events of the war to occupied Norway (Johansen & Kjeldsen, 2005, p. 470), inspired by the BBC and carefully monitored by the British authorities. This radio broadcast stood in stark contrast to speeches and posters used during the German occupation of Norway, especially the Nazi-collaborator Vidkun Quisling's condemnatory and rather aggressive style of communication.

The organization of the Norwegian propaganda work was comprehensive towards the end of World War II, at a time when the Norwegian Resistant Movement benefited greatly from the information they received and could send out. However, in October 1944, the leadership of the

Home Front sent a letter to Prime Minister Johan Nygårdvold (Labour) in London, warning against continuing state information activities after the transition period, activities which would be reminiscent of Nazi propaganda:

Based on the guiding principle that free speech must first and foremost be secured, one should be on guard against anything that might resemble state intervention and state regulation of press relations. The suggestion of a continued state information service beyond the actual transition period has therefore not won any support. There is concern that such activity may, after all, be reminiscent of the propaganda activity of the state authorities during the occupation, of which we had more than enough of during this period. (own translation, quoted from Aas, 1980, pp. 184–185)

It seems that such concerns gained greater importance for Norwegian information activities after the Second World War and into the Cold War, but perhaps not in the way intended in this specific entreaty.

## The start of the Cold War

After five years of German occupation, it was time to rebuild both the economy and democracy in Norway in 1945. It was time for peace and reconciliation. In the first coalition government after the war, all the political parties were involved, including the communists. However, cracks quickly appeared in this idyll, which affected political communication in Norway for years to come, including the Norwegian Public Relations Club.

On 4 April 1949, the USA joined forces with Norway, among others, to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 1955, the Soviet Union formed the Warsaw Pact, in cooperation with seven Eastern European countries all ruled by some kind of communist dictatorship. The tense international situation after the Second World War increased the interest in using propaganda and counterpropaganda on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The Cold War triggered the use of psychological warfare, amounting to ideological war in peacetime as well as in times without direct military conflicts (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 195).

The Soviet Union created and financed so-called *front groups* in Norway and other Western countries, which were supposed to look like civilian peace groups (Engberg, 1995; Rowe, 2002; Styles, 2017). Also called *astro-turfs* (fake grassroots organizations), these groups wished to hide who was

really behind the messages communicated, and as such they functioned as a form of black propaganda (Cull et al., 2003, p. 324; Jowett & O'Donnell 2019, p. 18).

In black propaganda, the sources are concealed or credited to a false authority and contain lies, fabrications and/or deceptions. By contrast, white propaganda comes from an identifiable source, and the information tends to be accurate, even when it intends to convince an audience of the superiority and justice of a particular regime or ideology. Grey propaganda lies between white and black propaganda, where the source may (or may not) be correctly identified, and the accuracy of some of the information may be uncertain (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, pp. 17–31).

The counterpart to Soviet propaganda in Europe was primarily the *Atlantic Pact's Information and Propaganda Organization – Information Service* – with offices in Paris. Systematic and in-depth analyses of communist propaganda activities in separate western countries were used to strengthen support of the national government's countermeasures. The Americans feared the effect of Soviet propaganda, but at the same time understood that direct American propaganda aimed at European citizens could be counterproductive (Risso, 2007, 2009, 2011). Therefore, the US primarily focused on a propaganda strategy that involved supporting locally produced counter-propaganda. Contacts and friendships with local journalists and collaborators formed part of the American strategy. *The Office of War Information* established itself in Oslo as early as 9 May 1945, and began early on to invite journalists from the Norwegian press to the USA, in collaboration with the *State Information Office* and the Norwegian Press Association (Danielsen, 2019; Ottosen, 1996, p. 281).

## **The organization of Norwegian propaganda**

During the transition period, when Norwegian democracy was to be reinstated, the Government Information Office in London was transferred to Oslo and renamed the *State Information Office*. Tor Gjesdal continued as leader, and many journalists from the *Press Office* in Stockholm also contributed (Aas, 1980, pp. 194, 200). Later the State Information Office was relocated back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a departmental press office, where it was before the war (Skjeseth, 2018, p. 162). On 31 August 1945, the Government established the *Information Committee for Reconstruction*. The Committee made short films, broadcasts for the Norwegian National

Broadcaster, and arranged conferences on the reconstruction work in Northern Norway.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the Home Front's warnings, other permanent institutions for communication were also established. In line with the entreaty from the Home Front, the work of these institutions was not called propaganda, PR, or any other form of influence, but presented under the guise of other activities. *Norsk Filmrevy* (known as *Filmavisen*) produced films from 21 May 1945 that legitimized the legal purge and democracy, and promoted the moral reconstruction of the country. This was a continuation of *Filmavisen*, which had shown Nazi propaganda in cinemas during the war. Now the films showed that the legal purge was just, and that the population had a moral duty to re-build the country, while at the same time highlighting Nazi barbarism and the heroism of the resistance movement. *Norsk Filmrevy* continued until 1963 (Flo, 2016).

When the Information Committee for Reconstruction was dismantled in 1947, the Prime Minister's Office restored the position of press chief. Olaf Solumsmoen now became one of Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen's closest advisers<sup>5</sup> (Garvik, 2022) and was a central figure in the development of the Norwegian propaganda apparatus, including his work as deputy chairman of the Norwegian Public Relations Club (more discussion below).

Past experiences with a lack of information and delayed resistance mobilization during the German attack in 1940 influenced the new information initiatives. In 1950, a committee was appointed, chaired by Solumsmoen, to plan how an information service in war could be organized. A committee was also appointed to discuss psychological defence preparedness. This committee was chaired by *Aftenposten*'s editor-in-chief Einar Diesen, and their recommendation was presented in 1954. Based on the work of these committees, the *Emergency Preparedness Committee for the State Information Service in War* was established in 1956, headed by Solumsmoen (Sørli & Rønne, 2006).

There were many on the political left in Norway who were against NATO membership and closer Western affiliation (Danielsen, 2019; Olstad 2021, p. 78). Support for NATO membership among the bourgeois parties and their voters was much greater (Galtung, 1993). Thus, the most

4 <http://finnmarksarkivene.no/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Arkivkatalog-Trond-Danckes-privatarkiv.pdf>

5 <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/smk/ansvarsmrader/forloperne/1946--nyere-tid/1948-Statsministeren-far-pressesjef/id759089/>

important target group for the new line of defence was those who were sceptical within the labour movement. The bourgeois parties left “it to the Labour Party to settle scores with the left-wing and the communists” (Dahlen & Werenskjold, 2022b, p. 173). At the initiative of Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen (Labour), the organization *People and Defence (Folk og Forsvar)* was established in 1951, after Norway joined NATO in 1949. Gerhardsen was one of the members of the working committee for the establishment of the organization, and Solumsmoen was present at the last planning meeting of the working committee in December 1950 (Nordahl, 1991, p. 47). The organization appeared to be an umbrella organization for various civil organizations (trade unions, political youth organizations and other independent organizations), but was supported and worked in close cooperation with the Norwegian authorities and NATO’s information service in Paris. The aim of the organization was to promote Norwegian defence policy and NATO membership (Dahlen & Werenskjold, 2022b).

In 1955, the *Norwegian Atlantic Committee (Den norske Atlanterhavskomite)* was established, with a more elitist character. Whereas People and Defence targeted local and regional newspapers, national newspapers were more important to the Norwegian Atlantic Committee, as well as researchers and teachers in schools. Like People and Defence, the Norwegian Atlantic Committee also presented itself as a civilian organization, but was supported financially by the government and loyally supported the government’s defence policy. Both organizations had a clear anti-communist and anti-Soviet message and cooperated closely with and were supported by a united Norwegian press, with the exception of the communist press. Appearing as civilian NGOs, they functioned as information agencies for the government, conducting grey propaganda, where sources of information were often hidden and delivered by civil organizations, in a sort of *Scandinavian propaganda model* (Dahlen & Werenskjold, 2022b). At the same time, a PR association was established in Norway, which was strongly inspired by the corresponding British *Institute of Public Relations* (IPR).

## The British Institute of Public Relations

The Institute of Public Relations – IPR was formally established in Britain in February 1948. The initiators of the Institute were a group of local public employees, but they quickly invited in PR people who worked in

other industries, including private businesses (L'Etang, 2009, p. 63). The aim of the Institute was to raise the professional standard and status of “this comparatively new profession” (Rogers, 1958, quoted from L'Etang 2009, p. 63).

Early on, IPR defined public relations in terms of an ideological Cold War framework, where PR was seen as a tool for promoting the right ideas. PR was presented as a source of morally good ideas and a technique that could combat totalitarianism in general and communism in particular:

[Public relations] is a group of crusaders whose job is to carry the torch of understanding into areas where discord and dissension may be eliminated by information and explanation. (Lipscombe, 1953, p. 1, quoted in L'Etang, 2009, p. 63)

It was pointed out that public relations should be for the good of society: “If we are not concerned that we are benefiting humanity, we are wasting our time” (Norman Rogers, honorary IPR secretary, 1951–1954, quoted in L'Etang, 2009, p. 73). The fight for the truth was therefore highlighted as an important concept in public relations, in contrast to communist propaganda. Public relations was presented as a source of morally sound ideas, an approach that stood in opposition to both totalitarianism and anarchy in the nascent Cold War. In this way, knowledge of the democratic principles was seen as the most potent defence against communism “and a powerful weapon in the ‘cold war’” (General Sir R. Adam, quoted in L'Etang, 2009, p. 69).

There was also a desire to define and formalize PR as a profession. The new association was supposed to be a channel for ideas and a lobbying body and opinion leader on behalf of the members to raise the status of communication workers in society. A provisional definition was established in May 1947:

Public relations means the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain, by conveying information and by all other suitable means, mutual understanding and good relations between a firm, undertaking statutory authority, government, department, profession or other body or group, and the community at large. (Rogers, 1973, p. 12, quoted from L'Etang, 2009, p. 65)

From the start, IPR actively organized outward-oriented activities, including their own journal *Public Relations*, which was published four times a year from September 1948. They arranged courses and seminars on design,



news values, journalistic practice, production of films and planning exhibitions from the first year (L'Etang, 2009, pp. 65–67).

Restrictions applied to IPR membership in order to maintain the status of the organization, with a restriction on those who were labelled “charlatans” (quoted from L'Etang, 2009, p. 75). Those employed by press agencies, for example, were denied access to IPR. Those who applied for membership, had to show that their work had a broader grounding (L'Etang, 2009, p. 75).

## The Norwegian Public Relations Club

Six months after Norway joined NATO, the Norwegian Public Relations Club held its constituent meeting on 26 October 1949, with nine male and one female members, all of whom held senior positions in society. The new head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' press office, Hans Olav, was elected head of the new association. He had led Norwegian information activities in the US during the war and continued as press advisor at the Norwegian Embassy, until he took over as head of the Press Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1948. According to the Club's anniversary journal, his stay in the USA had given him “considerable experience in the field and made many valuable contacts”.<sup>6</sup> The Prime Minister's close associate, Olaf Solumsmoen, was elected deputy chairman. In addition to the government employees, there were representatives from the *Norwegian Airline* (part of the *Scandinavian Airline System*), the *Norwegian Shipowners' Association* and the *Oslo Tourist Board* (*Reisetrafikkforeningen for Oslo og omegn*), all of whom were closely connected to the Norwegian government during and after the war.

Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen was invited to the first meeting on 21 December 1949. According to the minutes, they had a confidential conversation, which lasted almost two hours about the state budget, fiscal policy, Scandinavian cooperation, and the Norwegian defence situation.<sup>7</sup> Gerhardsen was especially concerned about defence issues and the communist threat. On 29 February 1948, he gave a speech to local party members, which received considerable attention in the Norwegian press. Gerhardsen characterized Norwegian communists as a threat to the rule

6 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1959): Den Norske Public Relations Klubb, 1949–1959. Oslo: Emil Moestue AS, p. 37; <http://runeberg.org/hvemerhvem/1948/0403.html>

7 Odd Medbøe (1949): Minutes from a meeting, 21 December 1949, KA.



of law, democracy, and Norwegian independence (Gerhardsen, 2005[1948], pp. 485–486). The first full year of the PR Club’s program shows that the organization was focused on the Cold War and the new security situation, with topics such as “Military Research”, “The Foreign Situation”, “The Broadcasting’s Foreign Programmes” and “Marshall Aid”.<sup>8</sup> At a meeting on 3 March 1950, Foreign Minister Halvard Lange gave a detailed briefing on the foreign policy situation and Norway’s position.<sup>9</sup> The Prime Minister also attended meetings of the Norwegian Public Relations Club in 1950.<sup>10</sup>

In the Club statutes, the emphasis from the start was on the role the Club should have in society. The organization was to be *a guide for society* and serve *the interests of society*. The Club’s first press release stated that public relations is aimed both externally to society and internally to the people who work with tasks of social importance.<sup>11</sup> The Club was supposed to be a non-political organization whose purpose was to promote the quality and ethics of the profession.<sup>12</sup> The definition of PR was almost directly transmitted/translated from the one used by the British Institute of Public Relations, even if it was a bit shorter and it didn’t include relations.<sup>13,14</sup>

The Secretary of the Club, Odd Medbøe, who worked for the Norwegian Airline, emphasized that public relations had an important role in preserving democracy, and could correct the press. According to Medbøe, it could be difficult for the press to maintain a full overview over matters, and that the public relations worker’s most important task was to assist the press, so that the journalists could have the best possible and broadest possible basis to carry out their work.<sup>15</sup> This representative from the state-owned airline company actually believed that PR workers had to help the press in order for the press to provide correct information, similar to the functioning of both People and Defence and the Norwegian Atlantic Committee in relation to defence policy issues (Dahlen & Werenskjold, 2022b).

Even before the constituent meeting of the PR Club, there was close contact with the corresponding British organization. In the summer of

8 Odd Medbøe (1950): Minutes from a meeting 18 January 1950, KA.

9 Odd Medbøe (1950): Minutes from a meeting 3. March 1950, KA.

10 Odd Medbøe (1950). Letter to Lemkuhl, The Norwegian Embassy in London (23.06.1950), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Office in London, National Archives.

11 Journalisten (November 1949): “PR-klubben”.

12 The Norwegian Public Relation Club (1949): “Lover” (§2) (26.10.1949), KA.

13 Tresselt, Egil (1950): «Public Relations», *Bedrifts-økonomen*, May 1950, KA, p. 119.

14 “Public Relations is a meticulous, factual, planned and sustained method of using information and other means to establish and maintain mutual understanding between one or more people or organizations in society as a whole” (own translation).

15 Odd Medbøe (1951): «Hva er public relations», *Morgenposten* (10.05.1951).

1949, Medbøe became a “corresponding member” of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR), and he participated as an observer at their annual meeting later that year. Medbøe also received statutes and other documents from IPR when he and Oddvar Aas from the Foreign Ministry’s press service were tasked with preparing statutes for the Norwegian PR Club. Aas was assistant press attaché in Stockholm during the war. On 3 August 1949, E. Lindsay Shankland from IPR came to Norway to meet Medbøe and four others who were founding members of the Norwegian organization. Shankland was also a guest at a meeting of the Norwegian PR Club in 1950, where he was thanked for the assistance he had provided in the formation of the Norwegian association.<sup>16</sup> Thus, representatives from the Norwegian PR Club gained good insight into ongoing discussions on PR in England and, according to the anniversary journal, this led to a lot of useful information being obtained.<sup>17</sup>

In 1950, Medbøe wrote to board member Herman Kristoffer Lemkuhl in London that the main idea of the PR Club was “to keep the new profession, Public Relations, under sound control in this country”.<sup>18</sup> Medbøe points out that there is growing interest in the field in Norway, and that it is therefore important that “our profession is not misused by anyone”.<sup>19</sup> This can be linked to an understanding that PR should only be used for the purpose of good, and not be abused by enemies of the state, or those who worked in commercial enterprises, who were still not welcome as members of the Norwegian PR Club. Voting on membership in the Club was kept secret and many applications were rejected in the early years (Mørk, 1994, p. 9). However, after the government invited the trade organizations into People and Defence, and thus the fight against communist influence and for Norwegian defence policy, members of the trade organizations were admitted to the PR Club for the first time in 1951.<sup>20</sup>

Compared with the Norwegian association, the British Institute of Public Relations was much more open concerning who could join. According to board member Odd Hjort-Sørensen, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’

16 Odd Medbø (1950): Minutes from a meeting 3. March 1950, KA.

17 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1959): Den Norske Public Relation Klubb. 1949–1959. Oslo: Emil Moestue AS, p. 37.

18 Odd Medbøe (1950). Letter to Lemkuhl, The Norwegian Embassy in London (23.06.1950), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Office in London, National Archives.

19 Odd Medbøe (1950). Letter to Lemkuhl, The Norwegian Embassy in London (23.06.1950), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Office in London, National Archives.

20 Odd Medbøe (1952): Annual Report for Public Relations Klubb 1951–52 (02.12.1952), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Office in London, National Archives.

press service, it was noted at the IPR annual meeting in 1949 by the association's secretary Alec Spoor that the Norwegians "had chosen a more correct line than the English in the matter of membership". Spoor said that he "regretted that it was a bit difficult to find a common ground for the work in the institute whose members represent widely different interests and often also competing companies".<sup>21</sup>

The Norwegian Club did not arrange practical courses in communication or publish their own magazine, as did their British counterparts. However, the members of the board wrote articles on PR in newspapers and magazines and conducted a series of lectures for political science students at the University of Oslo. The new chairman, Odd Medbøe, held lectures on public relations in 1956,<sup>22</sup> and several of the Club's members were invited back to give more lectures the following year. Medbøe held lectures entitled, for example, "General Introduction to Public Relations", and Finn Jerstad lectured on "Public Relations teaching at the American universities" after he had been on a study tour in the country.<sup>23</sup> All these lectures took place at the workplaces of the lecturers and did not become part of the official university teaching programme.<sup>24</sup>

Former head of the government's information office in London, now head of the UN information office, Tor Gjesdal, visited the Norwegian PR Club in 1954. At this meeting, Gjesdal said that the UN statutes stated that their information office should not engage in propaganda. At the same time, he claimed that PR was close to propaganda. It was all a matter of whether they were *meeting certain needs* or *conducting true propaganda*. Gjesdal therefore believed that PR was a good hiding or blurring concept, and that by practicing it, they were getting close to conducting an activity that they were prohibited from doing. Gjesdal's goal in this regard was to create an understanding of the ideas and work of the UN. Gjesdal also informed the Club members that the Russian UN representatives voted consistently against the budget of the UN Committee on Information.<sup>25</sup>

21 Hjort-Sørensen, Odd (1949): "Rapport fra The British Institute of Public Relations' årsmøte oktober 1949", KA.

22 Den norske public relations klubb (1956): "Styrets årsberetning for 1956", KA.

23 Den norske public relations klubb (1957): "Generalforsamling i Den norske public relations klubb". (29.05.1957), KA.

24 Den norske public relations klubb (1959): Den norske public relations klubb. 1949–1959. Oslo: Emil Moestue AS, p. 36.

25 Minutes, 06.01.1954, KA.

Secretary of the Norwegian PR Association, Odd Medbøe also played a central role in the organizing committee of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), along with representatives from NATO countries Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands. Together with Hans Hermans (advisor to the Dutch Prime Minister), Medbøe prepared the statutes of IPRA, was elected vice-president of the Provisional Committee<sup>26</sup> and chaired the first official meetings. IPRA was established in 1955 and included members from the United States, Belgium, Canada and Finland. The preparatory meetings and first IPRA meeting took place in Great Britain in June 1955.<sup>27</sup> From the beginning, the association had a clear Anglo-Saxon and Western European profile (L'Etang, 2009, pp. 76–78).

Medbøe was also invited to the annual meeting of the *Public Relations Society of America* in the late 1950s, as vice chairman of the International Public Relations Committee. There was a mix of people from the public sector and large business enterprises in attendance, but as Medbøe pointed out in an internal memo, Cold War issues were also discussed: Deputy Secretary of State Edward W. Barret talked about measures such as “Propagandizing for Democracy” and “Voice of America”, which apparently had altruistic motives, but the information was ideologically injected to shape positive perceptions about the United States and its allies and to create positive attitudes toward democracy, capitalism and freedom (Jowett & O'Donnell 2019, pp. 12–13), similar to the way People and Defence and the Norwegian Atlantic Committee functioned in Norway. In a speech to the American Public Relations Association, Medbøe highlights the importance of the organization for the development of IPRA:

We have always looked to you in the United States and admired your advanced development in this important field. I am happy to tell you that some of your fine members have been wholeheartedly in our discussion from the very beginning and contributed tremendously to the success of our work. In my opinion it would not have been possible to launch the international association without the support it had from the United States.<sup>28</sup>

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26 Provisional Committee for the Establishment of an International Public Relations Association – Minutes of Meetings, London, May 8, and Hastings, May 9, 1953 (1953), Bournemouth University Weston Library

27 Minutes of the first meeting of the Council of the International P.R. Association, Bath, England, 1 May (1955); Minutes of the Second meeting of the Council of the International P.R. Association, The Hague, Holland, 14 October (1955); Minutes of the Third meeting of the Council of the International Public Relations Association, Paris, France, May 31–June 2, 1956 (1956).

28 Odd Medbøe (1955): “Odd Meboe address”, KA.

Medbøe also said that PR can create better “understanding between nations”, and that: “Surely there is much we can do to develop warm cooperation amongst the people of the world”.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, this is the same year that the CIA supported a military coup in Guatemala, after Edward Bernays had worked for several years on a campaign on behalf of the *United Fruit Company*, to smear the legitimately elected Guatemalan president (Miller & Dinan, 2008, p. 22). This kind of propaganda is reminiscent of Britain’s activities during the First World War.

In the Norwegian discussions over statutes in 1956, it came to light that some people were talking about creating their own PR Association, if they continued to be banned from the Norwegian PR Club.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the paragraph that excluded certain branches was removed, but voting on members still took place by secret ballots.<sup>31</sup> In 1957, Lars Øystein Os from the *Information Office for Insurance* was admitted to the Club. Thus, formal ties were established for the first time with the Norwegian trade organization press and the private sector. In 1954, representatives from the *Norwegian Association of Trade Unions Insurance and Information* and the *Norwegian Cooperative Association* were also accepted into the organization.<sup>32</sup> In 1957, two PR managers for foreign oil companies in Norway were admitted: Bjørn Hafslund from *Esso, Norway* and Chris Bugge from *Shell, Norway*.<sup>33</sup> In 1960, PR agency leader and owner Nils Magne Apeland’s application for membership was granted,<sup>34</sup> the same year he published the first book in Norwegian on PR (Apeland, 1960). Gradually, more representatives from the Norwegian business community joined the organization. As the Norwegian Public Relations Club opened up to more and more members from the private sector, the organization moved into a new era, which is not within the scope of the investigations in this article.

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29 Odd Medbøe (1955): “Odd Mebboe adress”, KA.

30 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1954): Summer meeting on 15 June 1956 (18.06.1956), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information Office in London, National Archives.

31 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1956): Directors’ annual report for 1956, KA.

32 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1954): Minutes of meeting (17.09.1954), KA.

33 Finn Jerstad (1957): “Ekstraordinær generalforsamling 29 november 1957”; Den norske public relations klubb (1957): Letter to “PR sjef Bjørn Hafslund” (30.11.1957), KA.

34 The Norwegian Public Relations Club (1960): The General Assembly of the Norwegian Public Relations Club was held at the SAS House in Oslo on Tuesday, April 5, 1960, KA.

## A think tank for Cold War propaganda

We have seen that there are clear threads between British war propaganda, the British Institute of Public Relations and the Norwegian Public Relations Club. Several of the early members of the Club had backgrounds from the government's information office in London during World War II, and from the outset, there was extensive contact between the two countries' associations.

The Norwegian PR Club was significantly inspired by British and US communication work. The first leader of the organization had experience from information work in the USA throughout the Second World War. Moreover, the press manager of the state-owned Norwegian Airline had close contacts with the British Institute of Public Relations (IPR) and the International PR Association.

We have also seen that the Norwegian Public Relations Club was established after Norway joined NATO, and that NATO membership became part of the Club's internal discussions, which was also a focus of the government's information work, not least through People and Defence and the work of the Norwegian Atlantic Committee. The PR Club was originally only open for people who represented official Norway, mainly people who worked on foreign policy and other types of international contacts, such as the Norwegian Airline, the Norwegian Shipowners' Association and the Oslo Tourist Board, which worked closely with the official authorities. The available documents show that the discussions at the PR Club's meetings were about Norway's relations with other countries and foreign policy. There were also close (personal) ties to those who organized the pro-NATO and anti-communist propaganda in People and Defence and the Norwegian Atlantic Committee.

Neither the Norwegian Public Relations Club, People and Defence or the Norwegian Atlantic Committee used the term propaganda in their documents or in external work. After the British use of propaganda during World War I and Nazi Germany during World War II, the term propaganda was clearly discredited. Propaganda was used to unite European nations, which increased tensions in Europe, leading to a violent mobilization in World War I, and was later exploited by Hitler to mobilize around the Nazi movement and to expand the German nation in World War II (Stråth & Wagner, 2017, p. 47). The Norwegian Home Front also warned against government information work that would remind people of Nazi propaganda.

The Norwegian Prime Minister and his colleagues therefore had a need to develop other forms of communication, which would not be reminiscent of the propaganda of the Nazis, the new enemy, the communists, or the propaganda from the Soviet Union. This new form of propaganda was therefore more subdued, indirect, and subtle.

Thus, we can conclude that the Norwegian Public Relations Club was initially a part of what Dahlen and Werenskjold (2022b) call a Scandinavian propaganda model, where social democratic politicians use the media and civil society to gain support for defence policy and combat Soviet propaganda and communist influence (p. 174), a propaganda model that has many similarities to Soviet attempts to influence and support civil peace organizations in Scandinavia in the 1950s and 1960s.

Based on the discussion in this chapter, we have seen that the Norwegian Public Relations Club was originally a kind of think tank (“a safe place where plans and strategies could be discussed”<sup>35</sup>) for communication workers in the public sector. We have seen that the initiative to establish the Club, preparation of its statutes and its management were dominated by Labour Party people who held central positions in the state apparatus. The Prime Minister himself was present at the first meeting, and his close ally Olaf Solumsmoen was elected deputy chairman.

The Norwegian Public Relations Club was nevertheless an organization that was formed outside the state apparatus, as part of civil society, and could therefore include close allies from the Norwegian Airline, the Norwegian Shipowners’ Association and the Oslo Tourist Board, who would support the state’s goals and intentions, in line with the Scandinavian propaganda model.

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## CHAPTER 5

# Social Movement Communication as Democratic Innovation: The Alta Conflict 1970–1982

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**Abstract:** How can lobbying and influence be useful not only for those who already are powerful, but also for the empowerment of the disempowered? Thus, how may we democratise control over the means of rhetorical power? An answer may be found in rare cases of social movement communication impacting constitutional reform, such as the Alta dam conflict, 1970–1982, from an area where the Norwegian state overlaps with the Sápmi homeland. Social movement communication as democratic innovation is a research topic scattered between social movement studies (SMS) and strategic communication research (SCR). This chapter integrates both perspectives, firstly, (a) by identifying one shared approach, “empirically grounded critical theory”; and secondly, (b) by applying the empirical method typical to that approach, namely “comparative historical analysis”; and thirdly (c) by suggesting some empirically grounded amendments to existing theoretical concepts on social movement communication as democratic innovation.

**Keywords:** strategic communication, social movement, critical theory, Alta dam conflict, participatory-deliberative democracy

## Introduction

How can strategic communication deepen democracy by serving less resourceful groups in their efforts to empower themselves? Combining strategic communication research (SCR) with social movement studies (SMS), this chapter investigates *social movement communication as democratic innovation*. That is, lobbying and influence as tools not only for those who are already powerful, but also for the empowerment of the disempowered. Thus, the chapter contributes to research on democratisation of the means of rhetorical power.

By analysing a historical case, this chapter suggests concepts and methods for research on social movement communication as democratic innovation. The Alta Conflict started out as a local conflict about hydro-power development, but evolved into a conflict over competing models of democracy. It took place from 1970 until 1982, within the partly overlapping territories of the Norwegian state and the Sápmi homeland. A pro-dam movement had obtained a ruling position in the Norwegian state, but met with resistance, and an anti-dam movement emerged all over the Sápmi homeland, and spread beyond this area to become a wider movement (for a recent and vivid narrative over these events, see: Eriksen, 2023). Eventually, the dam was built. However, the conflicts that arose led to a crisis for the corporative and parliamentary democratic order, opening up political opportunities for lobbying, actionism, and later, formal constitutional changes aimed at protecting Indigenous rights and environmental rights.

Section 2 presents theoretical gains from SCR (e.g., Falkheimer & Heide, 2023) and SMS (e.g., della Porta & Diani, 2007). Our chapter integrates both SCR and SMS, operating within one of their shared approaches: empirically grounded Critical Theory, which has developed from Jürgen Habermas' normative theorising (e.g., della Porta, 2020; Falkheimer & Heide, 2021). Using Critical Theory, we contribute to the further development of analytical concepts *on social movement communication and democratic innovation*, introduced in section 3, by applying a *comparative historical analysis*, described in section 4.

Then, in sections 5–6, we examine the selected empirical case. We discuss the historiography of the Alta Conflict, considering newly accessible primary sources (section 4), and analyse questions that were ignored in earlier research on the case (section 5) due to the specialisation between

SCR (Ihlen, 2004) and SMS (Jensen, 2015). Specifically, we analyse the Alta Conflict as democratic innovation through social movement communication. The Alta Conflict serves as a test case for the role of communication in democratic innovation because it is an example of a social movement that created constitutional change (Johnsen, 2021, p. 23; Minde, 2003), something that is rare (Bailey & Mattei, 2013; della Porta, 2020). As a rare historical example of “new social movements” having an impact on a “corporatist democratic system” (Dryzek et al., 2003, pp. 26–27), it is hence a “deviant case” in the methodological sense (see Rueschemeyer, 2003, pp. 310–311). Thus, the study is not only an *application* of earlier concepts on social movement communication as democratic innovation; the case study suggests that the general explanatory concepts should be *amended* to fit an empirical reality of a specific type, where constitutional change is an important aspect.

Finally, section 6 provides implications for science and policy. We argue that, in this case, strategic communication *did* contribute to furthering democratisation by empowering the disempowered, and that – in some cases – social movements may use rhetorical creativity to *generate resources* and convert these resources into rhetorical impact.

Regarding the *ideographic* dimension, we discuss the implications of our analysis for debates regarding lobbyism and actionism, related to the Norwegian state-commissioned Power and Democracy Research (1998–2003) as well as the ongoing Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2018–2023), and we suggest directions for further research.

*Nomothetically*, these findings *demonstrate* that an integration of SCR with SMS, together with methodological sensitivity to historical processes, can help to uncover *complex interactions* between dominant and oppositional political forces. The case *tests* certain concepts from Critical Theory, indicating that – at least in some cases – it may be empirically misleading with *a priori* reification of “juridification” and “hegemony”, as these two concepts have been conceptualised, by Habermas (1981b) and Laclau and Mouffe (2001), respectively. We thus challenge some of the conceptual dichotomies that are foundational to the Critical Theory approach, an approach which is shared among some researchers of SCR as well as SMS – such as Habermas’ (1981a, 1981b) dichotomy between communicative and instrumental rationalities, or Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) assumed “agonism” between institutionalised deliberation and radical participation. Such dichotomies do not always fit the empirical

findings (e.g., della Porta, 2013), but this discrepancy has not yet been researched.<sup>1</sup>

## Background and puzzle

The toolbox of political action includes lobbying and activism. Do such tools undermine democracy by serving already resourceful groups at the cost of the common good? Or do such tools deepen democracy by opening for a wider range of voices? By acknowledging that most tools of political action may be used for good or evil, this chapter contributes empirically based theory that builds on how strategic communication may empower social movements that aim to deepen democracy, integrating both social movement studies (SMS) and strategic communication research (SCR). In both fields, there are ongoing efforts to formulate concepts regarding the phenomenon “social movement communication as democratic innovation” (e.g., Adi, 2019; della Porta, 2020, p. viii; Ihlen, 2004; Jensen, 2015; Mattoni, 2012, Milan, 2013; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2019).

Strategic communication research (SCR) deals with *influence* or persuasion. It is something of a paradox when some scholars in the field call for increased awareness of *power* (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018, p. 138) and *power inequalities* (Ihlen, 2004; Sommerfeldt, 2012). A founding article defined “strategic communication” as “the purposeful use of communication by an *organisation* to fulfil its mission” (our emphasis, Hallahan et al., 2007 cited in Falkheimer & Heide, 2023, p. 5). Though “organisation” in this definition *might* be a social movement (Hallahan et al., 2007, pp. 3–4; Zerfass et al., 2018, p. 334), *most* researchers in the field nevertheless deal with corporate communication, seeing activists and critical publics as adversaries (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018, pp. 34–5; Sommerfeldt, 2012). This disregard of the strategic communication of non-institutionalised actors, including oppositional social movements, indicates a blind spot in SCR research. Though SCR has a growing body of literature regarding political PR (Stromback & Kioussis, 2019), this research mainly focuses on how *institutionalised* parties or state- and business actors apply marketing strategies. Only a few studies take the opposite standpoint, inquiring into “activist PR” (Adi, 2019; Ihlen, 2004; Sommerfeldt, 2012), and only occasionally is the issue of *power differences* (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2019) treated as something

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1 Acknowledgement: The chapter builds in part on research funded by the Research Council Norway.

more *material* than merely a moral(istic) choice (as in Dan et al., 2019). This puzzling shortcoming in SCR may be because this research is still in its infancy, as “strategic communication has emerged as a professional and academic concept during the last two decades” (Falkheimer & Heide, 2023, p. 84).

Social movement studies (SMS), by contrast, is a specialised field of political sociology, established since the 1980s, in the aftermath of the “new social movements” (Della Porta & Diani 2007, p. 1). “Social movements” may be defined as “(a) mostly informal networks of interaction, based on (b) shared beliefs and solidarity, mobilised around (c) contentious themes through (d) the frequent use of various forms of protest” (della Porta & Mattoni, 2016). Hence, social movements are swarm-like configurations of individuals and “social movement organisations” (SMOs), which range from the ephemeral and improvised, to the permanent and formalised (Della Porta & Diani, 2007, p. 140). If SCR seeks sensitising concepts regarding *power* (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018, p. 138) and *power inequalities* (Adi, 2019; Ihlen, 2004; Sommerfeldt, 2012), then it may look to SMS research, first and foremost regarding media and communication as *empowerment* (Bazzichelli, 2013; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Karpf, 2017; Mattoni, 2012; Milan, 2013; Zamponi, 2018),<sup>2</sup> but also regarding the role of social movements in *democratisation* (della Porta, 2013, 2020; Rossi & della Porta, 2019; Talpin, 2015).

On the basis of these contested themes in current research: What research question is it pertinent to inquire into? In a rare example of integrating both SCR and SMS research, Bazzichelli (2013) gained fresh insight on *innovations* in the IT-sector as being co-determined by both social movement communication and corporate communication. This approach to innovation may be transferred to research on democratisation. During recent decades, many modern democracies have seen decreased participation in elections and parties (della Porta, 2020, p. viii) – while demands from social movements have led states to adopt *democratic innovations*, defined as “institutional arrangements allowing for participation, deliberation, and sometimes decisions of lay citizens and non-professionalised political actors beyond the ballot” (Smith, 2009, cited in Talpin, 2015). Integrating SCR and SMS in studies of democratic innovation may enable

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2 See also the Routledge book series “Media and Communication Activism: The Empowerment Practices of Social Movements” (e.g., Belotti, 2022; Pedro-Caranana et al., 2022; Rone, 2022).

us to unpack the various nuances of the *interactions*, between institutionalised and emerging actors. In particular, interactions that are related to both institutionalised and emergent actors' use of communication as a means for conveying and shaping their definitions of their own movements.

*Our chapter* asks the following question, at a general level: How can strategic communication deepen democracy by serving less resourceful groups in their efforts to empower themselves? Despite evidence, such as the Alta Conflict, this issue still seems to be weakly conceptualised. The research may be brought one step forward by integrating SCR and SMS. Thus, SCR may provide better tools to discover empowerment and democratisation, while SMS may more easily unpack and demystify institutionalised and already empowered actors. We integrate SCR and SMS in a historical comparative analysis. Previously, the case has been analysed from the angles of SCR (Ihlen, 2004) and SMS (Jensen, 2015) respectively. By integrating the two perspectives, we state novel research questions. From the viewpoint of SCR (Ihlen, 2004), the case was used to demonstrate how *differences in resourcefulness* could *determine rhetoric capacity*, but with little regard for how such dynamics change relative power inequalities. From the perspective of SMS (Jensen, 2015), the case demonstrates the dynamic self-empowerment of two competing political SMO-blocks, but without specific analysis of rhetorical practices. Thus, we ask the question that was ignored by this specialisation: *How do SMOs use rhetorical creativity to generate resources, and change relative power inequalities?*

How should we conduct research on such questions? Some researchers, within SMS and SCR alike, seek to contribute to empowerment and democratisation by adopting empirically grounded Critical Theory as their research approach (e.g., della Porta, 2020; Falkheimer & Heide, 2021). In the narrow sense, Critical Theory (with capital letters to denote a particular intellectual tradition) is the research tradition from the Frankfurt School. According to Habermas (1965), *critical research* is to pursue research questions of relevance to *human emancipation*, combining explanatory science with interpretative humanities. Below we elaborate on our method of critical research by way of abductive reasoning and the critical inquiry this method entails.

Some see a sustained tension within Critical Theory between empirical inquiry and normative philosophy (Bohman, 2021). Within SMS, this tension has been operationalised as a research design where Habermas' normative concepts have informed comparative research, leading in turn

to empirically based refinements of the normative concepts (della Porta, 2013, 2020). This corresponds well with what has been suggested as a way forward for SCR, taking inspiration from Critical Theory (Falkheimer & Heide, 2023, p. 212), combining the scientific “transmission-approach” with the humanistic “sense-making-approach” (Falkheimer & Heide, 2023, pp. 37–40), and applying Habermas’ normative distinction between *communicative* and *strategic* action to evaluate the degree to which the ideals of “co-creation” and “stakeholder dialogue” is actualised in empirical reality (Falkheimer & Heide, 2023, pp. 19, 60–62). We do not aim to “solve” these debates in this chapter, but rather see this as a fruitful starting point for our inquiry.

*Our chapter* operates within this Critical Theory approach, with its productive tension between empirical inquiry and normative theorising. We will now turn to a review of the implications regarding choice of analytical concepts (section 3) and research methods (section 4).

## Concepts

Our chapter contributes to the ongoing development of *analytical concepts* about social movement communication as democratic innovation. These concepts were originally coined by political philosophers within Critical Theory that hold different views on communication (e.g., Habermas, 1981a, 1981b; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), and further developed empirically within SCR and SMS (e.g., della Porta, 2013, 2020; Falkheimer & Heide, 2023). We summarise the conceptual development so far, identify some unresolved issues, and use these for a theoretical operationalisation of our research questions.

Strategic communication is radically challenged by Habermas’ conceptual bifurcation of *strategy* and *communication* as a dichotomous relation. “Strategic action is goal oriented, persuasive, and instrumental, while communicative action is oriented towards understanding and consensus” (Falkheimer & Heide, 2023, p. 61). The *ideal* communicative action is a dialogue where all participants are truly free to participate on truly equal terms. Democratisation theory argues that pure communicative action, if actualised, would be ideal *deliberative-democratic practice*, leading to consensus on the common good for all participants (della Porta, 2013; Eriksen, 1995). Compared to classical *technè rhétorikè* (Barthes, 1994), Habermas’ pure “communicative action” likens an idealist understanding of rhetoric,



as a deliberative clarification of norms and truth, whereas pure “strategic action” includes the sceptic’s understanding of rhetoric, as a manipulation of norms and truth. For Habermas, the open dialogue is to be desired, because it opens the right of individuals to argumentation and their inter-subjective recognition of each other in a shared “lifeworld”.

Yet the so-called “colonialisation” of the lifeworld by “systems” (e.g., state administration and market capitalism) is constantly hindering such a free exchange of views because its instrumental logic penetrates the lifeworld (Habermas, 1981b). Habermas’ dichotomy is a sensitising concept for ethical suspicion towards all mixing of strategy with communication (see Falkheimer & Heide, 2023, p. 61), such as PR, advertisement, and political campaigns. Social movement communication is not immune to Habermas’ critical suspicion. When some movements are seen as reactionary, authoritarian, or violent, they may be explained in terms of strategic action taking the upper hand.

When it comes to *democratisation movements*, Critical Theory combines ethical suspicion with pragmatic concerns – or strategic action. Laclau and Mouffe (2001) argue that political order always remains unfinished and imperfect, with unresolved conflicts and various coalitions struggling for domination, or “hegemony”. Furthermore, they claim that a “non-exclusive public sphere of rational argument is a conceptual impossibility” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. xvii; see also: della Porta, 2013), and thus they are even more suspicious than Habermas himself of whether communicative reasoning is even possible. They propose informal deliberative-democratic practices, understood as “counter-hegemony” in competitive (“agonistic”) relation to the dominant hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe (2001, p. xviii) call this “radical democracy” and argue in opposition to Habermas. However, Habermas (1962, § 14-15) analysed the failed revolution in 1848 as a failed attempt by “radical democrats” at instituting a more inclusive, “plebeian” public sphere,<sup>3</sup> and Habermas (1981a, 1982b, cited in della Porta 2013) took interest in both formal and informal forms of deliberation. The use of language can both be liberating and “colonising”, which Habermas (1981b) illustrates with the paradox of the “*juridification*” of rights, such as workers’ rights, on the one hand providing, potentially, the fulfilment of certain goals of social movements, and on the other hand, stalling further

3 In a recent response to Mouffe (1999), the “agonistic” form of “radical democracy” is included in Habermas’ theory of deliberative democracy. (See the German original: Habermas, 2023a, pp. 19, 51, 47–48, 63–4; as well as the Norwegian translation: Habermas, 2023b, pp. 22–23, 51–3, 60, 64–6.)

political struggle, because of the institutionalisation of rights (Spång, 2018). In that context, Habermas has *mostly* theorised on the possibility of establishing deliberative-democratic institutions *within the limits* of formalised *juridification*, whereas Laclau/Mouffe strive to open informal deliberative-democratic zones *within the limits* of oppositional *counter-hegemony*. These two models have been labelled “*liberal-deliberative democracy*” for the institutionalised form, and “*participatory-deliberative democracy*” for the oppositional form (della Porta, 2013). It seems that both Habermas and Laclau/Mouffe *contribute strategically* to radical *deliberative democracy* – a paradoxical unity of pure strategic action and pure communicative action. It seems that they try to resolve that paradox as a dialectical opposition within their analytical concepts of (counter-)hegemony and juridification. Other democracy theorists suggest that Habermas’ *dichotomy* would be better *redefined as scale*, including a range of mixed forms (Rommetvedt, 1995, pp. 109–119).

Empirical research on democratisation movements applies comparative historical analysis to inquiry into the *empirical manifestations* of deliberative democracy as coined by Critical Theory, especially its informal forms (della Porta, 2013). However, this research is in dialogue with other empirical research fronts, which may challenge the analytical concepts used by Critical Theory. By searching for mechanisms of democratic innovation, della Porta (2020) takes part in the research front on the outcomes of social movements (Bailey & Mattei, 2013; Bosi & Uba, 2021). Della Porta (2020) approaches such mechanisms mostly as social movement communication, theorised as the “framing processes” of SMOs (Snow, 2007). This includes not only framing as a dimension of *influencing*, or the “action repertoires” expressed by the SMOs (Taylor & van Dyke, 2007), but also framing as a dimension of *organising*, theorised as “resource mobilisation” within SMOs (Edwards & McCarthy, 2007) – two phenomena that SCR knows as the “external and internal communication” of organisations (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018, pp. 17–18). Such network analysis starts at the meso-level, which diverges from the abstract macro models such as (counter-) hegemony and juridification. The research so far, to our knowledge, has not discussed this *discrepancy* between normative concepts and empirical description. The *dichotomous models* of the micro-macro relation, offered by Critical Theory (Habermas, 1981a; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) may be better fitted to discover systemic inertia than the democratic potential of communicative action in the life-world. However,

so-called “practice theories”, with their *dualist models* of the micro-macro relation, may be fit to discover opportunities for transformative action, such as in the generative and dialectical tensions between structure and action.<sup>4</sup> We explore how both perspectives may be useful with respect to understanding democratic innovation. With this assumption, we may operationalise the research question: “How do SMOs use rhetorical creativity to generate resources, and change relative power inequalities?” Theoretically operationalised, the question becomes: “If we trace such actions in terms of networks, will the relation between micro and macro be better explained using the dichotomous or the dualist model of micro-macro relationships?”

We have now operationalised our research question regarding some of the unresolved issues in the empirical application of Critical Theory on social movement communication as democratic innovation.

## Methods

Our chapter adapts a historical-sociological method typical to empirically grounded Critical Theory. *Historicising*, or taking a historical approach, aims at discovering which human practices might have brought about what we know as society, and thus, which human actions might change it. We use this method to avoid *reification*, i.e., misinterpreting contingent human creations as unavoidable natural conditions (Lukács, 1923).

Habermas (1962), following in footsteps of Marx (1852), traced the rise and fall of the “bourgeois public sphere” through Western European history. Similarly, recent SCR on PR and democracy suggests testing the empirical grounds for Habermas’ more recent contributions to normative philosophy, by turning to historical institutionalist studies of democratisation (Engelstad, 2015). This would fit with a perceived need within SCR for more “observational” studies, that is, registering what people do rather than what they say that they do (Zerfass et al., 2018, p. 345). SMS, similarly, applies comparative historical analysis to identify mechanisms

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4 Some examples of practice theories being applied to research social movement communication: Bourdieu (1977) is applied by Ihlen (2004) and Mattoni (2020); Giddens (1984) is applied by Sommerfeldt (2012) and Mattoni (2020); Gramsci (2021) is applied by Marchi (2021); Latour (2007) and Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2006) are applied by Jensen (2015); while Negri (2000) is applied by Cini et al. (2017).

of democratisation at work across different particular cases (della Porta, 2020).

How can one single case yield theoretical gain? (Rueschemeyer, 2003). In other words, how may we generalise sociologically (nomothetical research) after documenting a unique historical process (ideographic research)? Historical narratives are written by arranging facts according to implicit explanatory models (Carr, 1961). These explanatory models may be made explicit in the form of diachronic comparisons within chains of causes and effects, so called *analytical narratives* (Knutsen, 2002). Such within-case (diachronic) comparison may or may not be combined with cross-case (synchronic) comparison. In any case, it is the “dialogue between theory and evidence that constitutes the comparative advantage of comparative historical analysis” (Rueschemeyer, 2003, p. 312). For Peirce (1986), it is incremental hypothesis development, so-called “abduction”: “Hypothesis is where we find some very curious circumstance, which would be explained by the supposition that it was a case of a certain general rule, and thereupon adopt that supposition” (Peirce, 1986, p. 326, cited in Jensen, 2015, p. 110). Abduction involves an “inductive” description of a particular case (“some very curious circumstance” in Peirce’s words), as well as a “deductive” argument to explain it (“would be explained by the supposition”), leading to hypothesis-development (“thereupon adopt that supposition”) (Jensen, 2015, p. 110). What Peirce calls a “curious circumstance” may at times qualify as a “least likely case”, or alternatively, a finding that disconfirms some “deterministic” hypothesis. In such cases we may talk about hypothesis testing, not only hypothesis development, even with single-case studies (Rueschemeyer, 2003, pp. 310–311).

*Our chapter* contributes with abductive conceptual development. It is a comparative historical analysis based on diachronic comparison within a single case. It will soon be clear that this is a “least likely case”, and thus, the abduction is close to hypothesis testing. The reader will now be introduced to the case first through a historical narrative (section 5), and then through a sociological analysis (section 6). We will discuss the previous historiography of the case in the light of newly disclosed primary sources, and we will revisit the sociological analyses to refine some analytical concepts. Thus, the next chapter continues the methodological discussion in a more concrete sense related to the documentation, historiography, and analysis of the case.

## A historical narrative of the case

The Alta Dam Conflict (1970–1982) was a cycle of eventful protests within two partly overlapping historical-geographical entities, the Norwegian nation-state and the Sápmi Indigenous homeland. In this section, we will first present the historical significance of the event, and frame it as a “least likely case”. Thereafter, we will narrate a short history of the case. Finally, this section will discuss the historical research on the case, and review some newly available primary sources.

### The historical significance of the Alta Conflict

Historians see the Alta Conflict as significant because of its contribution to Indigenous rights and environmental rights (Dalland, 1997, pp. 41–42), not only regarding the national histories of Sápmi and Norway (Minde, 2003), but also in the context of comparative history. In comparative research on *environmental rights*, Dryzek et al. (2003, pp. 26–27) analyse the Alta Conflict as a *rare example* of “new social movements” gaining popular support within a “corporatist political system”. Similarly, in comparative research on *Indigenous rights*, Johnsen (2021, p. 23) argues that it is clear that for the Sámi people, a “genesis phase [...] occurred in the 1970s as the Sámi movement gained momentum and eventually culminated in the Alta Conflict”. However, Indigenous rights and environmental rights remain publicly controversial. Whether the changes should be seen as democratisation or not is an issue for an ongoing Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as the public debate surrounding it (Johnsen, 2021, p. 23).<sup>5</sup> This has implications for our research. We may frame the Alta Conflict as what we call a “least likely” case in the methodological sense (see section 4), not only because social movements rarely gain constituent power (Bailey & Mattei, 2013; della Porta, 2013), but also because it took place within a corporative and discriminatory political tradition.

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5 “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Norway” was appointed by the Norwegian parliament in June 2018. Its mandate was to (1) conduct a *historical* mapping of the Norwegian authorities’ assimilation policy towards the Sami, Kven/Finnish and Forest-Finnish minorities, (2) examining *contemporary* repercussions of the assimilation policies, and finally, (3) propose *future* initiatives for further reconciliation. The final report was submitted to the Norwegian parliament on 1 June 2023: <https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/sannhets--og-forsoningskommisjonen/rapport-til-stortinget-fra-sannhets--og-forsoningskommisjonen.pdf> (last accessed 06.11.2013).

## A brief history of the Alta Conflict

Public contention over the dam started in 1970, when planning documents from the Ministry of Industry reached the local population. Protests lasted until 1982, with a pro-dam ruling by the Supreme Court, one failed sabotage action, and the main anti-dam SMO shutting down. Subaltern classes along Alta River were split on the matter. The same was the case with experts within the judicial and executive state powers. The parliament took a pro-dam stance twice: in 1978, the reason was an expected energy crisis, then, in 1980, the rationale was never to give in to actionists and lobbyists. Anti-dam protestors contested the legality of these decisions through the court system. The main anti-dam SMO, *Folkeaksjonen* or “The People’s Action” adapted unconventional means, lobbying and actionism, not only to influence public opinion, but also to block construction work, in anticipation of a court ruling. A less known, local pro-dam SMO called themselves *Borgervernet*, “The Militia”. More effectively, an anti-dam SMO, *Samisk aksjonsgruppe*, “Sámi Action Group” took action in the capital city Oslo, holding hunger strikes for Indigenous rights in 1979 and 1981. Both times, Labour party governments responded with a temporary delay of construction work. In the autumn of 1981, the Conservative Party formed a government, making conditions no longer favourable for hunger strikes. The Conservative Party was strictly pro-dam, while the centrist and radical left parties were anti-dam. The Labour party was split, but restored its pro-dam line in 1980. Also in 1980, the Ministry of Defence refused to use military capabilities for protest policing. This move contributed to avoiding a violent escalation, together with “The People’s Action” shutting down after the Supreme Court decision. The dam was built, but the Supreme Court’s pro-dam reasoning remains controversial in the legal profession, and the hunger strike in 1979 set in train a formal policy process, which would eventually lead to constitutional reform in 1989.

## Accumulated research regarding the Alta Conflict

If we leave activist literature and historical novels out of our account (e.g., Mikkelsen, 1971 1980), four systematic and in-depth historical accounts stand out. Dalland (1994) documented a detailed timeline without much narration or analysis. Ihlen (2004), re-visited the case in his doctoral thesis within SCR, analysing the struggle for agenda-setting between the more institutionalised actors involved. Hjorthol (2006) added a detailed

historical account, with particularly good access to sources regarding internal struggles within the labour movement. Jensen (2015) re-visited the case again in a doctoral thesis within SMS, taking a historical-anthropological view on the social basis of the competing pro- and anti-dam movements.

Additionally, there is an ongoing documentation process that has brought forth primary sources. Fresh primary sources have been published in the form of oral history interviews (Kuhn 2020) and autobiographies (Møller, 2015; Nilsen, 2019; Somby, 2016, 2022), whereas new documentation projects demonstrate better the role of local media (Larsen, 2019) and artistic practices (Garcia-Antón, 2019; Guttorm et al., 2020). These new sources provide richer information about the local historical anthropology (Larsen, 2019; Moller, 2015; Nilsen, 2019), as well as the least institutionalised parts of the Indigenous rights movement (Garcia-Anton, 2019; Guttorm et al., 2020; Kuhn, 2020; Somby, 2016, 2022). Other issues remain under-documented, such as a local pro-dam militia, and the anti-dam stance of local courts.

This chapter is mainly based on the latest iteration of the historical research (Jensen, 2015), partly because that study was authored by one of the co-authors of the present chapter. For sources, Jensen (2015) builds on three previous studies. Past ethnographic accounts<sup>6</sup> were added to unpack the subaltern social basis of the two competing coalitions. Furthermore, ethnographic primary sources from contemporary memory work has been included.<sup>7</sup> For most historians, the analysis is implicit in the narration (Knutsen, 2002, pp. 218–219). We will now move to a more *explicit* analytical narrative.

## A sociological analysis of the case

After discussing the history of the case, we proceed to analyse it sociologically. Addressing research questions that were left out by previous studies of the case, we test the applicability of certain analytical concepts.

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- 6 The past ethnographic accounts used by Jensen (2015, p. 194) were the following: *Firstly*, regarding the downstream Alta watershed, the source was Horgen & Norddølum (1978), which was published as a contribution to a Norwegian official Report, similar to a British “Green paper” (NOU 1978:18A, pp. 181–188). *Secondly*, the source on reindeer nomadism between upstream and downstream areas was Bjørklund & Brantenborg (1981), published as an expert witness report for the Norwegian reindeer owner association (NRF) for the Supreme Court case in 1982. *Thirdly*, the Supreme Court decision itself (Norwegian Supreme Court, 1982) was utilised as a primary source for discourse analysis, a method that is not ethnographic in the strictest sense, but which is part of the toolbox for historical anthropology in the *Annales*-tradition.
- 7 During the winter of 2014–2016 the author of Jensen (2015), who is also the main author of this chapter, worked as an archivist at Alta Museum World Heritage Rock Art Center. He worked on digitalization and dissemination of archival material, utilizing participatory-democratic techniques for co-creation together with persons from the organization that had donated the archive: *Folkeaksjonen* (the People’s Action), which was the main anti-dam SMO from the Alta Conflict.



*Firstly*, from the perspective of SCR, analysis of the Alta Conflict has highlighted the relation between rhetoric and resources, limited to fixed positions in the social field (Ihlen, 2004, p. 322), demonstrating that more resourceful actors have higher rhetorical capacity. *Secondly*, from an SMS perspective, the Alta Conflict was analysed in terms of power dynamics, regarding how two agonistic movements scaled up their actions in a struggle for social and political hegemony, however, that research did not analyse rhetoric specifically (Jensen, 2015, ch. 6). By integrating the two approaches, we address a research question that was ignored when the approaches were kept separate (see section 2): *How do SMOs use rhetorical creativity to generate resources and change relative power inequalities?* Examining this question, we not only *apply* certain analytical concepts from Critical Theory (see section 3), but also *test* their suitability in a “least likely” case (see section 4).

We will now address the research question according to the theoretical operationalisation outlined in section 3: If we trace such actions in terms of networks, will the relation between micro and macro be better explained with the dichotomous or the dualist model of micro-macro relationships?

When the conflict started in 1970, the pro-dam coalition had already installed itself within central nodes of power, such as the national interest organisations of capital<sup>8</sup> and labour,<sup>9</sup> the Labour and Conservative Parties, the Government, and the Ministry of Industry. From 1970 until 1979, a wide anti-dam coalition emerged, originating in local protest movements in the villages of Maze and Alta, ending with a constitutional crisis in the capital city of Oslo. Then in 1980, the anti-dam movement failed to win the majority within the Labour Party and, thus, the national parliament, whereas the pro-dam camp failed to mobilise the Ministry of Defence and its military capacities. By 1981, the pro-dam politicians in central positions had lost much of their initial hegemony, with plural legal interpretations in local courts, and competing scientific assessments in the administration. However, pro-dam politicians succeeded in imposing a restored unity of the court system and the state administration. In February 1982, the conflict ended with the final pro-dam decision in the Norwegian Supreme

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8 The Norwegian Employer's Confederation was known as NAF, acronym for “Norsk arbeidsgiverforening”, until it became part of a wider Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, known today as NHO, acronym for “Næringslivets hovedorganisasjon” in 1989.

9 The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, known as LO, acronym for “Landsorganisasjonen”.



Court, and an attempted sabotage action against a bridge by an anti-dam cell.

We may see the entire conflict through the lens of *cybernetic networks*. Tracing organising networks at the sociological meso-level is an approach to researching the mutual influence between micro action and macro structure, within SMS (Diani, 2007, p. 341; Staggenborg, 2002, p. 125) as well as within SCR (Falkheimer & Heide, 2023, p. 9). The research has explained the upscaling of the anti-dam block and the restoration of the pro-dam block with slightly different analytical concepts. *On the one hand*, the restoration of the *pro-dam block* was theorised in rather abstract terms (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2005, ch. 9), awaiting more detailed empirical data (Jensen, 2015, p. 265). Analysis of pro-dam networking should be cautious not to speculate beyond existing data. *On the other hand*, the upscaling of the *anti-dam block* was explained by transferring analytical concepts from another empirical study, regarding coalition building between dispersed environmental movements in Italy (della Porta & Piazza, 2008). Two locally based movements against large public works in northern and southern Italy managed to act in concert after they developed *frame resonance* about *re-defining* their local struggles as resisting “large useless public works” (della Porta & Piazza, 2008). Similar mechanisms were at play during the Alta Conflict (Jensen, 2015): Local inhabitants who would see their livelihoods negatively affected by damming the river congregated and sought external allies, and they emphasised the common good. The emerging networks may be traced from two villages down- and upstream of the dam.

One of the anti-dam SMOs, *Folkeaksjonen*, “The People’s Action”, was based in Alta village, downstream of the dam. The planned dam threatened local subsistence fisheries, tourist industries, and related livelihood strategies. The chosen rhetorical strategy was to emphasise environmental rights in local campaigns, but Indigenous rights when targeting audiences outside the municipality (Ihlen, 2004, p. 181). Recent documentation shows that, from its very beginning, *Folkeaksjonen* was embedded in local organisational ties, including sports associations, business entrepreneurs, environmental organisations, all political parties, and the printing company of one of the local newspapers (Nilsen, 2019). This recent documentation provides new insights into how resources were generated during the conflict, and it seems that network building was

a highly effective strategy. The message was spread through campaigns and lobbying aimed at informing the public and policy. They obtained a network of allies locally and regionally before the conflict was radicalised in 1978–9, with the pro-dam parliamentary decision and anti-dam civil disobedience.

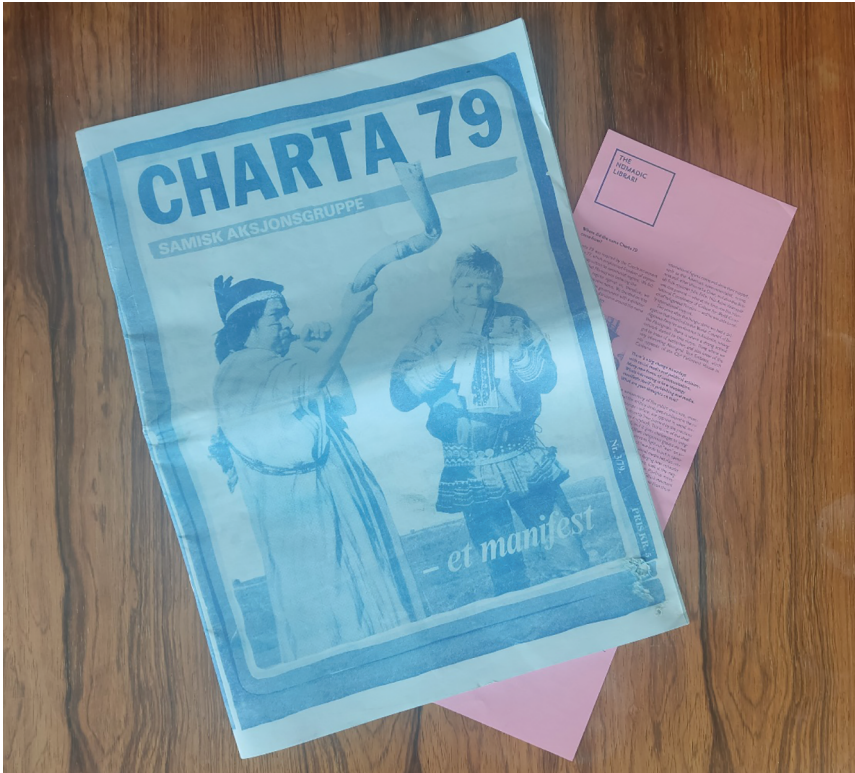


**Figure 1** From the hunger strike by Samisk aksjonsgruppe (Sami action group) in 1979. Left: Máret Sára, editor of *Charta 79*. Right: Niilas Somby, later known for an attempted sabotage action. (Reprinted from Somby, 2016, p. 47.)  
Photo: © Ánde Somby.

The other anti-dam SMO, *Samisk aksjonsgrupe*, “Sámi Action Group”, seems to have had its origins in the upstream Maze village, where the initial plans would have flooded the entire village, and a later, downscaled version would have threatened the migration routes of reindeer nomadism, a key livelihood adaptation within Sámi culture. Local protests from 1970 engaged the local artist collective. Recent documentation shows the collective as being central in an informal network of supporters for the first hunger strike for Indigenous rights, which took place in Oslo 1979 (Guttorm et al., 2020; Kuhn, 2020; Somby, 2022, 2016). The action idea

came from a group of radical Sámi activists who had been participating in civil disobedience actions in downstream Alta, but were dissatisfied with the moderation and lack of focus on Indigenous rights (Somby, 2022, p. 37). The hunger strike was staged in a public space as a spectacular action (Somby, 2016, 2022), and succeeded in changing the framing of the issue in the national media (Hjorthol, 2006). The hunger strike in 1979 led to unexpected public support for civil disobedience (Minde, 2003), leading to a steering crisis for the government. The government, as a result, gave in to some of the key demands, temporarily halting construction work, and starting the work of the Sámi rights commission, which would eventually lead to concrete constitutional reforms in 1989 (Minde, 2003). Recent documentation shows that the hunger strike, with its action newspaper *Charta 79*, was *improvised* by an *informal gathering* of persons (Somby, 2022, p. 38), however, the action group utilised a *conscious adaptation* of *action repertoires*, including collaboration with communication professionals (film makers) and academics (lawyers and social scientists), as well as inspiration from Kurdish comrades (Kuhn, 2020; Somby, 2022). This indicates that the informal action group behind the hunger strike probably had a more decisive impact than Minde (2003) found – something that should be further researched.

When a formal constitutional process was put in train in 1979, it was probably the result of the joint impact of rhetorical creativity and resource generation that resulted in networks of influence scaling out from Alta and Maze. A chief executive from the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE), the government bureau that planned the dam, said: “What made this a huge and difficult issue was the [I]ngenious issue the opponents raised when the river saviors and [those engaged in Sámi politics] joined forces. [...] That was pure genius” (Ihlen 2004, p. 180). The anti-dam issue was redefined from one about local livelihoods to Indigenous rights, and the pro-dam issue was re-defined from one about industrial growth to a defense of state sovereignty (Hjorthol, 2006). Thus, what started out as a conflict over industrialisation-versus-conservation mutated into a conflict over different democratic models: majoritarian democracy versus democratic pluralism (Jensen, 2015).



**Figure 2** Facsimile of *Charta 79*, issue no. 3, 1979, the newspaper made for the hunger strike by the Samisk aksjonsgruppe (Sámi Action Group). The facsimile was part of “The Nomadic Library”, a re-printing and research project by artists Joar Nango and Tanya Busse, for the exhibition “Let the River Flow. The Sovereign Will and the Making of a New Worldliness” at the Office for Contemporary Art, Norway, 2018. © Charta 79, Joar Nango and Tanya Busse.

By tracing the emergence of various formations in an informal cybernetic network, we have described some meso-level links between micro action and macro structure. This mechanism is qualitatively different from the aggregate of individual opinions, the latter being more relevant to explain voting behaviour. The two opposing movements responded to given opportunity structures, but also empowered themselves, gaining the capacity to open new opportunities at the structural level. When SMS and SCR approach networks at the meso level as mediating between micro action and macro structure (Diani, 2007, p. 341; Falkheimer & Heide, 2023, p. 9; Staggenborg, 2002, p. 125), this is relevant for a wider





**Figure 3** A view towards the Norwegian Parliament building from within a traditional Sámi tent (*lavvu*). Taken during the cast of the hunger strike action for the film *Ellos eatnu – la elva leve* (released 2023). Photo: © Beaska Niilas.

research front on the outcomes of social movements (Bailey & Mattei, 2013; Bosi & Uba, 2021). Here we find various conceptual resources that may be used in an analysis that continues where Ihlen (2004) ended his analysis of rhetoric and resources in the Alta Conflict, further diving into the flow of processes whereby the participants used rhetoric creatively to *generate* resources and *change* their relative positions in the social field.

*Firstly*, we may apply the conceptual dichotomies from Critical Theory to explain how rhetoric and resources impacted the macro level. During the Alta Conflict, both competing movements took *strategic action* to preserve and further their own vision of *democratic deliberation*. Thus, both acted within the tension between pure communicative action and pure strategic action, which we have seen in Habermas' (1981) understanding of "legalisation", as well as Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) concept of "(counter-)hegemony" (see section 3). The communicative actions from the *anti-dam* block could, on the one hand, be seen as expressions of (counter)hegemonic utterances (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) as they rendered a totality out of plurality. On the other hand, the change in the *pro-dam posture*, with its emphasis on popular sovereignty, could also indicate that the *resistance to the dam* was not only comprised of victims of a system's "colonialisation" of their lifeworld (Habermas, 1981b). The social movement was actually important in changing the way some pro-dam representatives of the state system framed their cause. Paradoxically, perhaps, these changes in the way the dominant state system framed its cause, may also have reduced the potential for further progress by the resistance block. The dynamics between the resistance and the pro-dam blocks may indicate less "agonism" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) or less one-way street "colonialising" than suggested by Habermas (Habermas, 1981b). Rather we see a dynamic exchange and change of frames in a wider discursive field, encompassing both social movement(s) and representative political systems. It might be that Critical Theory's dichotomous conception of the relation between micro and macro is well fit to discover structural limitations, but it seems to be overly deterministic and simplistic regarding the scope of action – and especially interaction – in the form of co-creation, joint impact, and the emergence of critical junctures.

*Secondly*, and alternatively, we may apply dualistic models offered by so-called practice theories, which have been used by various researchers of

social movement communication (see section 3).<sup>10</sup> For Giddens (1984, p. 2), social networks are long chains of regular social interaction, which constitute “social practices ordered through space and time”, thus reproducing and transforming social structures. Indeed, this is what happened when the anti-dam bloc congregated across localities, scaled up their spatial scope of action, and moved the sites of struggle to the capital city. Bourdieu (1977, p. 83) offers a more complex model, arguing that social networks are chains of concrete events determined by structural habits, and that when several causal chains at various durations happen to meet in a conjuncture, a concrete event may change a structural habit. Such a conjuncture happened during the hunger strike in 1979, which became a critical juncture setting in train the formal constitutional process. Such practice theories of the macro-micro relation may be characterised as dualistic rather than dichotomous, enabling us to discover actual possibilities for empowering action.

As rival theories, Critical Theory and so-called practice theories offer competing sets of analytical concepts, and both may be used for explanatory analysis. It seems that practice theories, with their dualistic models, are better fit to account for how micro action may impact macro structures via the mediating meso networks. This seems to fit the Alta Conflict, which is a “deviant case” not only because “new social movements” seldom gain constituent power (Bailey & Mattei, 2013; della Porta, 2020), but also because they exceptionally gain such power in “corporatist democracies” (Dryzek et al., 2006). However, one may suspect that Critical Theory, with its dichotomous models, may be better fit to account for the determinants imposed by structural limitations in most cases. Therefore, there may be a need for further research to bridge the gap between the two rival theories. One possible pathway might be to build further on Marchi (2021), who interpreted Gramsci (2021) in an innovative way by tracing “molecular transformations” of “cultural hegemony”, including legal order. Though Gramsci (2021) was less negative than Habermas (198b) towards Marxian value theory, that approach may nevertheless indicate a direction for how the terms “juridification” and “(counter-) hegemony” may be bridged with empirical tracing of meso networks.

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10 Habermas is deeply critical of the practice perspective qua production perspective, which he sees as reductionist (Habermas, 1987). He argues that emancipation emerges not from a production perspective but from “the paradigm of action toward mutual understanding” (Habermas, 1987, p. 82). One may, however, ask whether Habermas himself is reducing the context for emancipation by precisely this assumption.

In this analysis, we have refrained from assuming that the dominant political block constituted a fixed structure, instead *historicising* both the dominant and political block, by *tracing the becoming* of both of them. Thus, we have applied the concepts and methods of Critical Theory to social movement communication as democratic innovation. However, the empirical results call for an amendment to the concepts. When we refrain from *reifying* the dominant order, we gain empirical data that lead us to question if there might be a tendency towards *a priori* reification of the dominant order in the concept of “hegemony” as used by Laclau and Mouffe (2001), as well as the concept of “legalisation” in Habermas (1981b).

While Ihlen (2004) mapped static positions of rhetoric and resources in a social field, we traced the becoming of such positionings, leading to an empirical re-actualisation of a well-known critique within Critical Theory, against overly structuralist conceptualisations.

## Conclusions

This analysis indicates some of the ways whereby strategic communication may not only empower the already powerful, but also empower the underprivileged. Thus, strategic communication not only amplifies existing exclusion from the public sphere, but may also contribute to a more inclusive public sphere. Thus, strategic communication may, under some conditions, contribute to democratic innovation, through a disruptive deepening of deliberative democracy. The analysis indicates that such an event may take place as the result of *mutual adaptation* between competing political blocks, each of them applying rhetorical creativity to generate resources, in a process where network building forms agenda setting.

To search for such potentials, we have sought to overcome the specialisation between communication research (SCR) and social movement studies (SMS). We have worked within a specific research tradition, empirically grounded Critical Theory, used by some researchers within both SCR and SMS who share an interest in empowerment and democratisation. In previous research, the Alta Conflict has been studied using an SMS approach as a case of social movements as transformative power (Jensen, 2015), and using an SCR approach as a case of how relative positions in the social field may determine the combined power of rhetoric and resources (Ihlen, 2004). By combining both perspectives, and updating the case study with new historical evidence, we have uncovered



how, in some cases, social movement communication may contribute to transform the positions within the social field, generating resources by exercising rhetoric.

On the one hand, the findings have implications for public policy locally in Norway and Sápmi, or in the ideographic dimension. In line with earlier analysis of the case in comparative democracy research (Dalland, 1997, pp. 41–42; Dryzek et al., 2003, pp. 26–27; Johnsen, 2021, p. 23), we see the Alta Conflict as a phase of disruptive democratic innovation. However, we also find that the strategic framings of the pro- and anti-dam blocks co-evolved into a conflict about how to define already established democratic norms. In terms of SMS on democratisation (della Porta, 2013; 2020), it seems that the pro-dam block represented a restricted form of liberal-deliberative democracy, whereas the anti-dam block presented an oppositional form of participatory-deliberative democracy. When adapting to each other, both blocks contributed to the actual democratic innovation that took place. With regard to the Norwegian state-commissioned Power and Democracy Research (1998–2003), our analysis suggests (a) that internal disagreements within the commission (Eriksen, 2003) correspond with the conflict lines during the Alta case, but also, (b) that the process of democratic innovation was not only driven by the anti-dam block, a dimension observed by a case study commissioned by that project (Minde, 2003), but was also the product of joint impact and co-evolution between both blocks, and finally, (c) that lobbying and actionism may, at times, be empowering for the disempowered, contrary to what is suggested in their conclusion (Norwegian Official Report, 2003, § 13). Though the Alta Conflict as democratic innovation continues to be a contentious topic, something that is typical of historical SMS cases (Bosi & Reiter, 2014), the time may be ripe for further research into the case, especially in lieu of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2018–2023) and related public deliberation (Johnsen, 2021).<sup>11</sup> Our chapter provides a stepping-stone for further organisational analysis of social movement communication, which seems compatible with the organisational approach used in the Power and Democracy Research (Olsen, 1978, p. 24). In particular the inquiry into the “boundary work” of social movements (the construction of in-groups and out-groups for movements), and how this may be understood within a

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<sup>11</sup> Following Habermas (1985), even the civil disobedience of the form used in the Alta conflict has been seen as *communicative action* contributing to informal deliberative practice (Lysaker, 2022).

wider societal and contested context, could be one of the points of departure for future research on social movement communication as democratic innovation.

Additionally, the findings indicate some further developments of concepts and methods for the study of social movement communication as democratic innovation, the nomothetic dimension. Our analysis has indicated how rhetorical creativity may lead to resource generation, and, to the co-evolution of two competing social movement coalitions (in this case one pro-dam and one anti-dam coalition of SMOs). *Firstly*, the case study demonstrates the merits of an approach to research on social movement communication that combines the specialised research interests of SCR and SMS, and applies historicising methods, in sum helping to uncover processes of empowerment, as well as co-evolution between dominant and emerging actors. *Secondly*, our analysis slightly disconfirms (by testing) a tendency within Critical Theory towards *a priori* reification of dominant power structures. It seems that Habermas (1981b) may be overly critical to “juridification” as he conceptualises it, and the same applies to Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) take on “hegemony”. These foundational social thinkers, and thus the research streams relying on them, may lack some of the *complex dynamics* of the dominant coalition and the oppositional coalition as emergent phenomena at the meso level – as social movement coalitions. It might for example be that conceptualisations of the system according to Habermas (1981b) and hegemony according to Laclau and Mouffe (2001) are both encumbered with an *a priori* reification of the established social order and too segregated from the lifeworld and scenes for political grass-root mobilisation.

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## CHAPTER 6

# Strategic Communication in Digital Ecosystems: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Dating Applications

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**Abstract:** Dating technologies offer services that assist single persons in finding a partner, yet several users report that these technologies have made it more difficult to find one. Using the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis and strategic communication, we explore in-depth what 50 dating apps promise users and by which discursive means. A key finding is that dating apps are communicating in line with two main discourses: (1) a romantic discourse prevalent in modern society, which is a narrative about finding the right one, and experiencing great and long-lasting love; (2) An optimistic and magical image of technology – which will assist the user in finding “the One” with reference to the apps’ successful “matches” in the past (number of couples previously matched), present (number of app members) and future (number of people who are likely to become members shortly). We argue that we need to include the interconnected ecosystem of new media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that app companies are part of, in our studies in strategic communication. When dating app producers communicate how their apps will benefit their users, they employ hegemonic social practices (behaviour, norms, and procedures) of love and technology.

**Keywords:** dating applications, strategic communication, critical discourse analysis



## Introduction

Internet meetings through dating apps and platforms increasingly outperform the roles family and friends play in bringing couples together (Rosenfeld et al., 2019). Dating apps and platforms provide a virtual space for users to contact each other and play a key role in forming face-to-face relationships (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008). The number of involuntary singles has been rising significantly in industrialized societies (Statista, 2021), and the single market thus represents significant business opportunities. The American Match Group, the parent company of Tinder, Match, Hinge, and OkCupid, is one of the largest actors in this market. The company's total revenue in the fourth quarter of 2020 was roughly 635 million U.S. dollars. With over six million monthly downloads, as of January 2021, Tinder is the most popular dating app in the world, generating a monthly in-app purchase revenue of nearly 65 million U.S. dollars (Statista, 2022). 280 million online users of dating services are forecasted for 2024, and the global revenue of matchmaking dating services is estimated at nearly 655 million U.S. dollars in 2020 and will, according to statistical forecasts, reach more than 2.5 billion U.S. dollars by 2024 (Statista, 2022). The dating industry and platforms are powerful because they are attracting an increasing number of customers, with an image and promise that “love is only a few clicks and dollars away” (Barraket & Henry-Waring, 2008).

Obviously, technology offering to assist the user with finding a partner is a big and thriving business. Surprisingly, several users describe the platform as a negative experience: dating apps make the process of finding a partner more difficult (Romano, 2017). Dating apps can also be experienced as a superficial arena that promotes casual rather than serious relationships, resulting in users quitting and resorting to offline dating (Brubaker et al., 2016). In this chapter, we examine this paradox by addressing two research questions: (1) What do dating technologies promise users, and (2) What discourses are these promises based on?

To answer these two RQs, we conducted a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) of 50 dating apps focusing on narratives concerning love and matchmaking. As a theoretical framework, we employ a critical discourse analysis. The chapter contributes to the field of strategic communication by using an interdisciplinary and critical approach, an approach recently called for by Heide, von Platen, Simonsson and

Falkheimer (2018), to develop strategic communication as a unique and innovative domain. The chapter is organised as follows. First, we present previous research and our theoretical approach. This is followed by the methodology section, which presents how we collected data; next, we present our findings. The chapter closes with a discussion of our findings, a conclusion, our study's limitations, and a call for further research.

## Previous research and theoretical framework

Research from a variety of academic schools has explored different aspects related to online dating (e.g., swipe practices, interaction patterns, gender differences, representations of self, and so on (for a comprehensive overview of digital dating research see Degin et al. (2015) or Wu & Trottier (2022)), but few have studied how dating platforms communicate and advertise their services.

Some have, however, mentioned marketing dimensions in their dating site studies. Heino et al. (2010), for example, state that the marketing for top online dating sites reinforces the assessment of offering a wider pool of potential partners than is usually available in face-to-face encounters (Heino et al., 2010). They state that Match.com marketed itself for many years as providing “[m]illions of possibilities to meet your match” and that Match.com presents itself as a service that offers individuals countless opportunities to meet a romantic partner: a virtual marketplace of potential dating partners (Heino et al., 2010). Houran et al. (2004) also point to this marketing practice, exemplified by the Chinese dating site eHarmony which promises that love is just a click away. The advertisements on this dating site feature romance and warmth, and “no matter what values the registered user is looking for, she can find a suitable partner at Zhenai.com” (Wen, 2015).

Using scientific claims in advertising is a well-known marketing rhetoric, also in the dating business. One of the first dating sites, Match.com, already claimed twenty years ago that they used a “Personal Matching” method based on a “15-year research initiative” (Houran et al., 2004, p. 508; see also Pettersen & Døving, 2023). Economics of information theory suggests that consumers will be more sceptical of subjective claims than of objective claims when information about a product is difficult to evaluate before a purchase (Dodds et al., 2008). Summarized, besides the promise of

love and relationship, marketing claims identified in the literature revolve around matching technology and algorithms that will guarantee the user the wanted outcome.

## Platform capitalism

Dating apps are part of the app economy and the so-called platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2017). Platforms are ecosystems that, according to Hands, capture “digital life in an enclosed, commercialized and managed realm” (2013, p. 1). Platforms serve as intermediators between various types of stakeholders including users, advertisers, service providers, and physical objects such as smartphones and game consoles (Hammer, 2021). Platform economy denotes the tendency that organizations replace their previous value-chained and linear business models with digital platform business models where digital data is a key component for value creation (Pettersen, 2020). Mobile apps, for instance, have changed the way business is conducted. The mobile app economy comprises two distinct platform markets through which app developers make revenue: app platforms and ad platform markets. App sales are facilitated by app platforms, whereas advertising matching is intermediated by ad platforms (Zenny, 2021).

Developers distribute apps to users through app platforms such as Apple App Store and Google Play Store. Some of the more common revenue models are (1) premium (pay-per-download fees or copy sales), (2) freemium (in-app purchases), (3) subscription fees, and (4) advertising. Many apps use a combination of these. In most dating apps and platforms, it is possible to create a profile for free, yet the opportunities for search, interaction, and communication with others are typically limited for non-payers. Until recently, the ad revenue model has been a cornerstone of app monetization. However, due to privacy legislation, Apple and Google have started revamping the rules around online data collection (Farago, 2020). Privacy is predicted to be a game-changer for how apps create revenue, and in-app purchase-models are already outperforming ad-revenue models (Farago, 2020).

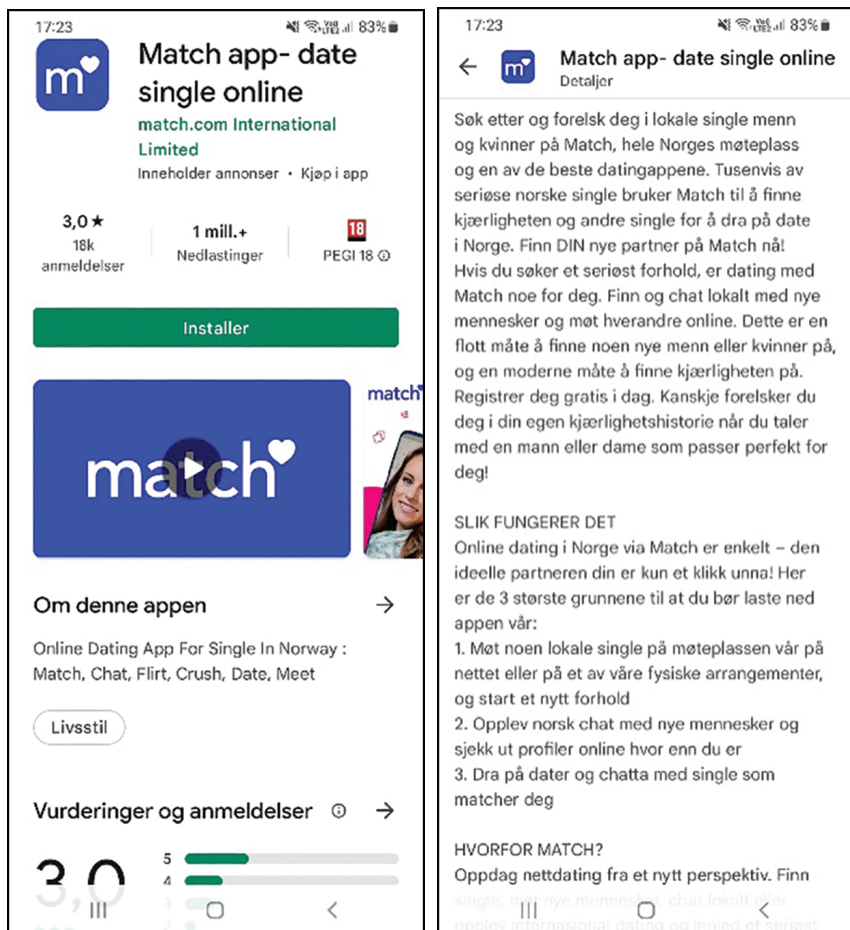
## Strategic communication

The app economy illustrates the shift from traditional mass media to digital third-party platforms (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016). This poses challenges

for how organizations communicate strategically. Although the definition of strategic communication has evolved over time, a key understanding is that strategic communication comprises different forms of goal-oriented communication inside and between organizations, their stakeholders, and society (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018). An established understanding is that strategic communication is the practice of deliberate and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere to reach a set of – both commercial and non-commercial – goals (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015, p. 74).

The main object of study in strategic communication research has typically been directed to managers and their perspectives, and most of the research has concerned public relations (Heide et al., 2018). Today, however, communication takes place on different platforms, where interaction between humans and technologies often produces unforeseen results. Organizations are not social units in control of the communication, but part of networks with fluid and shifting boundaries (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016). One of the places dating companies communicate most directly to the users and with some degree of control is in the app stores. These are therefore important venues for app companies.

Google and Apple are key players in the app economy and can act as monopolistic gatekeepers between app developers and their users (Zenny, 2021). Thus, dating companies need to strategize – act and position themselves – within the app stores when trying to reach their goals. People typically click on items at the top of the recommendation list (Keane et al., 2008), but how to get there is not straightforward. Both Apple App Store and Google App Store use complex algorithms to sort search results. Although the exact ranking algorithms are not publicly available, some known factors that highly influence a company's app store rank are the name of the app, its subtitle, keywords, index keywords, tag, number of downloads, and more (App Radar, n.d.). Also, app ratings and reviews have a say in findability in the app stores (App Radar, n.d.). Hence, dating app users' ratings and reviews are content that the companies lack control of. Another important strategic communication component in the app stores is how the dating companies are talking about their services within the distributed space of app stores (figure 2). This text is located behind "About this app" (Norwegian: "Om denne appen") (figure 1).



**Figure 1 on the left** More information about an app (in this case Match) is located behind the link to “About this app”/“Om denne appen”.

**Figure 2 to the right** Screenshot of the text the user can read to get more information about the app.

## Critical discourse analysis

In the study at hand, we analyse the texts provided from dating apps’ “about the app”, and discourses at play in these. More specifically, we employ a critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is a cross-discipline born in the early 1990s by a group of scholars such as van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, van Dijk, and Fairclough (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). A discourse is an opaque power object in our society and CDA aims to make this more visible and transparent (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). There is a range of approaches

to CDA; the three most prominent are Fairclough, Van Dijk, and Wodak (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018). In the study at hand, we employ Fairclough's discourse analysis because of the tripartite model he offers. Here, a discourse is approached as: (A) a text (spoken or written, including visual images), (B) a discourse practice production, consumption and distribution of the text, and (C) a socio-cultural practice (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018).

Following this tripartite model, Fairclough provides a three-dimensional framework for the analysis of text and discourse: (a) the linguistic description of the formal properties of the text; (b) the interpretation of the relationship between the discursive processes and the text; and (c) the explanation of the relationship between discourse and social and cultural reality. Texts, whether written, spoken, or represented by images, are the key materials out of which specific discourses – ways of representing the world – are constructed and can be understood (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2).

Texts provide us with insights into language, in the sense that “language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take into account language” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2). Language constructs and is constructed by social relations, events, structure, action, and agency (Waller, 2006). Social agents set up texts, and relations between elements of texts.

We will now present how we collected and analyzed the data.

## Methodology

We used a qualitative approach in this study because we wanted an in-depth understanding of the discourses at hand (Yin, 2012). While pictures and other visual elements are used in “About this app”, we chose to focus on texts as they convey the core discursive meaning of the material and because the material is large and space is limited.

### Data collection and case sampling

We began our data collection process through extensive searches on Apple App Store and Google App Play using the search strings “dating” and “date” which gave many hits. Searches for “serious dating”, “love”, and “relationship” found many of the same apps and also apps not targeting dating specifically. To widen the search, we conducted a search on Google with the term “dating applications” and found articles and web pages promoting

the “best dating apps”, some of which were added to our list. Due to the large number of dating apps, we decided to primarily include those with ratings, as this could indicate how much the applications are used. Our sample of 50 apps is listed in appendix 1.

In the next step, we coded each app thematically based on the app texts located within Google Play Store and Apple App Store. The main four categories were as follows: (1) “Serious dating” (50 apps), (2) “Network building” (23 apps), (3) “Casual” (8 apps), and (4) “Other” (6 apps) (N = 87 apps). Many of the applications could fit into several of the categories, but we placed them in the category where they seemed to fit best based on keywords from their texts. The category “serious dating” contains apps that predominantly promise ‘lasting love’ in their description.

Apps in the category “network building” contain applications that offer dating services but also network-building and the opportunity to find friends. In the category “casual” are applications that are more focused on flirting and casual meetups. The fourth category, “other”, are applications that are more focused on kinks, fetishes, or affairs, yet still directed towards people that want to form a relationship.

We chose to direct our attention to the 50 applications in the “serious” category, primarily because we want to study applications that aim to reach out to individuals looking for long-lasting relationships, and not flings or one-night stands etc. After the case sampling, the analysis commenced with a close reading of the 50 apps’ texts provided by the apps in the App Store’s “About the app” section.

## Data analysis of texts and discourses

The data analysis of the app texts was conducted in three phases. First, we analysed each app in-depth, mapping words and combinations of sentences. Second, through comparable reading, we identified patterns between the texts, identifying themes, analytic categories, and constructs used by the apps. Third, the two researchers compared and discussed the categorization. Having two pairs of analytical eyes on the data minimizes the risk of biased interpretations (Emerson et al., 2011; Gallenga, 2013).

The next step in our analysis was to analyze the thematic categories from the first analysis focusing on the main objective of the texts: stating what problems the apps will solve for the user. This was followed by



approaching the literature of prominent themes, for example the discourse of ‘love.’ Lastly, our analysis was theorized with the framework of strategizing communication. We will now present our findings.

## Findings

As a starting point, in our first analysis of all the apps, we mapped words and combinations of sentences, looking for similarities and differences. We inductively identified three main themes that also relate to different levels. These are “love” (the user/individual), “critical mass” (the community), and “technology” (the technological system). Each of the themes consist of sub-themes or narratives (see table 1). These are:

**Table 1** Three main themes were identified in our first analysis of the 50 dating apps. Each of the themes consist of sub-themes

Occurring theme	Sub-themes	Examples of texts	No of apps
<b>Love:</b> References to finding the user’s perfect love and thus make the person happy, often for life.	Finding Love	“love,” “real love,” “[find] love faster,” “happiness,” “a perfect partner”.	34
	The One	“the [person] you have been dreaming of,” “your better half,” “someone really special”	
	You	“[you] deserve love,” “fits you,” “your perfect match,” “someone you truly click with”	
	Romance	“Falling in love,” “romantic relationship,” “been dreaming of,” “someone special that will give you butterflies once again!” “someone really special”	
	Life change	“send your life in new directions,” “new chapter in life begins,” “chapter full of romance,” “settle down with,” “change your life for ever,” “share your life with”	
<b>Critical mass:</b> References to the pool of potential candidates available for the single user in the app	Serendipity	“take another shot at love with our app,” “biggest chance to find a relationship,” “destiny”	24
	Past	“thousands (...) have already found love,” “Hundreds of thousands of couples have met on [the dating site],” “we’ve made over 100 million matches and counting”	
	Present	“20 000 new members every day,” “our premium community offers more than 50 million quality singles, and more than 100 000 new singles join every day,” “millions of people are still waiting”	
	Future	“the worlds’ fastest growing [dating site] where 21 million single persons are looking for love,” “the largest and fastest growing dating app”	

(Continued)



**Table 1** (Continued)

Occurring theme	Sub-themes	Examples of texts	No of apps
<b>Technology:</b> References to the app's matching technology, which in turn will increase the chance of "finding the right partner"	Sorting process	"our unique matchmaking-technology we can help you find someone to share your life with (...) it works so well so you don't need to worry for not getting a match," "we have created the Compatibility Matching System to ensure each of your matches are based on qualities that are important to you," "An unique sorting of the best matches is one of the secrets [beyond our successful dating site]," "with our advanced search, unique matchmaking mechanism, and rigorous monitor process"	11
	Matchmaker-algorithms	"we have developed a special algorithm which brings together people who fit and are compatible to each other," "you'll be sure to find just what you're looking for with our intelligent matchmaking algorithms," "(...) our AI algorithms will do the rest for you (...)"	
	Technical affordances	"like the person you're interested in," "in the new single-feed you will see the latest from the singles you are looking for," "search for and fall in love with single men and women in [our site]"	

The most often occurring theme is "love" (34 apps). Here the apps construct "love" by using words and sentences that signal a romantic love life, where the user will "find love", more specifically "The One" for "You". This is typically presented in terms of "romance", as an existential "Life change" that will happen through a fortunate and random discovery. This theme is followed by sub-themes (24 apps) referring to a critical mass or pool of single candidates available in their app. Here the apps point to historical numbers of couples that have successfully established a relationship, the large number of single persons that are likely to be available in the app here and now, and how many new members are likely to be available shortly.

The last theme (11 apps) we found in our analysis concerns different technical functionalities and features the app claims to hold, that can assist the user with finding a potential partner. Here they refer to how the apps' sorting processes will sort out only persons in the large pool of candidates that "fit" the user. Next are references to how the apps use matchmaker algorithms or artificial intelligence to decide who, in the apps' large pool of available candidates, would fit the user the best. The final sub-theme in the theme of technology is technical affordances, which concerns sentences about technical features the apps state will increase the probability of establishing a relationship.

The next step in our analysis was to analyse the thematic categories from the first analysis focusing on the main objective and discourse of the texts. Here we find that one of the dilemmas these apps face is that there is an underlying tension and conflict between the discourses, but that the product relies on all three. Finding love and “the right one” is arguably harder and more time-consuming the more people you have available, which is also the main explanation for why people find dating more challenging than before (Romano, 2017).

Several studies have shown that offering a large pool of potential partners creates choice overload (D’Angelo & Toma, 2017; Sharabi & Timmermans, 2021), which makes users of digital platforms more pessimistic and likely to reject (Pronk & Denissen, 2020), and that a large pool of options triggers more searches, as well as decreases the perceived quality of the final partner selection (Wu & Chiou, 2009). This accords with research on social media where endless scrolling on the smartphone may lead to an experience of overload and an urge to disconnect (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020). Having a technological solution that counters such experiences is therefore key. One app that claims to have solved this dilemma is Once. They argue:

Sick of endless swiping? Once is one of Europe’s best dating apps, with over 10 million members. Hundreds of thousands of couples have met on Once, thanks to our simple recipe – there is no need to swipe. Every day you get a new match, specifically picked for you. You then have 24 hours of each other’s undivided attention, enabling you to create a proper connection.

Once combines the three discourses, arguing that someone special, “specifically picked for you” will be available on the app soon. They don’t reveal how the technology functions, but indicate that they have a secret recipe that almost magically picks the best candidates. Discursively, they turn the possible weakness of having a large member pool into their strength; their matching technology will overcome the problem. The technological weakness of swiping is addressed in other apps as well. The app Coffee Meets Bagel also markets its matching technology with the promise that “there’s less swiping, and more matching, chatting, and \*actual\* dating”.

From a market perspective, only the largest dating apps can lean confidently on numbers. The discourses concerning “love” and “technology”

are, not surprisingly, more prominent in the overall text corpus than references to the number of users or matches. These discourses are often combined in various constellations. The app Find My Love, for instance, states that if the user fills out a “specially designed questionnaire” the “AI algorithms will do the rest for you”. JustKiss ups the game, promising that their “unique match-making technology” will provide the right matches. The app SweetRing offers a similar argument, with reference to their “unique matchmaking mechanism, and rigorous monitor process”.

In a market where users often use several apps at the same time, appealing to “uniqueness” is a risky business. Market segmentation and identifying target groups are alternative approaches also found in our material. Several of the apps clearly communicate to specific segments, such as Muzmatch, which targets single Muslims, and EliteSingles, which focuses on people with higher education. Other apps focus on rare affordances such as Concha Date which provides the option of an “audio date” when people match. In sum, discourses about matching technology, promises of love, and large user pools form a recurring pattern, also in cases where special affordances and target groups are addressed.

We will now discuss our findings before we close with a call for future research.

## Discussion and closing comments

To answer the two research questions addressed in this chapter, we conducted a systematic and critical discourse analysis of how 50 dating apps describe their services in two different app stores. We found three themes: love, critical mass, and technology.

### What do dating technologies promise users?

The most dominant theme in the apps was found to be “love”. Love was constructed as something single people need and even deserve in life, but must actively look for to find. This was often linked to the idea that there is one person “out there” that is the Right One for all of us. Finding the One is promised to change the users’ life and, hence, monogamy is generally constructed as an underlying discourse – norm and practice – in dating apps. In addition, this discourse contains a Western, romantic, and emotional ideal typically mediated through films and media, rather than other

aspects of relationships, such as friendship, being a discussion partner, a supporter, and collaborator in everyday life, or someone to share your bills and laundry with.

The discourse of romantic love and “the one and only” accord with how these topics are represented throughout our society. The romantic discourse that is prevalent in our modern society is a narrative about finding the right one, experiencing great long-lasting love, monogamy, passion, and lifelong marriage (Øfsti, 2010). Employing key practices at play in this love discourse when communicating could illustrate that the reader or user is not a passive recipient of the app’s narratives but takes an active part in the construction of the discourse of which s/he is part. Hence, the app company is communicating in ways that align with the taken-for-granted idea and construction of love.

## **What discourses are these promises based on?**

The apps’ text descriptions employ practices (behaviours, norms, and procedures) that dominate the societal discourse of love and relationships the users are part of. Yet instead of searching for this special person on his or her own (and thus risk not finding “love”), the dating apps promise to find this person on the users’ behalf if only they become members of the dating site. Two discourses that underpin this promise are that the apps have a critical mass of members and technology needed to find love.

Concerning critical mass, which is the second theme, the apps point to temporality and time when they communicate; they refer to many successful establishments in the past. This is followed by pointing to a large sample of potential candidates present on the dating site. The apps will assist the user in finding a specific and special person, due to the apps’ large pool of candidates, following an idea that in a huge sample of people, the chance of having the One person that fits the user in that pool, is larger than if the sample had been small. Yet, as shown in the analysis, the apps refer to the past (previously “successes”), the present (many potential candidates available here and now), but also the future (where plenty of more available candidates will shortly join the app), as evidence of their ability to help individuals in their search for love. Thus, if you do not find the One right away, the One is likely to be available and present in the app in the near future.

The third argument the apps use when promising to solve the users’ problem of being single – which is the nerve in the love discourse – is the

apps' advanced technology. Through matching technologies, algorithms, and design affordances, the apps promise to increase the probability of the user finding the One in their large sample of potential candidates. While the matching technologies and algorithms are stated to help you find the right One for you, the technical design affordances enable you to look for and pay attention to several candidates on your own. These two discourses accord with a societal discourse of what modern technology is able to do: technology is presented as optimistic, almost magical. Technology often appears to be the solution to all sorts of challenges, including environmental and economic problems (Heikkurinen & Ruuska, 2021), but also, as in this case, the challenges of finding a partner.

Thus, the apps are communicating in line with the practices at play in a well-established discourse of love, denoting that one special person is out there for you and, that you need to look for that person in the apps' large pool of candidates that is likely to become even larger in the future. First, the apps nurture an established image of love by communicating what problems they are going to solve for the user, which accords with the discourse the users already are part of. Then the apps offer to help users reach this ideal by referring to the large sample of candidates present now or in the near future. Moreover, in order to find the needle in this haystack, the apps argue that their matchmaking technology and algorithms will find this needle – the One – for you. The sub-theme of one soul mate and a chosen one collides in many ways with the theme of a large sample of potential candidates. Having a large user base might contribute to the fear of missing out on a match (FOMA) phenomenon – that someone “better” than the candidate you have at hand might show up (D'Angelo & Toma, 2017; Gibbs et al., 2006).

How dating apps communicate an image of love points to institutionalized patterns of knowledge that become manifest in disciplinary structures and operate by the connection of knowledge and power. By using Fairclough's CDA-approach (2003), we were able to connect our analysis to the practices (behaviours, norms, and procedures) the dating apps use when they communicate strategically which problems they promise to solve for the users. And the practices at play in these structures are coloured by a discursive understanding of “love” and “technology” that is embedded in our Western society, which the apps employ when communicating.

In our literature review section, we found that “pools of potential partners”, “romance”, “love”, and scientific claims were some key marketing

tactics utilized by dating sites in their advertising. Our study has dived in-depth into this topic and confirms what others have only observed on the surface. To conclude, dating apps promise users that they will find love and the right one (RQ1), basing their discourses on how they will fulfil this promise by pointing to a critical mass and advanced technology (RQ2). Meanwhile, you just need to wait – and pay a few dollars on Tinders' monthly in-app purchase to contribute to their revenue of nearly 65 million U.S. dollars (Statista, 2022).

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## Appendix 1

The sample of 50 apps in the category “serious dating” that we have studied are the following:

Happn, Møteplassen, Match, Just Kiss, Sukker, Muzmatch, Hinge, MyDates, Luxy, EliteSingles, Inner circle, OkCupid, ICaught, Once, KristenDate Norge, Concha date, POF, Mamba, eHarmony, Coffee Meets Bagel, Dating.com, Be2, Skeiv, Not Dating App, Bluddle, OE Match, TrulyAsian, Pipper, Matcha, Mutual, FarmersD, NettDating, DilMil, Blurry, JSwipe, DateMyAge, SweetRing, ArabianDate, 123 Date Me, So Syncd, iFlirts, Dating & Chat, BLOOM, Find my love, Choice of love, Dating for seriøse forhold, Facebook Dating, Zoosk, Badoo, and Bumble.

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## KAPITTEL 7

# Reklame utnytter samfunnsdebatten. En studie av strategisk kommunikasjon i reklamefilm for intimsåpen Asan

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**Abstract:** Strategic communication promoted by advertising wrapped as political debate. This is the topic explored in this study, which deals with an advertising campaign for the intimate soap Asan. With a commercial film, Asan's owner promotes a social debate about whether all the porn on the internet destroys natural erotic intimacy of young people. By theories on strategic communication, marketing and visual storytelling, it is analyzed how such an advertising campaign is developed in accordance with recognized means of influence. The theme appears as appropriate and well-placed moral debate in society but is an advanced form of advertising and marketing. The content in the commercial film is tailored to provoke and to be spread further over several media channels. Censorship and conflicts provide opportunities for debate and increased attention both in social media and in editor-controlled media. The study analyses both the strategic level for creating and maintaining the public debate and the more tactical and operative means used in visual storytelling. An international trend in marketing is brands' efforts to be associated with political positions, and the case with Asan demonstrates such a practice in a Norwegian context.

**Keywords:** strategic communication, transmediality, narrative storytelling, visual rhetoric, public debate, activism, marketing campaign, branding

## Innledning

Reklame finnes i alle former, også mikset inn i politiske debatter. Merkevarer kan i sin markedsføring starte samfunnsdebatter for å bygge sin egen profil. Nike og Benetton er kjente globale eksempler, mens studien i denne artikkelen tar for seg hvordan såpemerket Asan har gjort det samme i Norge. Merkevarerne bruker avanserte kommunikasjonsvirkemidler som inkluderer nyeste teknologi og underholdning. De plasserer seg selv inn i den offentlige debatten på en måte som fremmer deres ønskede profil. Slik medieøkologien har utviklet seg, er en av utfordringene å skape kommunikasjon på tvers av plattformer og kanaler. Eksemplet i denne studien illustrerer nettopp det. Temaet er også designet slik at det representerer «den lille mannen mot systemet». Det gir utgangspunkt for historiefortelling som engasjerer målgrupper. Den kommersielle kampanjen pakkes inn slik at den også skaper nyheter i redaksjonelle medier. Eksemplet med Asans reklamefilm *Ta vare på identiteten* viser hvordan de som markedsfører Asan først vil skape debatt rundt at ungdommene kan ta tilbake intimiteten, som har forsvunnet med inntoget av pornografi ved bruk av film. Deretter tar de styring for å drive kommunikasjonen videre mot målgruppen for å oppnå ønsket resultat i en bredere reklamekampanje.

Slik reklame benytter seg av virkemidler, som er strategisk kommunikasjon. Reklame er betalt kommunikasjon. Reklamefilmen for Asan er visuell kommunikasjon og legger opp til både samfunnsopplysning og aktivisme. Filmens bilder brukes til å knytte saken sammen med et aktivert publikum på en meningsfull måte (Good & Lowe, 2017). Filmens rolle og virkemidler blir nedenfor koblet til teorier om strategisk kommunikasjon.

Store globale merkevareaktører kan gjennomføre slike kampanjer på verdensbasis, med gigantiske budsjetter. Det er kjent praksis, og også hvordan slike kampanjer kobles til å mobilisere i sosiale medier på en måte som tjener markedsføreren. Det kalles transmedialitet når historiefortelling utvikles til dialog over flere medieplattformer (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016). Denne studien viser hvordan slik transmedialitet kan utføres i det norske samfunnet, ut fra våre forutsetninger, innenfor den norske samfunnsdebatten og med budsjetter som er en brøkdel av budsjettene til globale aktører.

Med Asans reklamefilm startes en samfunnsdebatt man ønsker å drive videre fremover. Filmen konstruerer en fortelling, og studien undersøker

virkemidlene for å gi fortellingen troverdighet, slik at den kan bære et alvorlig budskap. Videre undersøkes det hvordan filmen gir en rolle for å støtte en større kampanje. Det unge publikummet søker etter balanse og harmoni mellom sitt eget standpunkt og verdenen ungdommene lever i. Filmen visualiserer romantiske eller erotiske spenninger og leder publikum til å ta et standpunkt i slike viktige spørsmål. Dokumentarfilmer gjør dette hele tiden: De lar spørsmålene henge i luften, men kommer med fakta om forskjellige ststeder som gir grunnlag for å ta et eget standpunkt. Filmen er i sin natur en konstruert virkelighet. For at seerne skal la seg bevege, bruker den derfor flere virkemidler enn bare fakta. Hva slags troverdighet man kan bygge inn i karakterer, fortelling, argumenter og undertekster, blir da verktøyene man bruker for få seerne til å bli engasjert av budskapet i filmen.

Denne studien avgrenser seg til et norsk eksempel for å undersøke denne formen for strategisk kommunikasjon innenfor vår nære kontekst. Hensikten er å avdekke hvordan en reklamefilm kan anvendes som et visuelt og strategisk verktøy i en større sammenheng med kommunikasjonsaktiviteter. Forskningsspørsmålet er delt i to:

1. Hvordan benyttes reklamefilmen for Asan og transmedialitet som verktøy i strategisk kommunikasjon?
2. Hvilke narrative virkemidler benyttes i den visuelle historiefortellingen i reklamefilmen for Asan for å skape troverdighet?

Slik starter studien med et strategisk perspektiv og går videre i det andre spørsmålet med et taktisk og operativt perspektiv. Motivasjonen for studien er å avkode, påvise og drøfte virkemidler som brukes i en kommersiell film for å skape *troverdighet*, en reklamefilm som har til hensikt å ta eierskap til en samfunnsdebatt. Temaet er aktuelt i debatten om slik medieproduksjon, og også angående innholdsmarkedsføring som metode der man vil engasjere og påvirke mottakerne gjennom historiefortelling som ett av flere verktøy i markedsføringsmiksen (Barland, 2016). Ved å studere et norsk eksempel kan vår lokale debatt settes i kontekst til den internasjonale diskusjonen.

Etter innledningen følger presentasjon av teori som anvendes for studien. Deretter presenteres metode, case og data før diskusjonen av forskningsspørsmålene følger.

## Teori

Teorier som blir brukt som analytisk rammeverk i studien, presenteres her først med det som angår strategisk kommunikasjon, markedsføring og merkevare, relatert til det første forskningsspørsmålet. Deretter dreier det seg om taktiske og operative narrative virkemidler og historiefortelling relatert til det andre forskningsspørsmålet.

Film kan mobilisere følelser og identifikasjon med et språk alle forstår. Historiefortelling kan benyttes ideologisk, pedagogisk eller moralsk der individer eller grupper har behov for å minnes eller orientere seg i en urolig samtid. Eksistensiell historiebruk kan benyttes til å skape mening eller sammenheng i tilværelsen, der fortellingen er et instrument eller redskap (Stugu, 2016). Slik kan man anvende film og visuell historiefortelling effektivt for å påvirke målgrupper i et digitalisert samfunn. Fra psykologi er det kjent at slik historiefortelling kan brukes for å gjøre noen så engasjert i en historie at de endrer atferd (Escalas, 2004). Slik fremstår også film som effektivt virkemiddel i strategisk kommunikasjon. Studien her viser også hvordan strategisk kommunikasjon er tverrfaglig og kan trekke inn flere teorifelter, for eksempel om ledelse, PR, omdømme og merkevarer (Werder et al., 2018).

Videre vil studien belyse hvordan ulike disipliner i strategisk kommunikasjon anvendes i Asan-kampanjen for å skape involverende engasjement. Videre viser studien et vanlig virkemiddel i strategisk kommunikasjon: Hvordan kampanjen drives videre i offentlig debatt ved å spille over i massemedier og redaksjonelle medier (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018). Dette virkemidlet samsvarer med definisjonen av «kommunikasjonskampanje», en intensjonsstyrt handling der man forsøker å informere eller påvirke handlinger hos et stort publikum i en spesifikk tidsperiode ved å benytte organiserte og varierte kommunikasjonsaktiviteter understøttet av forskjellige styrte budskaper i flere forskjellige kanaler (Rice & Atkin, 2013). Nyhetskriteriene kalt VISAK (vesentlig, identifikasjon, sensasjon, aktualitet og konflikt) er også utnyttet for å fremme kampanjen som nyhetsstoff.

Samspill over flere medieplattformer, transmedialitet, blir sentralt for casen for denne studien. En relevant strategisk teori for kommunikasjonen er COPE: *create once, publish everywhere*. Videre: Det som ikke spres, eksisterer ikke (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016). For å få til slik spredning må man legge inn virkemidler som gjør at man forteller flere historier, slik at disse kan fungere på tvers av plattformer og gjerne flere stemmer og

dermed også evne å holde dialog på de respektive flatene (Coombs & Holladay, 2018).

Studien av reklamefilm løfter også frem temaet merkevare, og i dette tilfellet hvordan merkevarerelasjoner skaper sosiale koblinger (Cova & Cova, 2002). Vi kan legge til grunn at målgruppen for kampanjen i vår studie er mer opptatt av diskusjonene om rettferdighet, moral, sex, porno, erotikk og intimitet enn av intimsåpe. Slike interesser kan drøftes opp mot hva som assosieres med en merkevare, og hva som eksisterer som samtaleemne i folks sosiale nettverk og i dagligtale (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Slik er merkevarer ikke bare fysiske produkter, men mentale objekter, mentalt konstruert i kraft av å gi mening eller sosial relevans for forbrukeren (Danesi, 2006). Et formål med merkevarereføring er å skille et generisk produkt fra andre produkter (en annerledes såpe) og også skape vilje i markedet til å betale ekstra for forskjellen. Slik markedsføring kjennetegnes også av langsiktighet, kontinuitet og gjentakelser (Rice & Atkin, 2013; Schmidt et al., 2022).

Omdømmebygging og også intern kommunikasjon kan være relevant for den strategiske kommunikasjonen i dette tilfellet. Et produkt eller merke som knyttes til noe viktig i samfunnet, kan bygge omdømmekapital og kan også styrke egne ansattes motivasjon ved at deres innsats kobles til et større formål i hverdagen (Johannessen et al., 2009). Samtidig kan det være en risiko for en merkevare som kobler seg til sensible temaer, at dagens offentlige debatt er blitt mer følsom for hva som ikke er akseptabelt. Trenden med såkalt *wake* øker risikoen for negative motreaksjoner i full offentlighet (Bredeveien, 2023), noe SAS erfarte da selskapets fortelling om «det skandinaviske» mobiliserte til motkampanje i sosiale medier (Njie, 2020).

Teorier om historiefortelling flytter perspektivet over til det taktiske og operative i studiens andre forskningsspørsmål. Ved å forstå hvordan historiefortellingen, narrativet, bygges opp, og hva historien er basert på, får vi innsikt i hvordan troverdigheten skapes, samt forståelse av presentasjon og budskap og av hvordan merkevaren fremmes (Weber & Grauer, 2019). Gjennom historiefortelling kan moralske verdier og standpunkter i samfunnet kobles til identitet, empati og retoriske spørsmål. Denne sammenhengen utnyttes i økende grad i markedsføring for å få merkevarerfortellinger til å oppnå publikums oppmerksomhet (Barbosa et al., 2021). En annen kjent teknikk er bruk av tvetydighet, som her kan berede grunnen for at fortellingen blir overført til flere plattformer og blir transmedial. Videre utvikles det menneskelige i fortellingen slik at det gir identitet, som igjen skaper følelser og engasjement (Chiu et al., 2012).

Analysen tar også for seg *cultural branding* (Holt, 2004), som anvendes for å si noe om utformingen av filmens tematikk, hvordan denne tilpasses og forankres i konteksten den kommuniseres i. Filmens historiefortelling og troverdigheten den bygger opp, kan brukes for å gi handlingsrom for aktiviteter etter publiseringen. *Cultural branding* kombinert med *rites of passage* (overgangsriter) (Snyder, 2005) kan gi målgruppen mulighet til å identifisere seg med fenomenet.

Semiotikk og persepsjonspsykologi – læren om tegn og symboler og om hvordan vi oppfatter ting – er relevant for å forstå bilder og visuell historiefortelling. Bilder kan beskrives som tegn, symboler og tekst, men effekten og oppfatningen av bilder og budskaper konstrueres i kroppens nevrologi. Der blir de prosessert til subjektiv forståelse eller tolkning. Teorier om klassisk kunst og slik effekt er også overført til populærkultur. For studien her er også bruken av emojier spesielt relevant (Gawne & McCulloch, 2019).

Asan-kampanjen spiller på sex og intimitet, som kan tolkes med teorier om *framing*, der bruk av konflikt og moral er en av metodene for å utforme budskapet (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018). Analysen av budskapet inkluderer også de retoriske grunnpilarene *etos* (troverdighet), *patos* (følelser) og *logos* (fornuft) (Handgaard, 2020).

## Metode og case

Metodene i studien er observasjon, semistrukturerte intervjuer og innholds-analyse av reklamefilmen. Casen for studien er reklamekampanjen for Asan «La oss ta vare på intimiteten», der filmen *Ta vare på intimiteten* inngår. Filmen er publisert både på hjemmesiden for Asan<sup>1</sup> og på YouTube.<sup>2</sup> Planleggingen av kampanjen startet i 2019, filmen ble publisert i 2020, og datainnsamlingen inkludert observasjoner ble utført frem til mai 2022. Casestudien er gjennomført i henhold til litteratur for denne metoden (Yin, 2017).

Casen er strategisk valgt for å representere aktuell praksis innen produksjon av kommersielt medieinnhold. Det er valgt en norsk case, både for å vise noe lokalt og aktuelt og fordi kilder er lettere tilgjengelig. Aktøren bak kampanjen er i norsk sammenheng en stor og betydningsfull trendsetter for praksis på området. Casestudien studerer et eksempel som gir

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1 Lenke til film på Asans hjemmeside: <https://www.asan.no/intimitet/>

2 Lenke til film på YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPasnCkml08>

dybdeinnsikt i et fenomen i et univers der det finnes lite forskning på bilder og film i innholdsmarkedsføring (He et al., 2021).

Studiens empiri er samlet i tre datasett. I det første datasettet er filmen kartlagt slik at vi kan beskrive observerbare virkemidler og egenskaper. Til det andre datasettet er det utført semistrukturerte kvalitative intervjuer med fem utvalgte aktører involvert i produksjonen, som er utført av markedsføringsbyrået Trigger Oslo på oppdrag fra eier av merkevaren Asan. De fem informantene er valgt ut fra deres ulike roller og profesjoner, som gir forskjellige og utfyllende perspektiver. I Trigger Oslo har vi intervjuet prosjektleder, innholdsrådgiver og en konsulent. De har brukt filmproduksjonsselskapet Oslo Assembly, og der har vi intervjuet regissør og produsent. (Se vedlegg 1 for oversikt over alle som er intervjuet.) Disse semistrukturerte forskningsintervjuene tar for seg bruk og utvikling av virkemidler, metodisk tidslinje og fokus i kampanjen samt budskapets utforming og kanaler. I analysen er det lagt vekt på det informantene sier, og med denne metoden oppstår blindsoner for det forskerne ikke fanger opp i sin analyse. I det tredje datasettet er det samlet informasjon som kan indikere oppmerksomhet i form av gjennomgang av omtale i redaksjonelle medier, opplevelser med målgruppens engasjement i hybride aktiviteter samt intervjuer og gjennomgang av engasjement rundt filmen i sosiale medier. Dette er data som kan brukes for å vurdere effekten kampanjen kan ha hatt overfor målgruppen.

## Funn og diskusjoner

Asan-filmen *Ta vare på identiteten* viser to ungdommers møte med sex for første gang. Filmens handling viser hva som faktisk skjer i rommet mellom de to som møtes. Men den tydeliggjør også forventningene og spørsmålene fra ungdommenes vennekrets om hva som har foregått. Filmen viser sunn usikkerhet, intimitet og empati mellom hovedpersonene samtidig som pornografiske referanser får frem utenforståedes usunne forventninger gjennom tekstmeldinger og bruk av emoji.

## Kampanjen og filmen som strategisk kommunikasjon

Her diskuteres studiens første forskningsspørsmål: Hvordan benyttes reklamefilmen for Asan og transmedialitet som verktøy i strategisk kommunikasjon? Et sentralt perspektiv er virkemidler filmen bruker for å innfri



strategiske mål om å nå bestemte målgrupper med et bestemt budskap og en ønsket respons.

Filmen er hovedelementet i kampanjen for Asan «La oss ta vare på intimiteten». Som definert ovenfor er en kommunikasjonskampanje intensjonsstyrt (Rice & Atkin, 2013). Her er Asan-kampanjens mål å ta eierskap til problemstillingene rundt hvordan unges holdninger til intimitet og seksualitet påvirkes av pornografi.

De som markedsfører Asan har planlagt aktiviteter der filmens budskap overfor bestemte målgrupper skal føres videre i sosiale medier, i nyheter og i den offentlige debatten. Slik viser kampanjen hvordan film kan brukes i strategisk kommunikasjon innenfor markedsføring av en merkevare. Det kan fremstå som det meste i denne kampanjen er planlagt. Det er lagt opp til motstand, eller konflikt som det heter i nyhetskriteriene. Dette gir handlingsrom for diskusjoner som kan forgrene seg ut i ulike mediekkanaler, og som de som leder kommunikasjonskampanjen, til en viss grad kan styre.

Filmen ble lansert som en reklamefilm med gjenbruk i sosiale medier. Etter kontroverser om nakenhet ble den trukket. Facebook sensurerte filmen. VG var blant avisene som i sine nyheter dekket debatten om hvordan YouTube stoppet opplæring om sex til ungdom (Vik, 2020). Slik kom merkevaren Asan og markedsførernes budskap inn i den offentlige samfunnsdebatten. Måten budskapet gikk fra en kanal til andre mediekkanaler, viser de transmediale virkemidlene. Det ble lagt inn flere budskaper i filmen, slik at det ble flere historier som egner seg for gjenfortelling i andre kanaler, et transmedialt virkemiddel for spredning over flere kanaler (Coombs & Holladay, 2018; Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016).

Det ble utviklet en tematisk overbygning, som en paraply, som inkluderte alle aktivitetene i kampanjen. Samfunnsproblemet er at pornografi farger det første intime møtet mellom unge kvinner og menn. Budskapet er å ta intimiteten tilbake, og det er overordnet i filmen, informasjonen og debatten og i aktivitetene i sosiale medier. Det er gitt forskjellige perspektiver og ulike stemmer som alle tilfører noe unikt til det overliggende temaet, et virkemiddel for at budskapet er konsistent når det spres over flere kanaler, og for at historiene på den måten kan fortsette å utvikle seg (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016).

Når budskapet deles i biter og spres til flere kanaler, oppstår muligheten til å nå målgruppen og til å mobilisere strategiske allianser. I denne debatten fikk budskapet som var koblet til Asan støtte fra Sex og samfunn (Norges største senter for seksuell helse), en programleder i NRK P3 som

dekker temaet unge og seksualitet, kjente podkastere og faglige autoriteter i sosiale medier. Kampanjen og filmen kan beskrives som et skoleeksempel på transmedialitet når det gjelder hvordan den er laget for spredning. Budskap og virkemidler i filmen er laget for å provosere og engasjere, og når det skjer, brukes det som grunnlag for å skape diskusjoner som gir enda mer oppmerksomhet i flere mediekkanaler. Et eksempel er VG-saken «Nå blir seksualundervisningen ny: – Vi får si mer om hva vi mener» med intervju med ekspertkilder og et besøk i en seksualundervisningstime i en klasse på ungdomstrinnet ved Nordpolen skole i Oslo (Halvorsen, 2020). Det samsvarer med COPE-teorien (se ovenfor) om å produsere budskapet én gang for så å få det spredt overalt (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016). I dette tilfellet spredte det seg også til redaksjonelle medier og andre informasjonsflater.

Motstand gir muligheter. Kontroversene om filmen ble frontet som sensur, noe som ga avsenderen anledning til å fremme en større debatt om hvorvidt sensuren skal diktere hva vi snakker om i et samfunn, og begrense moralske og viktige diskusjoner i den offentlige sfæren. Avsenders budskap spilte på motsetninger og brukte elementer av vesentlighet, identifikasjon, aktualitet, identifikasjon og konflikter. Disse er også kriterier for hvordan journalistikken former sine nyheter. Man kan anta at strategien var å tilpasse kommunikasjonen til de redaksjonelle mediene avsender ønsket å få oppmerksomhet fra. Kampanjens bruk av flere kommunikasjonsdisipliner og hvordan den utformes for å nå frem i redaksjonelle medier, samsvarer med teorier i strategisk kommunikasjon (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018; Werder et al., 2018). Videre vil vi argumentere for at troverdigheten i saken øker betraktelig fordi den løftes fra en kommersiell intensjon til en redaksjonell sak. Retorisk vil dette skape økt troverdighet både i selve budskapet og for avsenderen. Diskusjonen blir allemannseie, ikke bare en agenda for de som markedsfører Asan. Problemet inngår i dagligtale (Fournier & Avery, 2011), og det publikum er opptatt av, inngår i merkevarebygging (Cova & Cova, 2002). Slik skapes også muligheten for at kommunikasjonskampanjen kan ta raske operative tiltak for å fremme saken videre.

En debatt arrangert på Kuben videregående skole i Oslo illustrerer hvordan kampanjen legger opp til at videre spredning kan foregå. Debatten ble filmet og delt i sosiale medier, både av produksjonsselskapet og av personer i målgruppen. Ved dette eventet utnyttet Asans markedsførere både influensere, komikere, podkastere og filmskapere fra NRK som jobbet med en dokumentar om porno (Pettersen, 2022). En VG-artikkel med en YouTube-profil, «Påvirket av porno», viser også hvordan temaet

lever i den offentlige debatten (Hütt, 2022), noe som illustrerer hvordan kampanjen mobiliserte strategiske allianser med innflytelsesrike stemmer på rett plass.

Viktigheten av å løfte debatten fra betalte kanaler, der det var kjøpt plass til Asan-kampanjen, og over til redaksjonelle medier blir bekreftet av prosjektlederen i produksjonsselskapet Trigger Oslo. Det kan tyde på at markedsførerne hadde høyere ambisjoner enn bare å starte en moralsk diskusjon i befolkningen:

I dette tilfellet var det viktig for oss å faktisk møte ungdommen. Møtet på Kuben var gøy å være med på fordi man så at dette fungerte. Den største drømmen er at dette blir en del av seksualundervisningen. Men hvis du skulle skape den reelle folkebevegelsen, bør vi også bli flinkere til å aldri slippe der debatten starter. Det som ofte gjør at det ikke går så langt, er at det ikke er budsjett til det. Det er så banalt som det. (prosjektleder, Trigger Oslo)

Videre forklarer prosjektlederen tanken bak det videre arbeidet og utfordringene med å holde det i gang over tid:

De som skal fremme Asan må forstå at dette ikke bare er deres samtale, det er en samfunnsdebatt. De må gjerne fortelle om sin plass i denne debatten på egne kanaler. Men redaksjonelt skal det først og fremst handle om saken. Intensjonen her er jo å skape debatt. Men det er også særdeles viktig å ha beredskap overfor det som kommer ut av det for å holde momentet oppe. (prosjektleder, Trigger Oslo)

Gjennomslagskraft og troverdighet for budskapet bygges ved å opprettholde koblingen til temaet i samfunnsdebatten over tid. For en merkevare er det stor forskjell på å skaffe seg symbolsk kapital ved et PR-stunt kontra å ta en vedvarende aktivistisk holdning. Et virkemiddel her, som kjennes igjen i Asans kampanje, er å mobilisere strategiske allianser. Men skal det gi effekt, må disse alliansene ha evne til å fortsette sitt engasjement på flere fronter enn selve merkevaren kan (Schmidt et al., 2022). Denne problemstillingen ble poengtert av prosjektlederen, som understreket hvordan kampanjen for Asan hadde begrenset med ressurser, så fra et tidspunkt kunne markedsførerne ikke lenger jobbe for å mobilisere de i målgruppen.

Forskning om merkevare viser at publikum kan være mer interessert i de sosiale koblingene enn i selve merket (Cova & Cova, 2002). I tilfellet med Asan kan vi anta at målgruppen er mer opptatt av diskusjonen

om moral, pornografi og intimitet enn av intimsåpe. Men de som fremmer Asan greier å utføre slik markedsføring ved å plassere sin merkevare i folks sosiale nettverk og samtaler (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Casen med kampanjen for Asan illustrerer hvordan merkevaren ikke bare er et fysisk produkt, men et mentalt objekt som gir mening og er sosialt relevant for forbrukeren (Danesi, 2006). Videre viser Asan-kampanjen, gjennom å ta tidsånden, hvordan markedsførerne skaper mening ved å forstå og spille på kulturelle relasjoner og motsetninger (Holt, 2004).

Et globalt eksempel som tilsvarende kampanjen for Asan i Norge, er hvordan energidrikken Red Bull har tatt eierskap til ekstremsport. På samme måte vil man skape assosiasjoner mellom Asan og sunn seksualitet for unge. Prosjektleder i Trigger Oslo beskriver hvordan reklamebudskapet som er utviklet, er både kommersielt og idealistisk:

Kapitalistiske og kommersielle muskler kan også benyttes til å forvalte et budskap. Det kan bidra til noe mer i samfunnet. Vi kan mer enn å pushe salg på folk. Vi kan bruke denne posisjonen vi har, og den stemmen vi har, til noe mer enn å bare selge (prosjektleder, Trigger Oslo).

Hun beskriver at formålet også har vært å heve kunnskapen på et område der produktet skal selges. Teamet i Trigger Oslo bestemte seg for å fortelle en historie som ble koblet til en kunde (Asan), som kler budskapet. Intimsåpens plass i forberedelsene til intimitet er opplagt. Sånn sett blir kampanjen både kommersiell og idealistisk.

Omdømme er også et mål for avsenderen. Kampanjen skal også på den måten skape merverdi for avsenderen. Det skal forbedre økonomien på sikt og gi omdømmekapital som styrker merkevarens posisjon. Slik omdømmebygging kan også brukes til å styrke egne ansattes motivasjon (Johannessen et al., 2009). I kampanjen for Asan får selskapets egne ansatte muligheten til å se at deres innsats bidrar til noe større i samfunnet, noe som også vil kunne være en strategisk effekt av denne kommunikasjonskampanjen.

## **Narrative virkemidler og kampanjens taktiske og operative handlinger**

Her diskuteres studiens andre forskningsspørsmål: Hvilke narrative virkemidler den visuelle historiefortellingen i reklamefilmen for Asan benytter for å skape troverdighet. Det tar for seg det taktiske og operative nivået.

Filmens handling og virkemidler beskrives her mer detaljert. I starten står filmens to bærende karakterer i et rom og kysser for første gang. Tekstmeldinger som dukker opp på mobilskjermen, forteller en forhistorie om en kveld på byen der vennene til hovedpersonene lurte på hvorfor de begge forsvant. Når vennene får svar, utløser det påfølgende meldinger som presser for å få detaljer om hva som skjedde mellom den unge gutten (Espen) og jenta (Emilie). Handlingen foregår i en intim setting der hovedpersonene engasjerer seg romantisk og utforskende med hverandre. Klær faller. Settingen er visuelt ekte, intim og høyst troverdig. Samtidig tikker det inn forespørsler fra vennekretsen om grove detaljer fra samværet til hovedpersonene i filmen. Ærlige svar som reflekterer hva de egentlig føler, blir slettet og erstattet av beskrivelser som imøtegår spørsmålene. Men de unngår å beskrive hvordan situasjonen egentlig er, og hva de føler for hverandre. Emojier og tekst i meldingene viser tydelig avstanden mellom forventninger utenfra og virkeligheten i rommet. Kontrastene mellom pornografiske referanser og ekte intimitet er tydelig synliggjort. Filmen avsluttes med en faktatekst om at ungdom i mange år har konsumert porno før de debutterer seksuelt. Et betimelig spørsmål stilles om hva denne påvirkningen gjør med oss som mennesker. Til slutt kommer kampanjens slagord: «La oss ta vare på intimiteten.» Musikken som støtter stemningen, er Emilie Nicolas' følsomme låt «Feel fine».

Filmen forteller to tydelige historier. Den ene historien er virkeligheten i rommet, med et intimt møte mellom de to unge personene. Den andre historien er om forventningene fra de ytre omgivelsene. Begge historiene drives frem med bilder og tekst parallelt.

Ungdommene som spiller i filmen, er castet fra modellbransjen, ikke fra skuespilleryrket. Filmens produsent i produksjonsselskapet Oslo Assembly sier de ble valgt fordi man mente disse var tryggere på situasjoner med kroppen i sentrum. Hun legger også vekt på hvordan innspillingen ble forberedt for å skape trygghet. Det ble gjort tydelige etiske avklaringer, og filmteamet fikk støtte fra andre produsenter med erfaring med nakenhet. Hun forklarer hvordan castingen og forberedelsene ble så viktige for resultatet:

Kjemien stemte mellom de to. De hadde en trygghet som filmen trengte. Øyeblikkene under opptaket var tydelige og troverdige på settet. Kjemien de to klarte å ha seg imellom, var tydelig bra. Man tror ikke på historiefortellingen hvis man ikke føler det på settet. Er det ikke trygt og godt og varmt og fint, er det vanskelig. Forarbeidet med å skape trygghet er viktig, og det å la dette vokse mellom de to som ble castet til filmen. (produsent, Oslo Assembly)

Filmspråket er med på å skape engasjement og identifikasjon og viser konflikt samtidig som selve filmen er en brobygger til publikum og blir et springbrett videre til andre aktiviteter. Til tross for et ganske subtilt visuelt håndverk kan noen scener oppfattes som støtende. Nakenheten er tilstrekkelig provoserende til at algoritmene reagerer, og filmen blir flagget og fjernet. Som nevnt gir sensuren av filmen i sosiale medier mulighet til å følge opp budskapet i andre medier. Avsenderen som fremmer Asan får da gjennom flere medieflater frem et retorisk budskap om hvorfor rettferdighet og moral skal sensureres. Motsetningene og konflikten gir drivkraft til taktiske kommunikasjonsaktiviteter overfor målgruppen. På denne måten påvirker budskapet om Asan hvordan kunden oppfatter verdien av produktet, i samsvar med *cultural branding* (Holt, 2004), og plasserer mening hos forbrukeren ut over merkeverens fysiske produkt (Danesi, 2006).

Historiefortellingen i filmen er også tydelig tvetydig. Vi kjenner ikke tankene personene i filmen gjør seg om intimitet og pornografi. Det overlates til publikum å tolke og analysere dette. Svarene er ikke gitt av fortelleren, men blir antydning gjennom filmspråket. Slike antydninger gjøres for å stimulere engasjement, fordi det åpner opp for tolkninger og diskusjoner.

Virkemidlet *rites of passage* brukes i manus og film. Det er et dramaturgisk grep som skaper identifikasjon hos publikum. Virkemidlet beskriver smertefulle livsoverganger – ritene – som når gutt blir mann, eller overgangen fra jente til kvinne. Folks egne erfaringer skaper identifikasjon når historien fortelles på en slik måte (Snyder, 2005). Her følger Asan-filmene kjente teorier i filmproduksjon. Og intensjonen med virkemidlene beskrives også av filmens produsent slik:

Man ønsker kanskje å bli mer i kontakt med seg selv, tørre å presentere hvem man er, og være seg selv i ytterste konsekvens. Tørre å servere ting litt rått og ærlig vil lønne seg, og det magiske vil da oppstå. Pornografien gjør at man går glipp av det. Det ekte forsvinner. Vi ønsker med filmen å lokke de unge til å tenke over dette, hvordan man er redd for virkeligheten, og hvordan man gjemmer seg bak noen lag. (produsent, Oslo Assembly)

*Rites of passage*, som er opplevelser målgruppen har erfaringer og følelser knyttet til, kombineres her med de større moralske spørsmålene som *cultural branding* tar for seg (Holt, 2004). Historiefortellingen utnytter en konflikt i samfunnet og bruker *rites of passage* for å skape identifikasjon for målgruppen, noe som igjen bygger merverdi for merkeverden (Danesi, 2006).

Filmens grep lener seg også på *narrativ transportation theory*. Det er et begrep fra psykologien som beskriver hvordan man blir så opptatt og oppslukt av en historie at man endrer atferd (Escalas, 2004). Film mobiliserer gjenkjennelse, følelser og identifikasjon og bruker et språk alle forstår. Tematikken er aktuell for målgruppen som skal engasjere seg. Identifikasjon skapes ved bruk av *rites of passage*, som igjen skaper engasjement rundt tematikken (Chiu et al., 2012).

Filmen om Asan viser hvordan disse virkemidlene gjennom historiefortellingen setter målgruppen inn i en problemstilling og skaper engasjement for endring. Prosjektlederen i produksjonsselskapet beskriver at de som lager filmen velger å sette ting på spissen for å sette spor hos målgruppen:

Hvis man er altfor opptatt av å bli likt av alt og alle, så tør man jo ikke å gi ut noe som har en edge. Å bevege og provosere er bedre enn å sikre. Tar man bort edgen, tar man også bort grunnen til at man blir beveget. Det er både litt vondt og godt, og det er derfor det blir emosjonelt. (prosjektleder, Trigger Oslo)

En undersøkelse fra USA viser at 70 prosent av generasjon Z, de som er født omkring år 2000, er villig til å betale ekstra for merkevarer som de identifiserer med sine egne verdier, og som representerer en forskjell (Schmidt et al., 2022). Denne målgruppen forventer at merkevarer viser dens verdier gjennom politisk ståsted. Filmens operasjonelle virkemidler viser tydelig de strategiske målene her.

Troverdigheten i filmen bygges også opp i virkemidler med detaljer i øyeblikkene. Det er en konstruert historie og konstruerte øyeblikk. Men det er begjær i blikkene, pusting med åpen munn, famling med BH-låsen med påfølgende smil, gåsehuden på et bryst som sier noe om kvaliteten på berøringen fra den andre parten. Slike detaljer bygger troverdighet, de spiller på målgruppens erfaringer som målgruppen kan identifisere seg med. Det er slike øyeblikk man ikke glemmer – eller kanskje velger å glemme. Scenene konstruerer et univers man tror på. Gjennom sammenkobling av det man ser, og det man selv husker eller kjenner seg igjen i, kobles de visuelle argumentene kognitivt opp mot egne erfaringer.

Hos Weber og Grauer (2019), presentert i teoridelen, diskuteres et virkemiddel Asan-filmen åpenbart bygger på. En meget konkret tematikk, støttet av bilder som er tydelige og til dels provoserende, er elementer som setter dypere spor i menneskets hukommelse og underbevissthet. Disse elementene gir en tydelig reise inn i karakterenes mentale og følelsesmessige status

og blir dermed en katalysator for tydelighet når det gjelder publikums evne til å huske det man har sett. Den narrative kvaliteten i bildene skaper den historien som huskes fordi den er både tydelig, troverdig, provoserende og identifikasjonsskapende. Historien fortelles i lineær form. Narrativ historiefortelling benyttes her som fortellerelement, men også som strategisk kommunikasjon for å feste tematikken i målgruppens underbevissthet. Oppfølging kommer når filmen sensureres, og når det da gis mulighet for å ta debatten videre i andre medier, noe som viser hvordan motstand gir muligheter.

Musikken i filmen er Emilie Nicolas' låt «Feel fine», med en sår og lengtende vokal som kler filmens univers. Teksten gir lyd og metaforer til både bildene og det man ikke ser; «I wanna feel fine» og helt til slutt «You only get one chance», der det kan virke som det gikk litt galt for gutten. Men hun omfavner ham med en avvæpnende holdning som inkluderer og tilbakeviser opplevelsen av at denne var hans eneste sjanse. En motsetning i tekst og bilder støtter poenget om at trygghet kan skapes. Dette setter punktum på filmen. Det retoriske spørsmålet om hva det gjør med oss når vi ser porno, henger igjen på skjermen sammen med slagordet «La oss ta vare på intimiteten». Det åpner for nye arenaer og kanaler hvor diskusjonen kan fortsette.

Filmmusikken er valgt med omhu, og produsenten begrunner det slik:

Det kunne bare være den låta. Vi prøvde sikkert over 100 låter. Men det var kun denne som kunne benyttes. Låten forsterker bildene særdeles godt både i forhold til stemming i bildene og den sårbarheten som vokalisten har i lydbildet. Tittelen på sangen er også med på å understøtte intensjonene om at det er i ærligheten, sårbarheten og intimiteten man får servert, som gir magien. (produsent, Oslo Assembly)

Emojiene i filmen har en tydelig semiotisk og retorisk plass. De erstatter manglende dialog og forankrer også troverdigheten overfor målgruppen. Grepene er gjort i samsvar med hvordan emojiene har tilført nonverbale muligheter for interaksjon, og fungerer som symbolikk for meningsutveksling og identifikasjon av følelser og kommentarer (Gawne & McCulloch, 2019). Videre viser kombinasjonen av emojiene og musikk tydelig hvordan regissørens intensjon er å snakke med den utvalgte målgruppen på målgruppens premisser og med dennes språk. Konsulentene ved Trigger Oslo opplyser også at valg av emojiene ble testet ut overfor fokusgrupper fra målgruppen.



Filmens moralske retorikk om rett og galt er formet slik at den er lett å være enig i. Det handler her om påvirkningen som kommer fra nettet, og det store spørsmålet om hvilket samfunn vi vil at barna våre skal vokse opp i. Spørsmålet inkluderer både kampanjens primære målgruppe og den eldre delen av målgruppen. Sånn sett er historiefortellingen i samsvar med Stugu (2016), som sier at den må finne grobunn og spire for å kunne ha effekt og påvirke normer og verdier i samfunnet.

Den moralske forankringen, understøttet av konflikt og aktualitet, legger til rette for engasjement i målgruppen. Produktsjefen som skal selge Asan formulerer i et intervju hva intensjonen med filmens budskap er: «I en tid der mange eksponeres for et forvridt bilde av kjærlighet og seksualitet, for eksempel gjennom porno, syns vi det er viktig å minne om at intimitet er noe av det fineste som kan oppstå mellom to mennesker» (Kreativt Forum, 2020).

De retoriske grunnpilarene *etos* (troverdighet), *patos* (følelser) og *logos* (fornuft) (Handgaard, 2020) er godt gjenkjennelige i filmens virkemidler. Troverdigheten som er bygget inn i filmen, settes kanskje på prøve fordi avsenderen som selger Asan er en kommersiell aktør. Kan man tro på det moralske budskapet når kommersielle krefter står bak? I den sammenhengen viser annen forskning at film har spesielt gode forutsetninger for likevel å oppnå troverdighet. Barbosa et al. (2021) konstaterte at følgende kriterier ga størst sjanse for å lykkes med en kampanje der film inngår i virkemidlene: For det første skapes det positive konnotasjoner i publikum hvis det er en troverdig relasjon mellom budskapet og merkevarens plass i det aktuelle universet. For det andre avhenger effektiviteten i kampanjen av at den skaper følelser i publikum og også trekker oppmerksomheten mot merkevaren. For det tredje bør ikke merkevaren ha hovedrollen i historien; publikum blir mer motivert av budskapet enn av avsenderen. Kampanjen for Asan lever opp til disse kriteriene i teorier om å nå frem med strategisk kommunikasjon gjennom film.

## Oppsummering

Studien har undersøkt hvordan reklamefilm kan brukes for å skape debatt i samfunnet om en aktuell problemstilling, og hvordan slik involvering i samfunnsdebatten inngår i en kampanje som skal styrke merkevarens kommersielle posisjon. Virkemidler innen strategisk kommunikasjon brukes for å skape politisk debatt med reklame som formål. Casen som er

undersøkt for å vise dette, er reklamefilmen for intimsåpen Asan *Ta vare på intimiteten*, som inngår i reklamekampanjen «La oss ta vare på intimiteten». Den politiske debatten som fremmes, er om all pornoen ungdommene blir eksponert for på nettet, ødelegger den naturlige erotikkens intimitet. Merkevarebyggingen av Asan har som mål å bli assosiert med dette temaet.

Som analyseverktøy er det anvendt teorier innen strategisk kommunikasjon og markedsføring og om historiefortelling relatert til film. Ut over innholdsanalyse av filmen og sosiale medier i tilknytning til den er data i studien intervjuer med fem av dem som har utviklet reklamekampanjen, og materiale fra den offentlige debatten som ble skapt.

Det første forskningsspørsmålet tar for seg hvordan reklamefilmen for Asan og transmedialitet benyttes som verktøy i strategisk kommunikasjon. Transmedialitet er spesielt aktuelt for denne kampanjen fordi det her handler om å skape et budskap som kan spres videre i flere medieflater. Filmens budskap er formet og også gjort tvetydig, slik at ulike elementer kan spres gjennom en rekke kanaler, og slik at uklarhetene gir grunnlag for videre diskusjoner. Filmen var bevisst laget med nakenhet som skapte kontroverser. Det resulterte i sensur, konflikt og anledning til å løfte diskusjonen om temaet, både i sosiale medier, i redaktørstyrte medier og i debatter. Bruken av de transmediale verktøyene bidro til spredningen av budskap og fortelling. I tråd med teori fikk temaet hovedrollen, mens merkevaren Asan var mer i bakgrunnen. Likevel var dette merkevarebygging primært rettet mot generasjon Z, som består av de som er født omkring år 2000. Asan ble presentert som en merkevare som bryr seg om ungdommen. Denne målgruppen forventer at produkter representerer politiske ståsteder, og de er villig til å betale for slike produkter. Studien viser at filmen ble laget som start for en nøye utviklet kampanjeplan, og at kampanjens ressurser er avgjørende for hvor lenge avsenderen kan greie å holde temaet varmt i den offentlige debatten.

Det andre forskningsspørsmålet er hvilke narrative virkemidler den visuelle historiefortellingen i reklamefilmen for Asan benytter for å skape troverdighet. Her flyttes perspektivet over til et mer taktisk og operativt nivå. Innholdsanalysen beskriver det som kan observeres i film og sosiale medier, mens intervjuene får frem filmskaperens vurderinger og hensikter i utførelsen av visuell historiefortelling for å skape troverdighet. Det hele begynner med casting og valg av modeller som gjør rollefigurene troverdige. I språket legges det inn både provokasjoner ment for å skape reaksjoner, identitetsmarkører overfor målgruppen og tvetydigheter for å

stimulere debatt og videre spredning. Språk og handling er gjort på ungdommens premisser, også ved bruk av emoji'er og musikk som gjør filmen mer emosjonell. Disse elementene er nøye utvalgt for å gi den unge målgruppen sterk identitetsfølelse til situasjonen og temaet. Det er flere virkemidler som bidrar til transmedialiteten, altså hvordan budskapet kan spres videre. En fare kan være at man kan miste kontrollen over budskapet når det tar nye veier, men her presenteres argumentene slik at de er vanskelige å vri på. Den erotiske situasjonen som utvikler seg mellom de to unge, kan kobles til en overgangsrite, som i overgangen fra ung til voksen. Når situasjonen også kobles til moralske spørsmål og motsetninger i samfunnet, brukes virkemidler som har muligheter til å mobilisere et veldig sterkt engasjement både politisk og kommersielt.

Reklamefilmen illustrerer en form for strategisk kommunikasjon som er litt annerledes enn det som normalt er kjernen innenfor fagfeltet. Denne studien har med sin case likevel vist hvordan en kommersiell aktør agerer som politisk påvirker med reklame som formål. Markedsførerne utnytter en pågående samfunnsdebatt og greier å knytte denne til sin merkevare. Et internasjonalt forbilde er eksempelvis Red Bulls kampanjer med kobling til ekstremsport, mens kampanjen for Asan viser denne typen praksis i norsk kontekst.

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## Vedlegg 1

Kilder som er intervjuet i studien:

- Lars Tovik, Creative Director & Director/regissør, Oslo Assembly, intervjuet 3. februar 2022
- Jannecke Isdahl Nordskog, Producer/produsent, Oslo Assembly, intervjuet 3. februar 2022
- Magdalena Kamøy, kreativ leder/prosjektleder, Trigger Oslo, intervjuet 3. februar 2022
- Sindre Prestby, innholdsrådgiver, Trigger Oslo, intervjuet 21. februar 2022
- Tone Angsund, konsulent, Trigger Oslo, intervjuet 20. februar 2022

## CHAPTER 8

# The Paradoxes in Corporate Sustainability Communication – a Critical Discourse Analysis of an Energy Company’s Annual Reports

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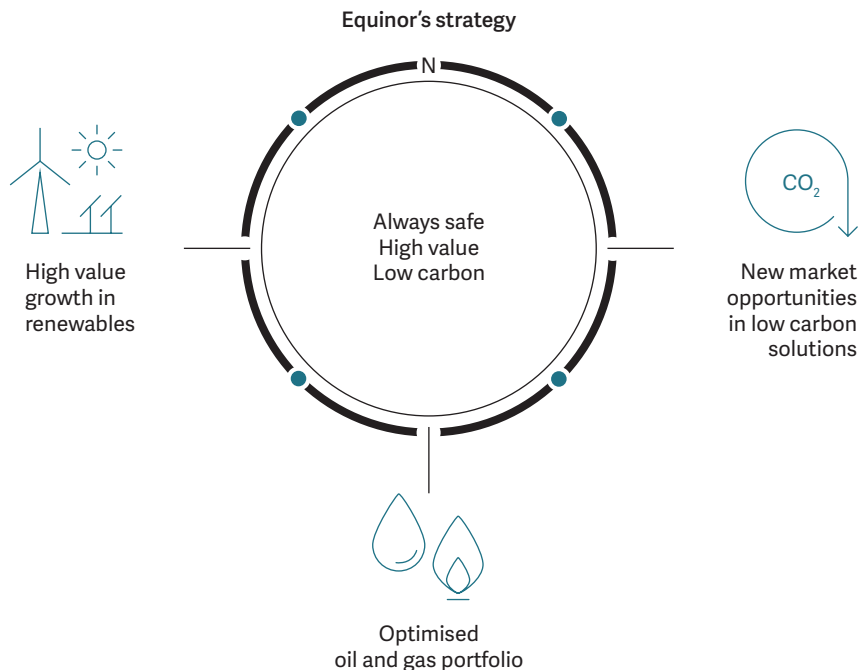
**Abstract:** This paper is a case study of an energy company’s strategic communication regarding its efforts to transform into a green(er) energy provider. The aim of the study is to describe and reflect on the demands placed on contemporary corporations to adapt to sustainability goals and how strategic communication is used for this mission. The annual reports from 2015 to 2021 are analyzed through critical discourse analysis to identify which legitimacy strategies the case company, Equinor, applies. The shifts in sustainable discourses from one annual report to the next are highlighted. The analysis shows how Equinor disclaims liability for the current state of climate change, frequently uses normalization and modality (forward-looking statements), and uses a discourse that intertwines a market-orientation and sustainable development. The analysis shows that Equinor strategically employs specific discursive practices to counterbalance and normalize the paradoxical tensions between competing business logics to defend its legitimacy.

**Keywords:** strategic communication, sustainable discourse, legitimacy, paradoxes, annual reports, critical discourse analysis, fossil fuel

## Introduction

Since the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 and the Paris Agreement entered into force in 2016, measures to stop climate change have received increasing focus. The oil and gas and energy industries are a focal point of SDG 7, which has the ambition “to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy to all and the ambition of zero-carbon solutions” (United Nations, 2020) by 2030. This poses challenges for the energy industry, which is experiencing “a fundamental tension between two competing mandates: the pressure to contribute to the social goal of climate change mitigation, and the need to perform financially and meet obligations to shareholders in activities that directly contribute to climate change” (Halttunen et al., 2022, p. 1).

This chapter presents a case study of a Norwegian-based energy company’s use of strategic communication to legitimize its transition into a green(er) energy provider. Equinor (formerly known as Statoil) is an international energy company developing and producing oil, gas, wind, and solar energy. The Norwegian government is the majority shareholder, with 67% of the shares. Equinor’s sustainability transition strategy consists of



**Figure 1** Equinor’s three-pillar strategy (Equinor ASA, 2023a).

three pillars. It combines focused, carbon-efficient oil and gas production with accelerated, value-driven expansion in renewables and leadership in building new low-carbon technologies and value chains.

Each of these three pillars will, according to Equinor, contribute individually and collectively as Equinor transitions into a broad energy company and towards its ambition of net zero carbon emissions in 2050, including emissions from the use of sold products (Equinor ASA, 2022).

However, an energy company that is primarily involved in oil and gas exploration and production, and simultaneously pursues the development of a renewable and low-carbon portfolio of products and services, might appear to be in conflict with their commitment to sustainability. In organizational studies, this phenomenon is called “paradoxes” (Lewis, 2000). Lewis describes paradoxes as “indicating interrelated elements that seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously” (Lewis, 2000, p. 760). Van Bommel (2018) refers to recent research on sustainable business models (SBM) by Smith and Lewis (2011), Gao and Bansal (2013), and Prendevil et al. (2017), suggesting that sustainable business models often involve paradoxical tensions, such as “the balance between short-term and long-term goals, profits and ethics, stakeholders and shareholders” (van Bommel, 2018, p. 830). An energy company engaged in oil and gas exploration and production that is simultaneously pursuing the development of renewable and low-carbon products and services indicates “an inherent tension between the nature of the organization’s core business and (some) principles of sustainability” (van Bommel, 2018, p. 832).

Equinor acknowledges these paradoxical tensions and sets forth that the company “must strike the right balance between generating cashflow to enable the transition, supporting their core, growing business in new energy areas and continuing as an attractive investment for their shareholders” (Equinor ASA, 2023a). In other words, the company uses its profits from core operations to become more environmentally friendly. This can be viewed as a mere legitimacy strategy rather than genuine progress, potentially hindering the transition to truly sustainable energy.

Communicating these paradoxical tensions poses challenges for Equinor’s legitimacy. Various conflicting discourses emerge as organizations determine their actions (or lack thereof) regarding resource degradation, pollution, carbon emissions, and climate change (Allen, 2016, p. 63). Thus, analysing and reflecting upon how Equinor handles this complex situation is highly relevant from a strategic communications perspective.



Considering this, this chapter seeks to contribute by examining how oil and gas enterprises strive to maintain their legitimacy during the process of transitioning toward sustainability. The following research question will be examined: *How does an energy company communicate its sustainability transition in its annual reports?*

To answer this question, the following sub-questions have been formulated:

- Which discourse(s) does Equinor employ in its annual reports to legitimize and communicate its sustainability transition?
- How does this discourse influence Equinor's overall legitimacy strategy within sustainability?

This chapter focuses on the financial strategic communication that represents the most controlled channel for the company – the annual report. Aiming to identify which legitimacy (communication) strategies the company applies, the annual reports from 2015 to 2021 are analyzed through a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995).

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section contains a literature review, and then the analytical framework, empirical material, method, and limitations are presented. This is followed by an empirical analysis demonstrating the legitimacy strategies that Equinor employs. Finally, the conclusion discusses the findings and gives suggestions for further research.

## Literature review

In the literature review, I will examine previous research that addresses how the fossil fuel industry has communicated while navigating sustainability challenges. These studies include communication, business management, corporate social responsibility (CSR), business ethics, and organizational studies.

In his rhetorical study of the Norwegian oil industry, Ihlen (2009) demonstrated that the industry applies four rhetorical operations to justify its sustainability claims (i.e., being environmentally friendly). These operations include 1) a commitment to reducing emissions, 2) adopting a long-term resource management approach, 3) critiquing alternative energy sources as unrealistic, and 4) highlighting Norway's comparatively low-pollution oil production.

Moving beyond specific industries, Ihlen and Roper (2011) examine the corporate discourse on sustainability and sustainable development in non-financial reports of the world's largest corporations. Their most notable finding reveals a shift, with many corporations no longer positioning themselves as works-in-progress towards sustainability but asserting that they have already been integrating sustainability principles into their operations for an extended period.

Du and Vieira (2012) investigated how oil companies, part of a controversial industry, worked on making their CSR messages more believable to maintain their legitimacy. They looked at how these companies presented their efforts from an environmental perspective. They discovered that there were weaknesses in the strategies and practices related to CSR. These companies didn't seem to have a solid, long-term plan to tackle environmental issues like pollution and climate change. Du and Vieira's study highlights that the oil companies under examination had not "recognized and integrated the environmental concerns into the firm's decision-making process" (Banerjee, 2002, p. 177).

O'Connor and Gronewold (2013) dived into the CSR environmental sustainability discourse within the oil industry, investigating 21 environmental sustainability reports. Their conclusion emphasizes that this discourse comprises both competitive advantage and institutional elements. Competitive advantage language, albeit less frequent, primarily pertains to environmental innovations rather than day-to-day operations. The predominant characteristics are regulatory and normative elements, often emphasizing leadership within the industry. "The most common use of competitive advantage language was to communicate a first mover or leader status within the industry" (O'Connor & Gronewold, 2013, p. 223).

Schlichting's (2013) meta-analysis of industry actors' framing of climate change from 1990 to 2010 identifies three distinct phases. Initially, there is an emphasis on scientific uncertainty regarding climate change, particularly in the US fossil fuel and coal industry. Subsequently, in the lead-up to the Kyoto negotiations, the focus shifted to socioeconomic consequences, particularly in the USA and Australia. Concurrently, European industry actors begin to promote industrial leadership in climate protection, a framing that has gained global prominence.

Jaworska's (2018) study delves into the discourses surrounding the term "climate change" in CSR and environmental reports by international oil companies. It reveals a transformation in the portrayal of climate

change – from a challenge that could be addressed to an unpredictable risk. Initially, a proactive stance with forceful metaphors is evident. However, this shifts to a distancing strategy characterized by hedging language and the deferral of climate change concerns to the future and other stakeholders.

Dahl and Fløttum's (2019) linguistic study offers a nuanced perspective, highlighting how major energy companies employ distinct discursive strategies to frame climate change. The energy company Total emphasizes responsibility, Suncor Energy portrays it as a business risk, and Statoil views it primarily as a business opportunity. However, the representation of risk emerges as the most dominant theme.

Li et al. (2022) compare the progress of decarbonization and the transition to clean energy using three perspectives: keywords used in annual reports, business strategies, and financial data related to fossil fuels and clean energy investments. They found a significant increase in the use of climate-related terms in reports. However, strategies mainly consisted of pledges rather than concrete actions, and financial analysis showed a continued reliance on fossil fuels with minimal spending on clean energy. In summary, they conclude that the transition to clean energy business models is not happening, as the level of investment and action does not match the discourse.

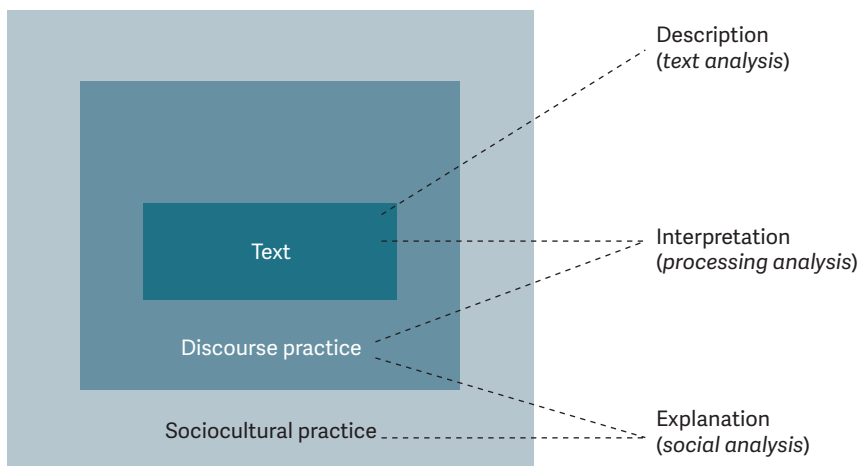
These studies present different approaches to how oil and gas corporations contend with sustainability and climate change issues, manage public perceptions, and navigate the complex terrain of corporate responsibility and sustainability. It is essential to mention that only Halttunen et al. (2022) have explored the challenges related to the conflicting mandates that impact the sustainability transition of energy companies. Their findings highlight defensive responses based on interviews with current and former professionals in the industry. I aim to conduct a more in-depth examination of Equinor's strategies for legitimization, drawing insights from their annual reports.

## **Analytical framework**

### **Critical Discourse analysis**

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) developed by Fairclough (1995) is considered suitable as both a theory and a method since it can provide in-depth insight into how an energy company applies communication strategies

to legitimate its sustainability transition journey. CDA aims to create connections between texts, characteristics of discourse practice, and the broader socio-cultural practice. Text refers to the actual language used in the document(s), i.e., the annual reports, while discourse practice refers to how language is used, especially in pinpointing how different perspectives are represented in discussions about social topics. Socio-cultural practice refers to the broader social contexts in which language is used. Fairclough (1995) suggests analyzing the relationship between these three defined dimensions.



**Figure 2** Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis (1995).

## Legitimacy

Vaara and Tienari (2008) propose a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective to investigate legitimation strategies in multinational corporations. CDA inherently adopts a critical perspective, evident in its deliberate application of analytical tools to address “controversial social or societal issues” (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 986). Van Veen et al. further elaborate that CDA's focal point is the study of change and, referring to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), also acknowledge that some aspects of the social world function according to a logic different from discursive logic. Van Leeuwen (2013) asserts that CDA is a method used to examine and criticize how language is used selectively and ambiguously, especially when it is used to hide “contradictions or to legitimate discrimination and abuses of power” (Van Leeuwen, 2013, p. 99).

In strategic communication, Suchman's (1995) definition of legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (1995, p. 574), aligns with the concept of legitimacy as articulated by Falkheimer and Heide (2022). They view legitimacy as "an individual or collective perception about which actors and institutions have the right to rule, regulate, and decide" (Falkheimer & Heide, 2022, p. 132). In their exploration of the relationship between legitimacy and strategic communication, Holmström et al. (2009) assert that for an organization, "legitimizing notions" (2009, p. 2) establish limits for decisions considered socially acceptable within a particular time, context, and perspective. Building upon the insights from Luhmann (1989) and Suchman (1995), Holmström et al. (2009) define organizational legitimacy as the shared belief that an organization operates within meaningful, reasonable, and appropriate frameworks within socially constructed systems. Here, "perception" means that legitimacy is not based on the actual substance of actions, but on how they are interpreted. In essence, legitimacy is not about what an organization does, but how they are interpreted. As a result, strategic communication and legitimacy are closely intertwined, and effective communication skills are critically important for organizations today (Holmström et al., 2009).

Further, Falkheimer and Heide (2022) position legitimacy at the heart of strategic communication, emphasizing its importance: "Legitimacy is at the core of strategic communication. When legitimacy is at stake, organizations and other actors use strategic communication to respond to, confront, and impact the outcome using different legitimacy communication strategies and tactics" (Falkheimer & Heide, 2022, p. 132). The organization's legitimacy influences the close relationship between an organization and its external environment.

A fundamental aspect of CDA interpreted by Vaara and Tienari (2008) involves the examination of how legitimacy is utilized, and more specifically, "the concrete means through which controversial actions are legitimated in the multinational corporation context" (Vaara & Tienari, 2008 p. 991). Within CDA, this concept is often framed as 'legitimation strategies,' referring to the methods employed to utilize specific resources to establish a perception of legitimacy or illegitimacy (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). Building upon Van Leeuwen's (2007) research, Vaara and Tienari (2008) have pinpointed five legitimization strategies: authorization, rationalization,

moralization, narrativization, and normalization. Authorization is making something legitimate by referring to tradition, customs, laws, or authorities. Moralization is legitimizing something by (indirectly) referring to moral values. Rationalization is justifying legitimacy based on alignment with social goals and knowledge. Mythopoesis (narrativization) establishes legitimacy through narratives that reward legitimacy and punish non-legitimacy. Normalization is separated from “authorization” to highlight the importance of strategies that make specific actions or phenomena seem “normal” or “natural” (Vaara & Tienar, 2008). This shift in focus enables us to redirect our attention from existing notions of legitimacy toward the ongoing discursive battles for legitimization.

## **Empirical material, methods, and study limitations**

### **Empirical material**

The annual reports from 2015 to 2021 have been collected and analyzed to identify which legitimization strategies the company applies. Annual reports focus on past and present financial performance and predict prospects. Whereas annual reports used to be rather factual documents oriented towards shareholders, today these reports are of interest to multiple stakeholders, such as journalists, interest groups, suppliers, clients, and employees. An annual report has thus become more of a strategic communicative document than initially intended. The presentation of strategies, e.g., in annual reports and corporate websites, is the sphere of strategic communication. This is one of the few fields where management research explicitly mentions the necessity of communication; however, it has rarely attracted the attention of strategic communication researchers until now (Köhler & Zerfass, 2019; Moss & Warnaby, 1998).

The selection of the seven of Equinor’s annual reports has been influenced by important (societal and organizational) milestones concerning the energy company’s path towards becoming a more sustainable energy provider (see Table 1). The Paris Agreement in 2015 is an essential milestone for the energy sector, as it highlights the commitment of numerous countries to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 and to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C. Achieving these goals necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of the economy and society’s energy systems. This has influenced Equinor’s

journey towards sustainability: establishing the “New Energy Solutions” business area in 2015, followed by a strong emphasis on offshore wind and carbon capture and storage in 2016. 2017 Statoil (now Equinor) introduced a refined strategy, “always safe, high value, low carbon”, complemented by a rebranding and a new CEO in 2018. In 2019, Equinor made a joint statement with Climate Action 100+ to support the goals of the Paris Agreement, setting the stage for investor engagement. The company continued its commitment to sustainability by launching a global climate roadmap in 2020 and establishing the Norway Energy hub in 2021.

**Table 1** Milestones annual report

<p>2015 The Paris Agreement, a legally binding international treaty on climate change, was adopted by 196 Parties at COP 21 in Paris and entered into force on 4 November 2016. (United Nations, 2015)</p>	<p>This is reflected in the annual report for 2015 where ‘Statoil recognises the ambition to limit the average global temperature rise to below two degrees centigrade compared to pre-industrial levels. The Paris agreement on climate change negotiated at the UN Conference of Parties (COP21) in December 2015 provides the prospect of improved policy support around the world’. (Statoil ASA, 2015, p. 63) The annual report further announces that it created a new business area, New Energy Solutions, to further access, develop, and produce low carbon energy when and where it is deemed valuable.</p>
<p>2018</p>	<p>The annual general meeting (AGM) in Statoil ASA (will vote on the proposal to change the company’s name, from Statoil ASA to Equinor ASA. The name Equinor reflects the company’s strategy and development towards becoming a broad energy company’. (Equinor ASA, 2018, p. 7)</p>
<p>2020</p>	<p>Equinor launches a new global climate roadmap with ambition to reduce net carbon intensity, grow renewable energy capacity tenfold by 2026 and reach carbon neutral global operations by 2030; and in August 2020 it was announced that Anders Opedal became the new president and CEO from the 2d of November. In the chief executive letter in the annual report for 2020 the new CEO states that: ‘Equinor is preparing for a future that will be different from the past. We aim to be a leading company in the energy transition and to build the energy industry of tomorrow.’ (Equinor ASA, 2020, p. 15)</p>
<p>2021 Nations adopted the Glasgow Climate Pact, aiming to turn the 2020s into a decade of climate action and support. As part of the package of decisions, nations also completed the Paris Agreement’s rulebook as it relates to market mechanisms and non-market approaches and the transparent reporting of climate actions and support provided or received, including for loss and damage.</p>	<p>Equinor launches the Norway energy hub. This is an industrial plan for Norway as an energy nation. Equinor invites partners and governments to collaborate on creating the energy systems of the future. (Equinor ASA, 2021, p. 9)</p>

By selecting Equinor's annual reports from 2015 to 2021, it was possible to conduct a comparative study focusing on the shifts in sustainability discourses that occur from one annual report to the next. Evidence supporting the idea that publicizing social and environmental information through channels like annual reports is done for legitimizing purposes is consistent with Deegan's (2002) study on social and environmental reporting (SAR) and its role in maintaining or creating organizational legitimacy. Emphasizing annual reports as the primary focus of this study is justified because they represent the most official and comprehensive documents addressed to shareholders and stakeholders. Their standardized year-to-year structure makes them highly suitable for meaningful comparisons (Li et al., 2022).

The focus of the analysis contains the following chapters of the annual reports:

- i. Introduction Chapter
- ii. Strategic report
- iii. Governance
- iv. Forward-looking statements

## Method

The analysis of the annual reports has been conducted by applying the three dimensions of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as defined by Fairclough (1995). First, an analysis was performed at the textual level to identify the most frequently employed linguistic devices in the annual reports. Following this, a more comprehensive examination was carried out on the three most used linguistic devices- nominalization, modality, and interdiscursivity – following the discourse practice within the context of annual reports. Finally, a critical evaluation was undertaken to assess the socio-cultural context's impact on the annual reports and their discourses.

For the textual analysis (first dimension), Skrede (2017), in his book *Kritisk diskursanalyse*, proposes using a set of linguistic features to analyze text and illustrate how grammar creates a particular worldview at the expense of others (Skrede, 2017, p. 47). These linguistic features are nominalization, passive voice, modality, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, recontextualization, and assumptions. I started by closely reading the annual reports and identified three frequently used discursive features: nominalization and



modality. In addition, I paid attention to how specific topics or issues are presented and framed from one report to the other.

In the second dimension, “discourse practice”, Skrede (2017) highlights Fairclough’s emphasis on recognizing which discourses are activated and the potential interests they may serve. In annual reports, these discourses encompass accounting discourse, financial discourse, PR discourse, and legal discourse (Bhatia, 2012); these discourses are not isolated but interact and influence one another, constructing a corporate narrative based on the financial activities and position of the organization. I scrutinized interdiscursive connections within the annual reports and attempted to pinpoint novel elements that contribute to destabilization (Skrede, 2017, p. 54). My approach combines Bhatia’s framework (2012) with Fairclough’s interdiscursivity concept to explore these interactions and to examine whether a new discourse emerges.

In the third dimension, “social practice”, I examined the power dynamics within the discourse, investigating who holds the authority to influence and shape it. Additionally, I identified and evaluated the discourse’s prevalent ideologies and belief systems, examining how these ideologies serve the company’s interests.

## Limitations of the study

A financial analysis has not been conducted as this is another field of expertise; however, some references are made here to financial statements to clarify or explain conclusions.

The analysis is limited to texts generated by the organization and does not assess the actual implementation of their sustainability initiatives. The focus is on Equinor’s annual reports, excluding various other forms of strategic communication by the company. However, these reports are essential to study because they are the primary way corporations express their views on sustainability. Whether these views are genuine and lead to actual action should be explored in separate research.

## Empirical analysis

In this section, the text analysis results will first be presented; then, the discourse order dimension will be examined, with connections drawn to the socio-cultural practices.

## Text analysis

The text analysis of Equinor's annual reports from 2015 to 2021 has provided valuable insights into how Equinor communicates its sustainability initiatives and navigates its legitimacy in the complex social and economic contexts in which it operates. It became clear that the most common linguistic features applied are nominalization and modality.

### *Nominalization*

Fairclough (2010) defines nominalization as changing a process into a nominal (i.e., noun-like) entity and that this process is ideologically motivated. An example of recurrent nominalization is the concept of "climate change". The original verb for climate change is "change", which has been turned into a noun by adding the word "climate" to describe the specific type of change. In the environmental chemistry field, climate change is defined as "the shift in climate patterns mainly caused by greenhouse gas emissions" (Fawzy et al., 2020, p. 2070). In other words, climate change is a process, not a thing. In this manner, climate change is presented as a fact without considering the process, i.e., energy accounts for two-thirds of total greenhouse gas emissions (International Energy Agency, 2023), which has hugely influenced and still is influencing the climate and the planet. This process and its consequences are confirmed by several other organizations and scholars, such as van de Graaf and Sovacool (2020, p. 1), who state that "(...) energy is the single largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, resulting in climate change that, if left unchecked, could devastate our planet".

Nonetheless, climate change is a nominalization that traces back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, examining the context in which it appears in the annual reports is more interesting. It is evident that climate change is mainly used in connection with potential risks for Equinor due to regulations, changes in the industry, changes in supply chains, changes in consumption, and geopolitical instability.

Fundamental changes are happening in the oil and gas industry. The industry faces new challenges, such as increased pressure on margins, changing patterns of energy supply and consumption, geopolitical instability, and rising climate change concerns. (Statoil ASA, 2015, p. 10)

Statoil monitors and assesses risks related to climate change, whether political, regulatory, market, or physical, including reputation impact. (Statoil ASA, 2016, p. 66)

The excerpts above illustrate that Equinor deflects responsibility for climate change by framing it as an external problem and even depicting it as a threat to the company. This paves the way for another context, where the concept of climate change is employed when discussing the company's role in tackling climate issues.

We have also teamed up with global peers through OGCI (Oil and Gas Climate Initiative) to help shape the industry's climate response. In Statoil, we believe the winners in the energy transition will be the producers who can deliver at low cost and with low carbon emissions. (Statoil ASA, 2016, p. 75)

The world's energy systems are in rapid transition to meet the challenge. The journey towards net zero creates new industry opportunities, and Equinor is ready to seize these opportunities. (Equinor ASA, 2021, p. 17)

These excerpts exemplify how Equinor diverts the focus from the industry and positions itself and the energy industry not as responsible actors for climate change but as "(...) central players in efforts to reduce emissions and mitigate climate change" (International Energy Agency, 2023).

### ***Modality***

Equinor frequently employs modality as a critical discourse device. Modality is about conveying a message, expressing facts, attitudes, asking questions, claiming something, or indicating obligations and (un)certainly levels (Skrede, 2017). It relies on linguistic devices like modal verbs (e.g., can, shall, will, must), adverbs, or adjectives to shape meaning and interpretation in texts. Equinor's use of modal verbs becomes especially clear in forward-looking statements, representing management expectations of future events or results, revealing their beliefs and opinions, and enabling potential investors to assess associated risks and possible outcomes. Forward-looking statements can be identified using words like anticipate, intend, believe, estimate, plan, seek, project, and expect.

In the Chief Executive Letter of 2016, Eldar Sætre (former CEO) announces Equinor's commitment to long-term sustainable value creation in line with the principles of the UN Global Compact:

We believe a low carbon footprint will make us more competitive in the future. We also believe there are attractive business opportunities in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Statoil intends to be part of this transformation to fulfil our purpose of turning natural resources into energy for people and progress for society. Our Climate roadmap explains how we plan to achieve this and how we will develop our business, supporting the ambitions of the Paris Climate Agreement. (Statoil ASA, 2016, p. 7)

At first sight, this paragraph indicates a commitment to the Paris Climate Agreement. However, the repeated use of verbs such as “believe” and “intends” demonstrates a careful choice of words that reduces their potential engagement with the Paris Climate Agreement.

The annual report from 2021 continues on this path. Even though it expresses a more substantial commitment to deliver on their engagement, modality is still utilized:

We strive to adhere to high industry standards and improve our performance in every area where we have a positive or negative impact. ... When assessing materiality, we considered the global sustainability context and evaluated impacts across our own activities and business relationships, including actual and potential, positive and negative impacts on people, planet and society. (Equinor ASA, 2021, p. 107)

Expressions like “we strive” are consciously chosen to indicate the action’s probability (or not). The same can be said about the use of “considered” and “evaluate” where there is an indication of commitment but without pledging a vow.

Furthermore, Equinor’s disclaimer in its forward-looking statements suggests that external factors and associated risks play a significant role in the implementation and outcomes of its corporate strategy. This contrasts with their initial ambition, as evident in the 2021 annual report, to lead in the energy transition, which is later disavowed in the disclaimer:

All statements other than statements of historical fact, including the commitment to develop as a broad energy company; the ambition to reduce net group-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 and to be a net-zero energy company by 2050; our aim to decarbonize oil and gas, industrialize offshore wind and hydrogen, and provide commercial carbon capture and storage; our ambition to develop low carbon solutions and value chains ...are forward-looking statements. You should not place undue reliance on these forward-looking statements. (Equinor ASA, 2021, p. 347)

Forward-looking statements disclaimers appear in almost all annual reports and are a legal provision protecting the management of legal or regulatory liability in certain situations. From a critical discourse analysis point of view, one could interpret this as a retraction of the ambition to become a green(er) energy provider.

## Discourse practice

Skrede clarifies that when “various genres or discourses are incorporated in a text without necessarily having an identifiable textual origin, it refers to it as interdiscursivity” (2017, p. 53). Furthermore, he explains that a minimal level of interdiscursivity suggests stability, whereas a substantial amount of interdiscursivity signifies a changing field.

Equinor’s annual reports show a considerable use of interdiscursivity, indicating a “shift”, a transformation as societal, industrial, and organizational changes progress. Equinor’s response is a paradoxical corporate strategy, combining an oil and gas business model driven by market logic and a parallel business model rooted in sustainable development principles. This approach results in two intertwined discourses in the reports: a market-oriented discourse and a sustainable development discourse.

In the 2018 annual report, Statoil rebranded as Equinor, emphasizing its intention to become a broad energy company. The company underscores its sustainability efforts, specifically highlighting renewable energy (wind energy), carbon capture and storage (CCS) to mitigate oil and gas production emissions, and the electrification of offshore oil and gas fields:

To achieve the emission reduction target of 3 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> from 2017 to 2030, we pursue energy efficiency measures, electrification, and other low-carbon energy sources at our installations. (Equinor ASA, 2018, p. 89)

This example demonstrates the intertwining of two discourses. Equinor emphasizes emissions reduction through efficiency measures and electrification of their oil and gas platforms, reflecting a market-oriented approach focused on operational, profit maximization and cost efficiency.

In the 2020 annual report, Equinor’s new CEO, Anders Opedal, states in his first chief executive letter:

The world needs to combat climate change – even during a pandemic. My message when I became CEO of Equinor was that we shall create value as a leading company in

the energy transition. Our strategic direction is still based on always safe, high-value, low-carbon. We are continuing our journey to reduce the carbon intensity from operations, and we are accelerating the transformation towards a broader energy company. Our ambition is to become a net zero company by 2050. (Equinor ASA, 2020, p. 13)

The excerpt above represents another instance of a deliberate strategy to integrate sustainable development discourse into the market-driven narrative. Equinor focuses on its ambition to become a net zero company by 2050, which can be perceived as a sustainable development discourse; on the other hand, a market-oriented discourse is implied by “to reduce the carbon intensity from operations” (Equinor ASA, 2020, p. 13). One can interpret this statement as a sustainable development discourse since it indicates carbon reduction – however, “from their operations” (Equinor ASA, 2020, p. 13) alludes to the exploration and production of oil and gas. This implies that their discourse is based on how they handle their operations and not what they do. Further in the report, Equinor makes clear that the Norwegian Continental Shelf oil and gas fields make up 60% of the company’s equity production and mentions in this context “large remaining resource potential” (Equinor ASA, 2020, p. 21) that may reach “potential historically high production levels in 2025” (Equinor ASA, 2020, p. 21). This indicates a market-oriented logic for the near future.

## Socio-cultural practice

To understand the socio-cultural practice, first, attention is directed toward the overarching drivers of sustainability transformation in the energy industry. Secondly, consideration is given to how this impacts Equinor. It is essential to comprehend on a broader societal scale that “energy profoundly shapes our wide societies, economics, and politics (...) and is a key driver for the pursuit of wealth and power in world politics” (van de Graaf & Sovacool, 2020, p. 1). Consequently, (European) oil and gas firms have received favourable treatment from governments and markets. Despite the contemporary push for sustainable energy solutions, oil maintains a substantial presence in European transportation markets, while gas remains an essential energy source for heating and electricity (Midttun et al., 2022). Furthermore, post-Covid vaccination efforts and the energy crisis in Europe have led to a rebound in gas and oil prices, resulting in oil and gas companies achieving unprecedented profits (Midttun et al., 2022).

Given this scenario, oil and gas companies are grappling with a dual challenge: the increasingly environmentally focused policies of the European Union, on one side, and the profit-generating potential of the oil and gas market on the other (Halttunen et al., 2022).

The oil and gas industry plays a significant role in climate change, necessitating a shift towards sustainability. Regulatory changes are forcing companies to focus on sustainable value creation. In 2019, the European Commission, under Ursula von der Leyen's leadership, introduced the European Green Deal (EGD), intending to achieve a carbon-neutral European economy by 2050. This initiative includes targets like climate neutrality by 2050 and a 55% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. The Commission's recent legislative package, "Fit for 55", contains revised and new measures aligned with the EGD's climate objectives (Knodt & Kemmerzell, 2022, p. 7). These developments underscore the industry's imperative to adopt more sustainable practices.

The annual reports indicate that Equinor acknowledges that climate challenges exist and that the Equinor must act. Within this context, the organization has identified an essential role for the company:

Statoil recognizes the ambition to limit the average global temperature rise to below two degrees centigrade compared to pre-industrial levels. The Paris Agreement on climate change negotiated at the UN Conference of Parties (COP21) in December 2015 provides the prospect of improved policy support around the world for accelerating the shift to low-carbon solutions. Statoil welcomes the agreement and believes the company is well-positioned to play its part. (Statoil ASA, 2015, p. 63)

In its 2019 annual report, Equinor not only describes its role as a solution provider but indicates that this is a responsibility involving several systems. One could understand this as a systems approach, a system of systems with three layers: supply infrastructure, demand infrastructure, and social infrastructure (van de Graaf & Sovacool, 2020).

Equinor is committed to sustainability and recognizes that the energy systems must go through profound changes to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. (Equinor ASA, 2019, p. 11)

In its 2021 annual report, Equinor goes a step further and positions itself as a leader in the energy transition:

We continue to pursue our strategy of always safe, high value and low carbon. To position ourselves as a leading company in the energy transition, we are accelerating profitable growth in renewable energy, positioning for low-carbon solutions and focusing on and optimizing our oil and gas business. (Equinor ASA, 2021, p. 3)

These excerpts reflect Equinor's evolving focus from identifying business opportunities and participating in the energy transition to taking on a leadership role. This purpose aligns with societal expectations and their commitment to address global climate challenges. However, despite positioning itself as an energy transition leader, Equinor strongly emphasizes its core business, oil and gas.

## Concluding discussion

The critical discourse analysis reveals a deliberate and thoughtful communication strategy at play. This strategy involves using linguistic discourse tools like nominalization, modality, and interdiscursivity, incorporating a sustainable development discourse, all to reconcile the paradoxes within Equinor's business logics and, consequently, uphold the company's legitimacy.

When examining the components of analytical discourse analysis and linking them with Vaara and Tienar's (2008) legitimacy framework, including authorization, moralization, rationalization, narrativization, and normalization, it becomes clear that a combination of legitimation strategies is employed.

Equinor utilizes authorization as a strategy by portraying themselves as solution providers and leaders driving the energy transition and combating climate change. Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 94) refers to this type of authority legitimation as "expert authority", where legitimacy is derived from expertise rather than mere status. This expertise is sometimes explicitly mentioned, often through references to credentials, but not limited to this alone. Halttunen et al. (2022) discovered a debate in the literature on whether incumbent players (i.e., fossil fuel companies) should engage in the energy transition. Some studies point to the potential for their positive contribution, assuming the continuation of current economic structures. In contrast, others argue that fossil fuel companies should not participate in the energy transition, in order to avoid increasing existing inequalities (Halttunen et al., 2022).



One primary legitimating strategy Equinor applies is shareholder rationalization, where the focus is on pleasing shareholders. When Equinor talks about creating “high value”, it can mean a few things. It might involve investments driven by market demands to generate profit. However, looking at Equinor’s annual reports, it becomes clear that “high value” primarily revolves around generating shareholder returns, making this the central driving force for the company’s activities. The focus on delivering value to shareholders also extends to investments in renewable energy. Despite the environmental and sustainability aspects associated with renewable projects, companies also approach these projects from a high-value perspective. In simple terms, Equinor is not just investing in renewables for the greater good; the company’s investments fit with its goal of delivering value to shareholders. Shareholder-oriented thinking, in this context, can be perceived as being at odds with long-term sustainable development.

Narrativization, as a legitimating strategy, is about narratives that reward legitimacy and punish non-legitimacy. Equinor has been criticized for greenwashing by interest groups and other activists, newspapers, and scholars (ClientEarth, 2019; Dahl & Flottum, 2019; Greenpeace International, 2018; Ihlen, 2009; Kent, 2018; Langum Becker, 2022). An alternative definition of greenwashing by the research group CorpWatch is “a phenomenon of socially and environmentally destructive corporations attempting to preserve and expand their markets by posing as friends of the environment and leaders in the struggle to eradicate poverty” (CorpWatch, 2002). In essence, this definition characterizes greenwashing as a strategy companies employ to enhance their public image and maintain or expand their market presence. They achieve this by portraying themselves as advocates for environmental causes and poverty alleviation, even if their commitment to these objectives may be insincere.

The annual reports clarify that Equinor acknowledges that climate change is the central challenge in an ever-shifting energy world. Global energy systems are swiftly transforming to tackle this challenge, opening fresh opportunities for the industry, and Equinor itself claims to be prepared to embrace these opportunities. In other words, Equinor has positioned itself as one of the “(...) central players in efforts to reduce emissions and mitigate climate change” (International Energy Agency, 2023). International oil and gas production represented approximately 40% of Equinor’s equity production in 2018, a record-high year for production. At the same time, Equinor is building a new energy portfolio and expects 15–20% of its investments to

be directed towards new energy solutions by 2030 (Equinor ASA, 2018). In other words, the company's core business (exploration and production of oil and gas) will, in the foreseeable future, be the primary value driver for the company. Equinor's three-pillar strategy, aimed at positioning itself as a prominent player in the energy transition, can, in line with CorpWatch's definition, be viewed as a manifestation of greenwashing.

Equinor is building up a narrative that highlights its goal of becoming a leading force in the shift towards cleaner energy. However, there are various signals that Equinor is preparing an alternative narrative to explain why specific goals will not be achieved. PricewaterhouseCooper's annual report, the Climate Index, which evaluates climate efforts and reporting by major companies in Norway, has highlighted a significant disparity between these companies' emissions and climate targets. In PwC's assessment, Equinor maintains the status quo in the second category, signifying that the company has managed to reduce emissions, but not in alignment with the goals of the Paris Agreement (PricewaterhouseCoopers AS, 2023). Even though Equinor "advocates for and aligns with policies and actions that accelerate the energy transition in accordance with the goals of the Paris Agreement" (Equinor ASA, 2023b); Eirik Wærness, Chief Economist at Equinor, has recently drawn attention to the increasing challenge of achieving the 1.5-degree climate ambition, despite policy and technological advancements (Energy Voice, 2023). He attributes this increasing difficulty to heightened levels of geopolitical conflict, which have led to a more fragmented landscape in the global energy transition. This situation is exemplified by the ongoing conflict triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has had ripple effects on energy transition efforts.

Moreover, economic factors, including inflation and rising living costs, further complicate the pursuit of essential energy transition measures (Energy Voice, 2023). Wærness's assertion underscores the complex interplay between geopolitical tensions and economic considerations, highlighting the hurdles Equinor must overcome to meet ambitious climate targets. This narrative does not (yet) appear as a discussion point in the annual reports (2015–2021) analyzed here. Still, it serves as further validation for why Equinor is falling short of the goals of the Paris Agreement and is a clear example of how Equinor makes specific strategic actions and decisions seem normal.

Equinor utilizes the legitimization strategies discussed earlier, which are commonly entangled, with a combination of multiple legitimization

approaches which often prove to be highly effective (Vaara & Tienar, 2008, p. 988). These legitimating strategies respond to the societal demands placed on the company, enabling it to blend sustainable values into its market-oriented system of meaning. This system of meaning is entwined in the narrative of the annual reports and can be interpreted as an effort to create a “corporate dream”, a concept introduced by Rahm et al. (2020). Corporate dreams should not be conceived of as irrational, confused fantasies but as potentially legitimate responses to the institutional, ideological, and discursive contexts in which the company operates. A public declaration of morally justifiable and legitimate dreams is, in itself, a performative act with direct and indirect consequences on corporate image, status, and legitimacy. Dreaming “appropriate” dreams – in public – can be a way of presenting oneself as a trustworthy actor in the marketplace (Rahm et al., 2020). The question arises whether Equinor’s corporate dream of becoming “a leading company in the energy transition” (Equinor ASA, 2021, p. 2), is adequately adapted to the paradoxical situation the company finds itself in regarding its transition towards a broad energy company. Another pertinent question is whether Equinor’s corporate strategy, primarily driven by market considerations, can genuinely integrate and prioritize sustainability in its strategic communication efforts in order to legitimize its sustainability transition.

Further research could examine stakeholder perceptions, including investors, customers, and environmental advocates, to assess how Equinor’s sustainability communication aligns with their expectations. Additionally, conducting comparative studies with other energy sector companies could help evaluate Equinor’s sustainability communication and legitimacy strategies. Exploring the internal impact of these communication strategies on Equinor’s corporate culture, decision-making, and identity is also a valuable avenue for investigation.

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## CHAPTER 9

# AI-powered Fact-checking: Strategic Framing of AI Use for Information Verification

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**Abstract:** As the scale of mis/disinformation grows across media and social media platforms, public and professional discussion about the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for information verification is becoming increasingly common. This chapter explores how six companies working on AI-powered services strategically frame mis/disinformation issues and what sort of moral judgments they use when making diagnostic inferences to find solutions for “information disorder”. Informed by Entman’s framing theory, this study qualitatively analyzes textual data from the websites of AI-powered services for information verification. We find that the companies studied promote services that we identify here as: automated fact-checking, automated credibility assessment, and automated authenticity assessment. Hence, this chapter focuses on the strategic framing of the mis/disinformation problem, along with the solutions promoted by AI-powered services, laying the groundwork for further explorations of how the offered technologies might tackle the problem of spreading fake news.

**Keywords:** strategic communication, fact-checking, artificial intelligence, framing, information verification

## Introduction

Technological development and accelerated digitalization contribute to the malicious process of spreading mis/disinformation “farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly” (Di Pietro et al., 2021; Vosoughi et al., 2018). As the scale of mis/disinformation grows across media and social media platforms, public and professional discussion about the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for information verification is becoming increasingly common (Graves, 2018; Mishra & Setty, 2019; Moreland & Doerrfeld, 2016). The media industry, academia, tech, and civil society are collaborating to come up with AI solutions to deal with fake news defined as false information “packaged to look like real news to deceive readers either for financial or ideological gain” (Tandoc et al., 2019, p. 674). Many hope that remedies for this “informational disorder” (Wardle, 2018) will be found within the technological realms. The current trend of injecting AI into the process of information verification within the media industry is also comfortably situated within such technology-oriented logic. AI-powered services for information verification have been called the “holy grail of fact-checking” (Hassan et al., 2015), and this type of framing is a type of strategic communication that can influence how people view AI-based fact-checking.

Despite rapid developments in the field, AI-powered services for fact-checking are still in their embryonic phase (Jimenez & Li, 2018). Yet, they still need to prove the viability of their products and motivate how AI may offer better solutions for media ecosystems distorted by “fake news”. In this chapter, we observe how six leading companies, all of which work on tackling mis/disinformation, strategically frame their AI-powered services on their websites. Companies engage in various kinds of strategic communication to convince users and potential customers about the credibility and efficiency of their solutions. Due to the novelty of such services, it is still too early to talk decisively about their short-term effects or long-lasting implications on information ecosystems or societies. Instead, with the help of framing theory (Entman, 1993), we examine their intentions and strategic positioning within the context of information verification. Thus, this chapter explores how organizations working on AI-powered services strategically frame issues related to mis/disinformation and what sort of ethical judgments they use while making diagnostic inferences to find solutions for information disorder. Accordingly, we answer the following research questions:



- RQ1: How do AI-powered fact-checking services frame the problem of information disorder?
- RQ2: Which diagnoses and moral judgments do the AI-powered fact-checking services express on their websites?
- RQ3: What solutions do the AI-powered fact-checking services recommend for dealing with mis/disinformation?

To address these questions, we selected six leading companies already associated with the use of AI for information verification, designing AI-based systems, and attracting attention from the fact-checking community (Burgess, 2016; Fray, 2016). We will analyze textual data obtained from their websites that demonstrates how they define the problem of mis/disinformation, evaluate causal agents, make judgments, and suggest remedies. First, we discuss the premise of using AI for information verification in media production, which is followed by a short theoretical discussion about Entman's framing theory and a description of the collected data. Finally, the chapter discusses the results of our analysis and the broader implications of strategic framing of AI solutions for information verification.

## Literature review

The use of AI in media organizations has attracted considerable scientific and industry attention lately (Diakopoulos, 2019; Whittaker, 2019). The rise of AI technologies has already significantly affected different stages of media work, including “newsgathering, production, and distribution” (Marconi, 2020, p. 22). As Chan-Olmsted (2019) notes, algorithmic technologies have been applied to at least eight main areas in news media: audience content recommendations/discovery, audience engagement, augmented audience experience, message optimization, content management, content creation, audience insights, and operational automation. Checking the veracity of facts is part of the content creation and management process in newsrooms. In this regard, AI is used for tasks like “information search, retrieval, classification, and treatment” (Torrijos, 2021). Media and tech industries are collaborating to create algorithms that would spare human fact-checkers or reporters from the burden of monitoring media spaces for breaking news (Liu et al., 2016), cleaning



and analyzing data (Stray, 2019), writing the headlines (van Dalen, 2012) and news stories (LeCompte, 2020), and distributing credible information to the audiences. Accordingly, terms like “automated journalism”, “robotic journalism”, and “algorithmic journalism” are becoming ubiquitous (Torrijos, 2021).

Moreover, one of the cornerstones of journalistic practice – fact-checking – has also turned into a separate genre of media production (Juneström, 2020) and is attracting scientific and industry attention in the context of using AI. The utilization of AI for corroborating or refuting the veracity of information, be it textual claims or audio-visual artifacts, has thus far mostly been studied from the computer and data science perspective (Zeng et al., 2021). The necessity of finding technological solutions for information verification has become especially acute after recognizing the dangerous scale of fake news spreading worldwide. Lately, researchers have been focusing on the use of AI technologies in determining the credibility of sources of information (Choudhary et al., 2020) as well as breaking down the logic behind manual fact-checking and the automatization of its various steps. This process was epitomized by the emergence of terms like, automatic detection of fake news, automated fact-checking, or computational fact-checking (Ciampaglia et al., 2015; Lahlou et al., 2019; Zeng et al., 2021). However, finding the “holy grail” (Hassan et al., 2015) for identifying fake news is still in the distant future. Nevertheless, tech and media enterprises are investing time and resources to design and exploit AI-based tools for harvesting, repurposing, and delivering information backed by verified facts.

Before AI-powered solutions of information verification materialize on a large scale, it is worth looking at the reasoning behind putting so much industry and professional effort into a phenomenon that is often described as a solution for mis/disinformation-related societal problems. How do AI-powered organizations frame the problem of fake news? What do they see as the solution to this problem? How do they position themselves in this process? What is the role of AI technologies in attempts to deal with the problem of information disorders? At present, the scientific literature is unable to answer such questions sufficiently. Here, with the help of Entman’s framing theory, we examine the strategic communication of the AI-powered services as expressed on their websites. This chapter examines examples where AI is strategically used to curb the fake news problem. Further, we demonstrate how this process

is communicated strategically, relying on framing theory as discussed in the next section of this chapter.

## Entman's analytical framework

Though framing as an analytical tool is often used to study how certain topics are covered by news media, Hallahan (1999) notes that framing analysis also proves to be useful in analyzing how public actors communicate to wider audiences. Accordingly, public relations, including strategic communication can be examined via this framing lens. AI-powered fact-checking services communicate their mission statements on their websites, like most other companies. This allows us to examine how they frame their purpose as well as solutions to specific problems through information selection and salience – what is called framing. As described by Entman (1993, p. 52), to frame is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. So, framing can be a way to conduct strategic communication on a company's website.

In recent decades, there has been considerable interest in intangible aspects and assets such as brands, organizational identity, reputation, image, and legitimacy (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014). Here, we understand strategic communication as the targeted and formal communication processes planned and activated as a means for organizations to reach overall goals (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015). Strategic communication has also been defined as “[t]he purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission [...]. The concept further implies that people will be engaged in deliberate communication practice on behalf of organizations, causes, and social movements” (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 7). An organization, in the context of this chapter, refers to private companies, public authorities, formal networks, associations, and interest groups currently developing AI-powered tools within the fact-checking industry.

As Hallahan (2008) highlights, even though framing has received disproportionate attention in the media since the 1970s, the concept has the potential to illuminate broader communicative processes, in spheres such as organizational behavior, economy, politics, and sociology. More

importantly, he notes that “framing is not merely useful but is essential to public relations” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 229). Elsewhere, Hallahan (2008) offers “strategic framing” as a concept to delineate the purposeful use of communicative techniques to convey a desired interpretation of reality to audiences or to promote certain products by directing audience attention to the desired aspects of reality. Eventually, to quote Hallahan, “the goals of strategic framing are to telegraph meaning and to focus audience attention on particular portions of a message or aspects of a topic to gain favorable response” (2008, p. 1).

As stated by Entman, the idea of framing offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text, and analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which the influence of human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location – such as speech, utterance, news report, novel – to that consciousness. Thus, Entman’s framework is divided into four steps that we will apply to our analysis of the six websites: 1) define the problem – delineating what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually defined with common culture values; 2) diagnose causes – identifying the forces causing the problem; 3) making moral judgments – evaluating causal agents and their effects; 4) suggest remedies – offering treatment of the problems and predicting their likely effect.

## **Data material, methods and the study limitations**

We have selected a specific public communication channel, the websites of companies currently developing AI-powered services, to qualitatively study how they frame and diagnose mis/disinformation-related issues. As Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015) note, since internet technologies and Web 2.0 have become universally accessible, stakeholder-owned media channels like websites, blogs, and social media can be used for maintaining coherent strategic communication. Accordingly, nowadays so-called “participatory websites” (Walther & Jang, 2012) represent one of the primary means for companies to communicate their mission, strategies, or products to a broader audience.

To collect qualitative data on the AI-powered organizations that closely associate themselves with the mis/disinformation ecology, we

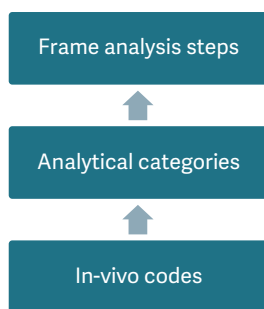
have purposefully selected six leading companies, both in terms of public recognition, adoption by media companies, and innovative solutions: a UK-based organization, Company 1; a Norwegian startup, Company 2; services from three US-based organizations, Company 3, Company 4 and Company 5; and Company 6, which currently operates in three countries (the US, the UK and India). The data was collected from the companies' six websites between February and May 2022.

The companies differ from each other when it comes to their organizational and institutional characteristics. Some are more business/profit oriented (Company 2, Company 5 and Company 6) aiming to monetize their tools to earn revenues. Other services were established in more academic (Company 3 and Company 4) or non-governmental/charity (Company 1) contexts. Several of the selected organizations are already established within the fact-checking and information production landscape (Company 1, Company 5 and Company 6), while others are still in their embryonic phase, and in the process of developing their products (Company 2 and Company 3). Accordingly, we have included a variety of organizations that allow us to look at different framing strategies for their solutions to mis/disinformation-related issues.

After selecting the organizations, we created a database of texts from their websites. Within the database we have collected data about the type of organization (business/profit-oriented, charity/non-governmental, academic); organizational slogans/mottos, associations with company names, texts from their mission statements and "about us" sections, information about funding, existing and imagined user profile, description of the products and the role of humans in the functioning of the products. Key information on the websites for this study includes organizational mission statements and so-called "about us" sections, as well as descriptions of the products, users, and funding sources, which represent how organizations identify and analyze the problems they are working on and reveal their solutions to the identified problems. Besides, associations with company names, as well as their slogans and mottos allowed us to interpret their moral stance when it comes to operating within the mis/disinformation ecology. In the case of two organizations (Company 2 and Company 3), the information on the website was relatively short, making it difficult to do a proper analysis. Hence, we complemented the website information with information from papers published by representatives from the organizations or their founders and promoted on their websites as a part of a

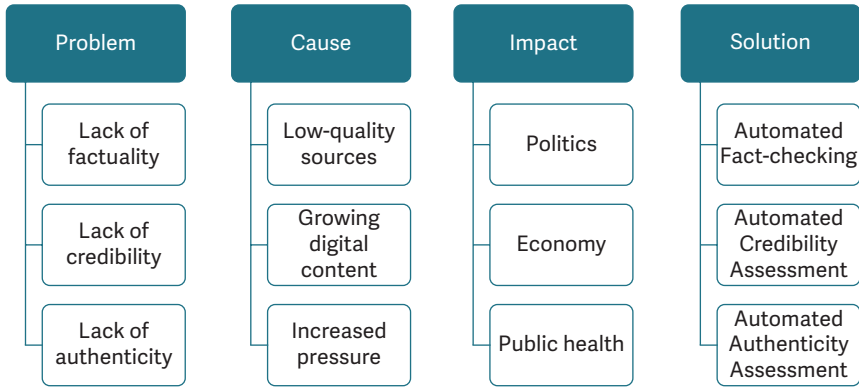
public communication practice (in total two conference proceedings and two academic journal articles).

After populating the database with information from the websites, we thematically analyzed the data with the help of “in-vivo coding” (Manning, 2017). As Saldaña notes, in-vivo codes are parts of the text (often words or phrases) that “seem to stand out as significant or summative of what is being said” (2014, p. 17). As in-vivo codes, we have taken snippets from the texts collected on the AI-powered service websites. The length of in-vivo codes varied depending on the meaning snippets conveyed. To illustrate, a few examples of the codes with the respective frame analysis steps are – “unprecedented amount of falsehoods, hyperboles and half-truths” (problem), “claims made by politicians, public institutions and journalists” (cause), “harm to people’s lives, health, finances and to democracy” (impact), “scalable, robust, automated fact-checking” (solution). According to Entman “the text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (1993, p. 52). This approach has provided us with a theoretical framework to analyze the data, connecting in-vivo codes to the four main steps of the frame analysis: description of the problem, diagnosis, moral judgment, and treatment recommendation. In-vivo codes have been grouped under analytical categories within the respective steps of the framing analysis, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Analysis of framing ai-powered fact-checking solutions.

Accordingly, the frame analysis steps and analytical categories under each of them represent the logical backbone of the study results presented in the next section of this chapter and described in Figure 2.



**Figure 2** Analytical categories under each frame analysis step.

Before discussing the results, it is worth noting that the companies included in the analysis were strategically selected. The study does not aspire to get representative results, generalizable to all the organizations working within the fact-checking industry that use AI in some form. Our selection of companies prioritized the services that address information verification of texts, hence largely omitting visual and audio media content. Apart from that, the goal of this chapter is not to discuss in depth the root causes, scale, and general effects of or remedies for information disorder. Instead, we focus on how AI-powered services reconstruct the social reality of spreading mis/disinformation and imagined solutions by making their technological offerings salient. Despite these limitations, we believe our research makes a valuable contribution to understanding the mis/disinformation problem from an overlooked perspective. To our best knowledge, there are no other studies in the media industry that have analyzed the strategic framing of AI solutions to information verification.

## Frame analysis of AI-powered services

In order to frame the entities that are in charge of the communication, first, we must single out the problem they are trying to fix (Entman, 1993). This is followed by identification of the causal agents of the problem and the impact it has on the social world. Lastly, we examine how the companies present their solutions to the problem. Accordingly, the AI-powered information verification services introduce the problem they are attempting to solve on their websites, before presenting their evaluation of the situation and suggesting remedies for restoring the information ecology.

## Identifying the problem of distorted information landscapes

In describing mis/disinformation issues and the harm “information disorder” brings to societies, AI-powered companies identify various sets of problems. They use different terminology to illustrate the situation, such as “fake news”, “bad information”, “misinformation and disinformation”, “falsehoods, hyperboles, and half-truths”, “harmful claims”, and “damaging and misleading information”. Company 6, offering different kinds of services, including AI-assisted fact-checking, intelligence reporting, and countering extremist online content, offers to assist in separating “the facts from the fakery in ... the news diet”. The UK-based fact-checking organization Company 1 indicates that they work “to tackle misinformation and disinformation without harming free speech”. Some of the organizations put particular emphasis on the increased risks of spreading malicious information during politically or socially critical moments, such as “elections, public health emergencies, and natural disasters”.

Terminological ambiguities and diversity around mis/disinformation issues have already drawn major scholarly attention (Fallis, 2014; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Despite divergent approaches to classifying misleading or deceiving information, based on our analysis, AI-powered services problematize mis/disinformation issues in terms of three main aspects: lack of factuality, lack of credibility, and lack of authenticity.

### *Lack of factuality*

A core problem under the scrutiny of AI-powered services is the factual quality of information bits, such as claims, multimedia artifacts, news stories, and information campaigns. Selected organizations emphasize the value of factuality and take for granted that facts represent the vital building blocks of quality media experiences. This belief is even manifested in the names of some of the companies (Company 1, Company 2 and Company 5). Facts are the main “instruments” that journalists use to depict reality and reconstruct the truth about the topic they are covering. As Zelizer (2004) puts it, “facts”, along with “truth” and “reality” are journalism’s “god-terms” (Godler & Reich, 2013). Hence, AI-powered services that tackle information verification issues emphasize their devotion to determining the factuality of the information units.

### ***Lack of credibility***

Selected organizations also highlight the problem of credibility in media content. Company 5 and Company 6 in particular emphasize the need to evaluate the credibility of online media products. According to Company 5's website, their tool evaluates the information value of articles published in the media to help information consumers determine if they can be trusted and perceived as unbiased. Discussing the issue of media trust, Mrazek notes that "credibility becomes an essential asset of future journalism" (2019, p. 132). In the same fashion, the company 5 highlights that "the unbiased movement" they are aspiring to, should "help people trust the news again". According to the organization, the credibility of media content is inherently connected to another ongoing, yet already well-documented problem in several Western democracies – a decline in media trust (Hanitzsch et al., 2018).

### ***Lack of authenticity***

With the rise of social media and its paramount role in information production, one of the key objectives of information verification is to determine if the information derives from an authentic source or has been manipulated by a malicious actor. For example, Company 4, which was launched in 2014, uses machine learning to determine if a specific Twitter user is authentic or is a "social bot" i.e., an account pretending to be a genuine human user that is actually controlled by computational means (Ferrara, 2017). As Company 4's website mentions, "social bots can be used to manipulate social media users by amplifying misinformation". Accordingly, tech services like Company 4, which specializes in social media account analysis, emphasize the problem of source authenticity online.

Before we discuss the causal agents of information disorder according to AI-powered services, we should underline that the organizations analyzed in this study focus on three main problematic areas of information production in the digitized world: authenticity and credibility of online information sources and the factuality of the media content. To deal with these problems they offer particular AI-based solutions.



## Causes of information disorder

As our analysis further demonstrates, AI-powered fact-checking organizations identify at least three different causes of the distorted online media landscape: 1) low-quality information sources; 2) growing digitally mediated content; 3) increased pressure on media professionals to verify the information. In the following subsections, we provide examples of how the causal agents of information disorder are described by the six AI-powered fact-checking initiatives.

### *Low-quality sources*

One of the key drivers of information disorder, according to the organizations, is ill-intended or erroneous sources, especially within the digital realm. Such sources might differ by origin, medium, intensity, or intentions, but they all contribute to the construction of an aberrated social reality. Our analysis shows that some organizations emphasize the involvement of real-life public figures and institutions in the process of producing and amplifying mis/disinformation. As Company 1's website claims, they "fact-check claims made by politicians, public institutions and journalists, as well as viral content online". Such actors often make erroneous claims regularly, which enhances the growing scale of dis/misinformation. As Hassan et al. underline in their paper on aspects of the Company 3 initiative, "politicians repeatedly make the same false claims. Fake news floods cyberspace and even allegedly influenced the 2016 [US presidential] election" (2017, p. 1803). Thus, there is a dire need to hold politicians or institutions accountable for the information they share with the help of fact-checking, which resonates with the normative function of media professionals as watchdogs to hold public actors responsible for their actions.

Other services focus on more non-human entities within online spaces, such as bots and inauthentic social media accounts. For instance, Company 6 is involved in the credibility assessment of information sources both from human and non-human origin. Company 4 is also exploiting AI technologies to automatize the detection of inauthentic Twitter accounts. As noted on their website, "there are many kinds of social bots. Some are harmless or even useful or amusing. But malicious bots can be used to manipulate social media users by amplifying misinformation". In some cases, such sources are involved in "coordinated disinformation campaigns" or "political astroturfing, a centrally coordinated disinformation campaign in which

participants pretend to be ordinary citizens acting independently” (Keller et al., 2020, p. 256). They usually attempt to exploit the vulnerability of media professionals and the readership to digest large amounts of information coming from every corner of the digital infrastructure, hence catering to certain political, economic, or ideological interests.

### ***Growing digital content***

Thus, the campaigns mentioned above are marked by an abundance of information that also increases the risk of spreading mis/disinformation. By simple logic, the more information produced, the higher the chance of sources that make mistakes or manipulate information. AI-powered fact-checking services highlight the overload of digitally produced content and consequently the growing pressure on media professionals to verify astronomical amounts of data as one of the key drivers of information disorder. The Norwegian startup, Company 2, points out that there are “500 million new tweets, 29 million new blog posts, 5,642,511,302 Google searches, and 720,000 hours of uploads on YouTube” daily, which affects the fact-checking process because it becomes harder to find a way through this ocean of information. Human fact-checkers need to operate efficiently on at least three different levels of fact-checking: claim identification, claim verification, and distribution of fact-checks (Graves, 2018). Meanwhile, the informational overload clogs the pipeline of fact-checking on each level. It becomes harder to make decisions about which claim to choose from a myriad of claims, sort through information, and make sure that all aspects of a claim have been thoroughly checked. “Deep research takes time, and the increasing amount of misinformation is not making it any easier”, reads the website, underlining the hardships of keeping up with the scale of misinformation fact-checkers have to deal with.

### ***Pressure to verify information***

Besides, information verification as an epistemic activity is a mentally and materially demanding task that requires significant financial and human resources. As Company 3’s creators note, “the human fact-checkers cannot keep up with the amount of misinformation and the speed at which they spread” (Hassan et al., 2017, p. 1803). Fact-checking is a relatively young branch of journalism, often characterized by low interest from the general

public and low chances of getting advertisement revenues. This makes it unrealistic to expect such resourcefulness from fact-checking organizations and to ask human fact-checkers to deal with all the malicious content in the public discourse. To ease this pressure, AI-powered services offer different solutions “to accelerate research and fact-checking” (Company 2) and to “ensure the accuracy of their news stories” (Company 3), which we will discuss in detail after presenting the companies’ take on the implications of spreading mis/disinformation.

## **The moral judgment: Impact of information disorder**

Distorted information ecosystems come at a cost. AI-powered fact-checking organizations provide rich descriptions of the societal consequences of spreading mis/disinformation. As the data analysis show, the selected organizations focus on three major aspects of human life: politics, public health, and economic issues. Fake news as a harmful socio-technical practice certainly goes beyond these aspects and could be considered equally as, for example, an issue of national security (Belova & Georgieva, 2018) education and literacy (Higdon, 2020), climate crises (Allen & McAleer, 2018), etc. Here, we do not claim that AI-powered services provide a full account of the impact information disorder is having on human lives. Instead, we focus on the areas of social life the organizations make salient while positioning strategically within a broader public discourse on information verification practices.

### ***Politics***

First and foremost, AI-powered services emphasize the effects of information disorder on politics, especially on the quality of democratic governing, political polarization, and specific political events such as elections. Company 1 repeatedly mentions that mis/disinformation “hurts our democracy, by damaging trust in politicians and political processes” as well as “leads to bad decisions, by disrupting public debate [...]”. Similarly, scientists working on Company 3’s technologies claim that “unprecedented amounts of falsehoods, hyperboles, and half-truths [...] do harm to wealth, democracy, health, and national security”. Meanwhile, Company 5 and Company 6 emphasize the negative consequences of the information crisis in connection with political, media and social polarization.

### ***Public health***

Another recurrent topic among the analyzed websites is how fake news affects public health. Such an emphasis on health-related topics is exemplified by the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic shifted from a health issue to an informational issue, manifested in the emergence of the term *infodemic* (Solomon et al., 2020). In the beta version of the AI editor created by Company 2, the organization allows users to check claims related to the pandemic and especially vaccines, such as the claim that “vaccines don’t cause autism”. Considering the scale of the resistance towards vaccines across the globe, it is logical why AI-powered services try to demonstrate the efficiency of their tools by examining public health-related claims.

### ***Economy***

The selected organizations also highlight the negative consequences of the information disorder on economy-related issues, underlining the exceptional damage that the spread of fake news has had on businesses, economies, and public wealth in general. Company 4 highlights instances involving inauthentic social media accounts and bots in “committing financial fraud, suppressing or disrupting speech, spreading malware or spam, trolling/attacking victims, and other types of abuse”.

## **AI-powered solutions for distorted information landscapes**

Apart from discussing the negative impact of mis/disinformation, AI-powered organizations also demonstrate the importance of verified information and how their solutions can contribute to it. “Good quality information is fundamental to our daily lives”, as stated on Company 1’s website; “we want to ensure that the right information is available to the right people at the right time”. Company 6 notes that they are designing solutions “to protect democratic debate and process and provide access to trustworthy information”. For this, the selected services are offering socio-technical solutions that recommend using AI to tackle the mis/disinformation issue on a scale that we will discuss in the following sections of the chapter.

While communicating to broader audiences primarily via their websites, the companies responsible for these services highlight the value of AI-driven solutions in the process of tackling the mis/disinformation problem. They attempt to make the case that automating different processes of information verification is a preferred response to the increased pressure and impact of mis/disinformation on media ecosystems, even though the level and understanding of automation differs from organization to organization. The studied organizations are developing various types of AI-based services related to information verification, including but not limited to what we here identify as automated (or semi-automated) fact-checking for determining the factual value of claims made by relevant public actors; automated credibility assessment of media content; and automated authenticity assessment of information sources.

### ***Automated fact-checking***

Some AI-powered services, such as Company 1 and Company 3, aim to create technology capable of autonomously conducting fact-checking. This includes identifying checkworthy claims, comparing them to existing fact-checks or authoritative databases, and making judgments about their factual value. As Company 1's website notes, the organization is "building scalable, robust, automated fact-checking tools to be used in newsrooms..." to make "fact-checking dramatically more effective using existing technology". However, creating automated fact-checking technology is not the primary goal of the organization, and represents only one part of their effort to tackle mis/disinformation issues. Importantly, Company 1 makes a disclaimer that they are not trying to substitute fact-checkers with machinery. Instead, they want to empower fact-checkers with the technologies. Thus, the AI solutions Company 1 designs are part of the bigger process and are based on the prior efforts of human-led fact-checking.

Company 3 also highlights the importance of human contributions to ensuring the functioning of its service. The website declares that the goal of Company 3 is to create technological solutions to online falsehoods. They even hint at the ambition of creating the so-called "holy grail" or end-to-end system capable of conducting information verification autonomously (Hassan et al., 2017). Accordingly, the promise of creating a fully functional automated fact-checking system is something the organization sees as a solution to information disorder.

Other organizations, like Company 6, have a slightly different understanding of what automated fact-checking means. In a report published on their website, Company 6 describes how they used AI for live fact-checking of the 2020 US presidential election. According to the report, “when any of the [US presidential] candidates or moderators spoke, their speech was automatically transcribed into text, and from this transcription, our AI extracted claims and compared them with our existing fact check library”.

### ***Automated credibility assessment***

Services like Company 5 use AI to assess media content based on the criteria of credibility. The company website states that their algorithm is capable of evaluating articles by considering the quality of the article’s website, the expertise of the author, the quality and diversity of sources used, and the tone of the article. Thus, the goal of Company 5 is to determine the information value of the media content based on these metrics and to assist users in deciding whether certain content can be considered credible or not. Credibility evaluation is also one of the goals of Company 6, assessing whether the media source by itself seems credible. Company 6 offers a browser extension to its users to help them navigate websites with confidence that information sources are credible.

### ***Automated authenticity assessment***

Another aspect the companies try to address is finding inauthentic information sources and identifying coordinated mis/disinformation campaigns these sources are involved in. For instance, Company 4 analyzes accounts on Twitter with the help of a machine learning algorithm capable of calculating a score where “likely human accounts” get low scores and “likely bot accounts” get high scores. In this context, Company 4 defines a social bot “as a social media account controlled at least in part through software” and more notably, “deceptive bots take on inauthentic personas and are controlled by unknown entities”. Such social media accounts are often involved in coordinated mis/disinformation campaigns, an inauthentic process of information production and dissemination. Coordinated mis/disinformation campaigns are also targeted by other AI-powered services such as Company 1 and Company 6.

## Conclusion

Though there are a number of initiatives that have been launched to tackle the problem of mis/disinformation, in this chapter we decided to focus on one particular type of endeavor – companies using AI-powered services to address this issue. Informed by Entman's (1993) framing theory as an analytical tool, we studied the strategic communication of six websites presenting AI solutions for various aspects of information verification. This chapter has captured the way AI-powered services frame the problem of information disorder (RQ1), how they view the cause and impact of the spread of mis/disinformation (RQ2), and how they frame their AI-based solutions as a way to deal with the situation (RQ3).

As our analysis shows, AI-powered services problematize current information ecosystems primarily in terms of a lack of factuality and credibility in media content, as well as a deficiency of credible and authentic information sources engaged in creating and circulating information online. The explanation for this state of affairs can certainly not be diminished to the few reasons we have identified in this chapter. From current geopolitics to economic struggles or various kinds of crises (public health, environment, migration, to name a few) the reasons behind this distorted informational reality can be found in many areas of the social-political realm. According to the websites of the selected AI-powered companies, the root causes of information disorder are the amplification of the information sources and media content, along with decreasing quality. Additionally, the websites highlight the increased pressure on people working within the information verification industry. Given the scale of harm, AI-based information verification services highlight the implications of spreading mis/disinformation in politics, especially on the state of democracy, on elections, etc. As the websites emphasize, the information ecosystem is saturated with fake news and other types of falsehoods that negatively affect other aspects of human life, such as the economy and public health.

To respond to this challenge, the companies offer various kinds of automated services. Even though these technologies are far from performing without mistakes, AI-powered organizations and initiatives emphasize that the key to solving the mis/disinformation problem might be in lifting the burden of manually verifying information from the shoulders of human fact-checkers. The selected companies suggest using services that we have identified as automated fact-checking, automated credibility assessment, and automated authenticity assessment.

Using the term “automated” in the presentation of these solutions creates an expectation that these services should be capable of conducting information verification, credibility assessment, or authenticity evaluation without humans. The limitations of this chapter prevent us from analyzing the performance of each AI solution within each category, but we can confidently say that this is not the case. Human effort is very much required even in the most basic steps of operating such technologies, either for producing and sorting the data, labeling it, taking final decisions regarding the correctness of facts, or simply initiating the information verification process. Some of the companies even express cautious optimism about the functioning of their tools, emphasizing that using AI might not be a “silver bullet” that will solve the problem of distorted information ecosystems. Company 1 expects “most fact-checks to be completed by a highly trained human, but we want to use technology to help”. Nevertheless, some initiatives (Company 3) still keep pushing the idea that creating the “holy grail” or an end-to-end information verification system is possible, while others (Company 5) emphasize that their algorithm works without human input, and that they “can offer a consistent assessment of news articles in just seconds”.

Different AI-powered services choose different approaches to communicate their strategic goals depending on their intended audience, which may vary from media professionals to laymen, depending on the simplicity of the tool or the goals the AI-powered companies are trying to achieve. Though all of these companies emphasize the importance of automation and express optimism about AI-based solutions for mis/disinformation, analyzing their websites illuminates that the involvement of humans in information verification remains immutable. Thus, the role of human effort in autonomous information verification systems, as well as the actual functioning of AI-powered services could be a topic of further exploration in order to observe the strategic positioning of the companies and the actual results their services yield.

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## KAPITTEL 10

# Politisk påvirkningsarbeid sett med mottakerens øyne: Hva gir NGO-er innflytelse?

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**Abstract:** What are the factors that give NGOs influence in political processes? As a result of a deductive-inductive process, nine distinct capital forms have been identified that may influence how successful an NGO is in influencing Norwegian positions and policies. Informants in senior government and political positions have been interviewed to identify the relative importance of these capital forms. Key findings are that several capital forms have a higher importance than organizational size, such as competence, expertise, field operations and results. We also find indications that government officials and politicians value capital forms somewhat differently.

**Keywords:** advocacy, civil society, NGO, political communication

## Introduksjon

Dette kapitlet tar for seg politisk påvirkning som en form for strategisk kommunikasjon. Politisk kommunikasjon og påvirkning som forskningsfelt har vokst fram det siste tiåret. Hallahan et al. (2007) plasserer politisk kommunikasjon som en underdisiplin av strategisk kommunikasjon. Graber og Smith (2005) definerer feltet politisk kommunikasjon som utforming, sending og prosessering av budskap som potensielt har en vesentlig direkte eller indirekte effekt på politikk. Avsendere eller mottakere kan være politikere, journalister, medlemmer av interessegrupper eller enkeltindivider. Et vesentlig kjennetegn ved politisk kommunikasjon er blant annet at budskapet har en vesentlig politisk effekt på hvordan enkeltpersoner, grupper og institusjoner tenker. Påvirkning kan også ses som enkeltpersoners, gruppers og organisasjoners forsøk på å påvirke sosiale og politiske beslutninger i regjeringer, selskaper og samfunnet (Reid, 2000).

I takt med at globale styringsinstitusjoner som Den europeiske union (EU), Verdens handelsorganisasjon (WTO) og Forente Nasjoner (FN) har blitt stadig viktigere for å løse globale utfordringer, har de også blitt viktigere mål for internasjonale ikke-statlige organisasjoner (NGO-er) som vil påvirke utviklingen og gjennomføringen av global politikk (Carpenter, 2007; Corell & Betsill, 2008; Dellmuth & Bloodgood, 2019; Gotz, 2019; Kamstra, 2017; Nothhaft, 2017; Ruhlman, 2019; Saint-Martin, 1994; van Wessel et al., 2021). Som respons har NGO-er i økende grad prioritert påvirkning som del av sine aktiviteter (Coates & David, 2002). Vårt nedslagsfelt er NGO-er som ønsker å påvirke global politikk ved å påvirke norske myndigheter i internasjonale prosesser. Vår innfallsvinkel har vært å se på hva som kjennetegner de NGO-ene som politikere og byråkrater velger å lytte til i politikkkutviklingen. Sagt på en annen måte: Hva mener politikerne og byråkrater skal til for å drive vellykket påvirkning?

## Viktige begreper

### NGO-er

NGO-ene kan forstås som del av det bredere sivilsamfunnet. Sivilsamfunnet kan igjen forstås på en rekke ulike måter (Edwards, 2011). En vanlig definisjon er å se på sivilsamfunnet som den arenaen der borgere går til kollektiv handling relativt uavhengig av staten og markedet (Walzer, 1998, sitert i Edwards, 2011). Slik kan sivilsamfunnet omfatte frivillige grupper,

ideelle organisasjoner, foreninger, stiftelser, veldedige organisasjoner eller geografiske eller interessebaserte samfunns- og støttegrupper, yrkes- og grasrotorganisasjoner, universiteter og forskningssentre, religiøse og ikke-konfesjonelle organisasjoner og menneskerettighetsforkjempere (Edwards, 2011). NGO-enes formål er å bidra til utvikling og sosial endring innen felter som klima- og miljøspørsmål, menneskerettigheter eller utviklingspolitikk. Dette gjør de ved å påvirke hvordan beslutninger tas, hvilke beslutninger som tas, hvordan de iverksettes, og hvem som skal stilles til ansvar for at de gjennomføres (Coates & David, 2002; Servaes, 2022). Påvirkningen kan rettes enten mot nasjonalstater eller direkte mot internasjonale institusjoner (Davies, 2019; Dellmuth & Bloodgood, 2019; Henry et al., 2019; Stroup, 2019). De NGO-ene vi ser på i dette kapitlet, er utviklingsorganisasjoner som forsøker å påvirke FN-prosesser innenfor utviklings- og klimapolitikk.

Det finnes ingen omforent definisjon av hva NGO-er er, men Fowler (2011) viser til noen felles trekk: 1) De henter sin legitimitet fra andre kilder enn myndighetene gjør; 2) De henter sin eksistensberettigelse fra læresetninger innen internasjonal bistand; 3) De skal ikke skape overskudd for eierne og får inntektene fra private givere eller over skatteseddelen; 4) De opererer på alle samfunnsnivåer (lokalt, internasjonalt og globalt); 5) De er partipolitisk uavhengige. Videre faller utviklings- og klimaorganisasjonene inn under kategorien «ideelle organisasjonsformer», som normalt vil være organisert som foreninger eller stiftelser. Mens en forening er en selveiende sammenslutning med medlemmer som skal fremme ett eller flere politiske, ideelle eller andre typer formål, har stiftelser verken eiere eller medlemmer.

Noen opererer med et skille mellom organisasjoner som har påvirkning som hovedaktivitet, og de som driver påvirkning som del av den øvrige virksomheten (Greenspan, 2014). Goncalves og Oliveira (2022) ser NGO-ene som en sarskilt gruppe innenfor nonprofit-sektoren, der den definierende forskjellen er graden av innsats for å drive politisk påvirkning i offentlighetens interesse. Dette kapitlet omfatter imidlertid både rene påvirkningsorganisasjoner og NGO-er som driver påvirkning som del av virksomheten.

## Påvirkning

«Påvirkning» kan omtales som lobbyvirksomhet på norsk og på engelsk eller også som *advocacy* på engelsk. Påvirkning kan også forstås som en aktivitet der grupper søker og politikere gir innflytelse (Lucas et al., 2019).

I dette kapitlet ser vi på *innflytelse* som et (ønsket) resultat av *påvirkning*. Påvirkning kan omfatte å utvikle problembeskrivelser (*framing*), å formidle kunnskap og informasjon til myndighetspersoner eller å løfte fram marginaliserte og underrepresenterte gruppers perspektiver (Greenspan, 2014). Dette arbeidet foregår hovedsakelig gjennom formelle og uformelle bilaterale møter, brede konsultasjoner, skriftlige innspill og tekstsamarbeid, men kan også foregå indirekte gjennom media eller ulike former for kampanjer og offentlige markeringer. De ulike formene for påvirkning kan initieres av både myndighetene og NGO-ene selv. Mens politikerne utformer politikk og tar de endelige beslutningene knyttet til hvem som skal høres om hva, spiller embetsverket en viktig rolle i utformingen av tilrådingen med anbefalinger om hvilke organisasjoner som skal få tilgang på hvilket nivå, og hvordan politiske innspill skal behandles. Som sådant er embetsverket også gjenstand for påvirkning og hører naturlig med i en studie av hvordan effektiv påvirkning kan forstås.

## Kapitalformer

Det er ikke nytt å se på organisasjoner i lys av ressurser – eller kapitalformer. Greenspan (2014) argumenterer for å trekke spesifikt på Pierre Bourdieus kapitalteori i analyser av påvirkning. Også Ihlen (2005) har tatt til orde for å anvende Bourdieu for å forstå hva slags ressurser en organisasjon trekker på for å nå sine mål. Greenspan (2014) argumenterer for at ikke bare personer, men også organisasjoner kan ha disse kapitalformene, og mener de er nyttige for å forstå hvordan politisk påvirkningsarbeid fungerer. Før vi går nærmere inn på hvordan Greenspans (2014) og Ihlens (2005) anvendelser av Bourdieu gir en god inngang til forståelsen av NGO-påvirkning, vil vi kort presentere noen andre teoretiske innfallsvinkler.

## Forskning på NGO-påvirkning

De ulike fagtradisjonene har litt ulik inngang til forskning på sivilsamfunnet og NGO-ene.

Sivilsamfunnsstudier er et eget fagfelt som tar for seg hvordan sivilsamfunnet har vokst fram og utviklet seg ulike steder i verden, sosial kapital og forholdet mellom markedet og sivilsamfunnet, metode og målbarhet samt politiske forhold som påvirker sivilsamfunnet (Anheier, 2014). Sivilsamfunnsstudier har i mindre grad satt søkelys på myndighetenes

forventninger til sivilsamfunnet, og på hva slags merverdi som kan ligge i dette samarbeidet (van Wessel et al., 2017). Vi mener derfor det er interessant å se nærmere på hva slags merverdi og forventninger politikere og embetsverk tillegger organisasjoner som venter å påvirke norsk politikk.

Det er en krevende øvelse å måle hva som er vellykket påvirkning. Ett mulig indikatorsett er utviklet av Carole-Ann Senit (2020). Man kan si at én eller flere organisasjoner har innflytelse når problembeskrivelsen av et policy-spørsmål samsvarer med organisasjon(e)s egen begrepsbruk i en forhandlingsposisjon; når regjeringens ambisjonsnivå er på linje med organisasjonens krav; når løsningsforslag og anbefalinger er i tråd med organisasjonens krav eller forslag; og når institusjoner, regler og prosedyrer opprettholdes eller endres på en måte som styrker organisasjon(e)s mulighet til innflytelse i kommende forhandlinger (Sénit, 2020).

Forskning på påvirkning spenner over et bredt spekter av begreper, teorier og fagtradisjoner. Basert på hvilke tidsskrifter litteraturen er publisert i, finner vi forskning på NGO-ers påvirkning innen en rekke fagdisipliner (tabell 1).

**Tabell 1** Utvalgte publikasjoner om påvirkning

Fagdisiplin	Forskere
Organisasjonsstudier	Colli & Adriaensen, 2020
Internasjonale relasjoner	Davies, 2019; Carothers & Barndt, 1999; Götz, 2019; Ruhlman, 2019; Stroup, 2019
Utviklingsstudier	Banks et al., 2014; Chandhoke, 2007; Coates & David, 2002; Edwards & Hulme, 1996
Klima- og miljøstudier	Hermansen et al., 2017
Statsvitenskap	Berkhout & Hannegraaff, 2019; Betzold, 2013; Binderkrantz & Krøyer, 2012; Bloodgood & Tremblay-Boire, 2017; Burstein, 2019; Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2017; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2019; Henry et al., 2019; Ihlen & Raknes, 2022; Lisi & Loureiro, 2021; Lucas et al., 2019; Thiel & Uçarer, 2014
Freds- og konfliktstudier	Saint-Martin, 1994
Sivilsamfunnsstudier	Edwards, 2011; Fowler, 2011; Heiss, 2019; Hill, 2010; Saglie & Sivesind, 2018
Retorikk	Ihlen, 2005
Evalueringsstudier	Arensman, 2020; Arensman et al., 2018; van Wessel, 2018
Medie-, kommunikasjons- og PR-studier	Carvalho et al., 2017; Ihlen & Raknes, 2020; O'Neil, 2013; Nothhaft, 2017; Servaes, 2022; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2019



En gjennomgang av 15 statsvitenskapelige og 33 sosiologiske artikler (Burststein, 2019) viste at 34 av artiklene ikke påberopte seg å teste noen form for teori. Det mangler også et felles vokabular for å beskrive forskningen. På denne bakgrunnen synes det klart at vi har måttet ta noen pragmatiske valg med hensyn til både begrepsavklaring og litteraturgjennomgang. Nedenfor følger de mest sentrale perspektivene.

Interessegruppeteori er en vanlig inngang til å forstå påvirkning. I denne tradisjonen står strategier for å oppnå innflytelse sentralt (Dellmuth & Bloodgood, 2019). Det er vanlig å skille mellom innside- og utsidestrategier, også kjent som direkte og indirekte strategier (Binderkrantz et al., 2015, sitert i Dellmuth & Bloodgood, 2019). De indirekte strategiene involverer direkte kontakt med myndighetene og omfatter private møter, deltakelse i arrangementer organisert av myndighetene eller innspill til konsultasjoner. De direkte strategiene retter seg mot opinionen og kan være brev- eller e-postkampanjer, informasjonsarbeid, opprop og demonstrasjoner utenfor offentlige bygg. Interessegruppeteorien belyser spesielt hva som gjør at ulike organisasjoner velger ulike strategier, og hvilken effekt disse valgene kan tenkes å ha (Betzold, 2013; Binderkrantz et al., 2019; Colli & Adriaensen 2018; Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2017; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2019; Ihlen & Raknes, 2022; Lisi & Loueiro, 2022). Påvirkning (*advocacy*) er et bredere begrep som kan sies å ta opp i seg både innside- og utsidestrategier (Arensman et al., 2018). I dette kapitlet retter vi søkelyset mot hvilke faktorer som gjør de ulike strategiene mer eller mindre effektive, sett fra myndighetenes perspektiv.

Mens interessegruppeteorien er orientert mot avsenderen, gir transaksjonsteorien et perspektiv på samspillet mellom den som påvirker, og den som blir påvirket, der interessegruppen gir politikeren noe som er nyttig for denne, og omvendt. Ihlen og Raknes (2022) har undersøkt hvilke strategier lobbyister bruker for å oppnå velvilje hos politikerne. De er opptatt av hvordan typen organisasjon lobbyisten representerer, påvirker hvilke strategier han eller hun velger. De påpeker at, fra et retorisk perspektiv, er ikke overtalelse bare avhengig av avsenderen, men krever også aktivt samarbeid fra publikum. Tilsvarende argumenterer Nothhaft (2017) i en omfattende studie av lobbyister i EU-apparatet for å se på lobbyvirksomhet som en sosialpsykologisk samhandling, der forholdet mellom lobbyisten og politikeren ble sett som gjensidig. Mottakersiden av lobbyvirksomhet og dennes perspektiver på hvilke betingelser som avgjør utfallet av lobbyvirksomheten,

har likevel fått lite oppmerksomhet i forskningen (Nothhaft, 2017). Det er dette spørsmålet vår studie forsøker å imøtekomme.

Andre perspektiver som har vært brukt for å undersøke påvirkning, er ressursmobiliseringsteori. I dette perspektivet blir vellykket påvirkning forstått som et resultat av organisasjonens evne til å mobilisere finansielle, politiske og menneskelige ressurser (Zald & McCarthy, 1987, sitert i Greenspan, 2014). Mens det i dag blir tatt nærmest «for gitt» at konkrete og påtakelige ressurser gjør en organisasjons påvirkning mer effektiv, blir ressursmobiliseringsteorien også kritisert for å underkjenne betydningen av sosiale, kulturelle og ideologiske faktorer (Buechler, 1993, sitert i Greenspan, 2014; Greenspan, 2014). Andre forskere har trukket inn konseptet sosial kapital, som omfatter nettverk basert på felles normer, verdier, tillit og gjensidighet (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998, sitert i Greenspan, 2014). Greenspan (2014) og Ihlen (2005) tar steget videre og argumenterer for å trekke spesifikt på Pierre Bourdieus kapitalteori i analyser av påvirkning.

## NGO-ene og Bourdieus kapitalteori

Unikt for Bourdieu er ifølge Greenspan (2014) at kapitalen er uløselig knyttet til et spesifikt felt som kan være for eksempel økonomisk, organisatorisk eller politisk. Aktørenes slagkraft blir avgjort av hvor mye kapital de har, relativt til andre aktører innenfor sitt felt. Videre kan kapital både akkumuleres og veksles inn for andre kapitalformer. Ihlen og Raknes (2022) bygger videre på denne forståelsen i forskning på lobbyvirksomhet. Mens Greenspan (2014) tar utgangspunkt i de sentrale kapitalformene økonomisk, sosial og kulturell kapital, og i hvordan NGO-enes aktiviteter kan forstås i lys av disse, ser Ihlen sammen med Raknes på hvordan organisasjonene bruker ressurser til å oppnå velvilje hos myndighetene (Ihlen & Raknes, 2022).

Vår tilnærming har vært induktiv-deduktiv. Basert dels på litteraturgjennomgang og dels på pilotintervjuer med personer med lang fartstid fra både sivilsamfunn, storting og embetsverk utledet vi følgende ni tenkelige kapitalformer som kunne tenkes å bidra til vellykket påvirkning: *størrelse, prosjekter og resultater i felt, politisk ståsted, organisasjonsform, medlemsaktivitet, faglig kompetanse og ekspertise, synlighet i media og personlige relasjoner*. Framgangsmåten vil bli nærmere beskrevet under avsnittet om metode. Før vi kommer så langt, vil vi nå ta for oss hvordan våre ni utledede kapitalformer står seg i lys av eksisterende forskning.

En organisasjons *størrelse* kan måles på flere måter: antall ansatte, størrelse på budsjettet, antall medlemmer for medlemsorganisasjoner og antall medlemsorganisasjoner for paraplyorganisasjoner. En annen måte å måle størrelse på er å se hvor stor andel av statsbudsjettet NGO-ene får. Det er for eksempel denne kalkylen som ligger til grunn for begrepet «de fem store», altså Flyktninghjelpen, Røde Kors, Redd Barna, Norsk Folkehjelp og Kirkens Nødhjelp.<sup>1</sup> Økonomisk kapital som kriterium for vellykket påvirkning kan imidlertid fort bli for snevert, og Ihlen og Raknes (2022) vektlegger andre faktorer, som størrelse i form av antall ansatte og det de kaller for «politisk kapital», som de ansattes eller organisasjonens engasjement i partier og offentlige komiteer samt antallet ansatte som arbeider med strategisk kommunikasjon eller lobbyvirksomhet. Samtidig er det en organisasjons finansielle ressurser som gjør det mulig å ansette fagrådgivere og bestille eksterne rapporter som bidrar til kompetanseheving i organisasjonen. Tilsvarende vil størrelse i form av både dyktige kommunikasjonsfolk og en stor medlemsmasse gi mulighet til økt gjennomslag i media, noe som også er en form for kapital. Utspill fra en stor organisasjon vil ha større nyhetsverdi, og en organisasjon med konkurransedyktige lønninger vil ha større mulighet til å ansette markante og kjente ledere med bakgrunn fra embetsverket og den politiske ledelsen. Med andre ord styrker den finansielle kapitalen muligheten for å bygge både kunnskapskapital og symbolsk kapital. Vi vil her se størrelse som en form for symbolsk kapital, som en faktor som kan gi legitimitet og respekt.

*Nærvær i felt* viser til om NGO-en driver prosjekter i utviklingsland. Gjennom nærvær i felt opparbeider organisasjonene seg *ekspertise og kompetanse*. Greenspan (2014) ser også medarbeidernes utdanning og kompetanse som en form for kulturell kapital. Saint-Martin (1994) viser til tankegods, utredning og forskning som viktige kapitalformer. Gjennom prosjekter i felt får NGO-ene inngående kjennskap til lokalsamfunn og sivilsamfunn der de arbeider, og giverlandene gjør seg i økende grad nytte av denne kunnskapen (Saint-Martin, 1994). Denne tenkningen passer for øvrig godt inn i et transaksjonsteoretisk perspektiv, der NGO-er formidler kunnskap politikere og byråkrater selv ikke har, til gjengjeld for innflytelse.

Prosjekter i felt gir også tilgang til lokale og nasjonale nettverk og NGO-er i utviklingsland, som er en form for sosial kapital som kan formidles til myndighetene til gjengjeld for innflytelse. I det perspektivet kan

1 <https://www.panoramanyheter.no/bistandsbransjen-bistandsorganisasjoner-humanitaer-bistand/disse-fem-har-kapret-6-av-10-statlige-kroner/328349>

nærvær i felt også forstås som både symbolsk kapital i form av positiv assosiering med viktige grupper og sosial kapital i form av nettverk i de landene norske myndigheter betaler NGO-ene for å arbeide i. Dersom prosjektene i tillegg gir gode *resultater*, styrker de organisasjonens omdømme. Altså kan man tenke seg at gode resultater i felt kan være en form for symbolsk kapital som gir legitimitet i påvirkningsarbeidet.

Ettersom NGO-ene har blitt mer profesjonalisert, har enkelte forskere (og sivilsamfunnsrepresentanter) begynt å operere med et skille mellom NGO-ene og det øvrige sivilsamfunnet basert på organisasjonsform (Banks et al, 2014). Grovt forenklet har to forestillinger om NGO-ene vokst fram side om side. Den ene forståelsen vokste ut av 1990-årenes demokratiseringsbølger og bærer i seg synet på NGO-ene som drivere av sosial endring. Den andre forståelsen springer ut av nyliberalismens framvekst, der NGO-ene ble sett som kapable til å tette hull i statens tjenesteleveranser i tilfeller der staten trakk seg tilbake. Med det rykket personer med erfaring fra næringslivet inn i styrene i flere NGO-er – og med dem igjen en tanke om «profesjonalisering» i form av metoder fra kommersiell drift. Slik ble sivilsamfunnet et hedersbegrep langs hele den politiske akse, fra høyre til venstre (Chandhoke, 2007, Carothers & Barndt, 1999; Fowler, 2011; Edwards, 2011; Lavalette & Ferguson, 2007).

Banks et al. (2014) setter en radikal politisk agenda i sammenheng med nettopp organisasjonsform. De har satt opp en typologi der medlemsorganisasjoner politisk blir sett som mer radikale enn NGO-er som er drevet av profesjonelle sekretariater, og som i stor grad opererer som tjenesteytere på vegne av myndighetene. I et lite land med stor sirkulasjon mellom politikk, embetsverk og organisasjonsliv ser vi det som sannsynlig at de to ulike synene lever side om side, både i organisasjonslivet og hos myndighetene, og at NGO-ansatte som i større grad oppfatter seg som radikale og i opposisjon til myndighetene, også vil velge en mer konfronterende stil og muligens også forvente et dårligere resultat av sin påvirkning. Tilsvarende er det grunn til å tenke seg at en politiker eller byråkrat i møte med sivilsamfunnet vil være mer positiv til å bli utfordret, enn en som primært tenker på NGO-ene som tjenesteleverandører og instrumenter for norsk utviklingspolitikk. I en studie av hva slags praksis, normer og ressurser lobbyister har i påvirkningen, trekker Nothhaft (2017) også fram felles tankegods, som kan ses som kulturell kapital. Med Bourdieus briller kan man se disse forståelsene som en slags habitus, der felles syn på sivilsamfunnets verdi kan spille inn på hvor mottakelig for politisk påvirkning en politiker eller byråkrat er.

Et annet aspekt ved organisasjonsform er hvordan medlemsdrevne organisasjoner utformer sin politikk før de går til myndighetene med den. Forskere som Saint-Martin (1994) har pekt på demokratisk involvering i NGO-enes interne styringsprosesser som en mulig kapitalform. I lys av denne hypotesen kan man tenke seg at *organisasjonens form*, det vil si om det er snakk om en stiftelse eller en medlemsorganisasjon, kan påvirke muligheten for innflytelse dersom den som blir påvirket, ser på demokratiske beslutningsprosesser som en verdi.

*Synlighet i media* er en viktig form for indirekte påvirkning av myndighetene. Synlighet i media gir organisasjonene en mulighet til å styrke sin egen merkevare, vise fram sine resultater fra felt og mobilisere tilhengere. Å oppnå slik synlighet er både en visuell og språklig oppgave, og Greenspan (2014) trekker inn lingvistisk kapital som en form for kulturell kapital. Med lingvistisk kapital mener han talerens evne til å produsere uttrykk som tillegges verdi hos målgruppen. Jo større lingvistisk kapital taleren har, desto bedre rustet er vedkommende til å bruke et system til sin fordel. Lingvistisk kapital kan brukes til produksjon, ikke bare av spissede politiske innspill, men også av presseutspill, kronikker og meningsytringer som bidrar til NGO-ens omdømme.

Vi har allerede sett at nettverk i felt kan være viktige. Også nettverk i Norge i form av *personlige relasjoner* mellom politikeren og byråkraten og organisasjonens ansatte kan tenkes å ha betydning. Med andre ord kan kort avstand mellom organisasjonene, embetsverket og politisk ledelse være en mulig kapitalform (Nothhaft, 2017; Tvedt, 2006). Overført til NGO-er kan sosial kapital ses som varige nettverk av mer eller mindre institusjonaliserte relasjoner som bygger på gjensidig kjennskap og anerkjennelse (Greenspan, 2014), som igjen kan resultere i innflytelse.

Vi har nå tatt for oss de ni ulike kapitalformene vi har identifisert, i lys av eksisterende forskning. For å undersøke de ni kapitalformenes relative betydning formulerer vi følgende forskningsspørsmål:

S1) *Hvilke kapitalformer gir NGO-ene størst innflytelse i møte med myndighetene?*

## Metode

Som tidligere nevnt har vår tilnærming vært deduktiv-induktiv. For å finne ut hvilke variabler som kunne tenkes å gi gjennomslagskraft, ble det gjennomført tre bakgrunnsintervjuer med tidligere og nåværende byråkrater i stortings- og regjeringsapparatet. Basert på litteraturen og disse

intervjuene utledet vi følgende mulige kapitalformer som vi ønsket å teste: størrelse, nærvær og resultater i felt, politisk ståsted, organisasjonsform, eventuell medlemsaktivitet, synlighet i media, kompetanse og ekspertise og personlige relasjoner. Pilotintervjuene ble gjennomført med tidligere og nåværende byråkrater i stortings- og regjeringsapparatet i perioden oktober–desember 2021.

Dernest ble det i perioden februar–mai 2022 gjennomført 13 semistrukturerte intervjuer med byråkrater og politikere fra sittende og tidligere politisk ledelse i nåværende og tidligere stortingsperioder samt tidligere aktører i regjeringsapparatet. Intervjuene ble foretatt av førsteforfatteren som del av et prosjekt finansiert av Forum for utvikling og miljø, der noen av spørsmålene danner grunnlag for en oppdragsrapport, og noen av spørsmålene utgjør datamaterialet som analyseres i dette kapitlet.<sup>2</sup>

Samtlige informanter oppfyller minst to av kriteriene nedenfor:

1. har hatt eller har ansvar for sivilsamfunnsinvolvering innenfor sitt fagfelt
2. har sittet eller sitter i en relevant stortingskomité
3. har deltatt i eller vært leder for en offisiell delegasjon til ett eller flere internasjonale møter
4. har arbeidet eller arbeider med spesifikke internasjonale prosesser som del av sitt daglige virke i embetsverket
5. har vært eller er del av politisk ledelse
6. har egen erfaring fra norsk og/eller internasjonalt sivilt samfunn

Informantene har bakgrunn fra Klima- og miljødepartementet, Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet og Utenriksdepartementet samt er politikere med ansvar for relevante områder i Stortinget eller regjeringsapparatet. Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet er relevant i denne sammenhengen fordi det koordinerer regjeringens arbeid med bærekraftsmålene, som ligger til grunn for alt norsk utviklingsarbeid (Meld. St. 40 (2020–2021)). Eksempler på prosesser våre informanter har vært i berøring med, er FNs klimakonvensjon (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNFCCC), FNs høynivåforum for bærekraftig utvikling (High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, HLPF) og FNs toppmøte om matsystemer (Conference on Food Security). Arbeidet med slike prosesser foregår over år og tiår, og påvirkning er derfor en

2 Rapporten *Fra den andre siden av bordet: myndighetenes syn på samarbeidet med norsk sivilsamfunn i internasjonale prosesser* (Viken, 2023) ble publisert i januar 2023.

kontinuerlig prosess som endrer karakter med hvilken fase en prosess er i (Rostad & Viken, 2023).

Informantene ble først stilt åpne spørsmål om hva som kjennetegnet de organisasjonene de valgte å invitere inn i første omgang, og som dernest ble lyttet til. Motsatt ble de også spurt om hva som kjennetegnet de organisasjonene som ikke fikk møter, eller som ikke ble lyttet til. Etter den frie delen av intervjuet ble informantene bedt om å vekte kapitalformene i tabell 2 nedenfor på en skala fra 1 til 6, der 1 var lite viktig og 6 svært viktig. Intervjueren plottet inn skåren som ble oppgitt av informantene, som ble invitert til å dele sine refleksjoner rundt hvorfor de landet på den skåren de gjorde. Noen av intervjuene ble gjort ansikt til ansikt, mens andre ble gjort som videosamtaler på grunn av koronapandemisituasjonen. Varigheten på intervjuene har variert mellom 30 og 60 minutter. Intervjuene ble tatt opp og har blitt transkribert manuelt og kodet for kvalitativ analyse ved hjelp av programvaren Dedoose.

I presentasjonen av funn starter vi med en deskriptiv analyse av skårene som ble gitt i den strukturerte delen av intervjuene. Siden dette ikke er en representativ utvalgsundersøkelse, vil ikke tallene kunne gi grunnlag for en kvantitativ generalisering. Men de gir oss et numerisk uttrykk for hva respondentene legger mest vekt på, samt hva de i ulik grad er enige eller uenige om. Vi har også brukt programvaren SPSS for å se på korrelasjonen mellom skårene på de ni kapitalformene (tabell 2). Vi bruker Spearman-koeffisienten, siden den ikke forutsetter en lineær sammenheng mellom variablene. Sammen med analyse av svarene på de åpne spørsmålene kan tallmaterialet danne grunnlag for en konseptuell generalisering.

## Funn og diskusjon

For å avdekke konteksten for kapitalformenes relative betydning (S1) ble informantene først bedt om å reflektere rundt hva som kjennetegner konstruktivt samarbeid med norske sivilsamfunnsorganisasjoner. Tre faktorer utpekte seg tydelig: rolleforståelse, tillit og relevans. Embetsverkets rolle er å legge det faglige grunnlaget for politiske beslutninger, og våre respondenter er svært opptatt av rolleforståelse og grenseoppgangen mellom det faglige og det politiske. Respondentene er svært nøye med å understreke at det er politisk ledelse som avgjør politikken og hvilke møter statsråden tar avgjørelser om hvilke møter statsråden tar. Denne rolleforståelsen er en viktig del av embetsverkets selvforståelse.



Tillit ble også trukket fram som en forutsetning for godt samarbeid. Det handlet om tillit til at NGO-enes representanter forstår og respekterer de ulike rollene som embetsverket og politikerne har. Det handlet også om tillit til at NGO-representantene forstår sin egen rolle, og til at de forvalter informasjonen de får av embetsverket og politisk ledelse, på en klok måte. Én informant påpekte betydningen av at tilliten må gå begge veier, og av at sivilsamfunnet «tør å håpe på og tro på at [informasjonen de deler] vil bli brukt godt» (Intervju). Herunder er informasjon om uenighet internt i sivilsamfunnet, som ofte gjør at diskusjonene rundt bordet kan bli mindre verdifulle enn om man hadde hatt større åpenhet.

Sist, men ikke minst ble betydningen av relevans for regjeringens politiske prosjekt trukket fram. Som én byråkrat uttrykte det: «Først og fremst handler det om politikken, om å være relevant for politikken, om man er på den kritiske siden eller i en mer samarbeidsmodus eller har noe man kan samarbeide om, eller en felles interesse» (Intervju).

Rolleforståelse og evnen til å bygge tillit og til å framstå relevant kan ses som en form for kulturell kapital som legger grunnlaget for at de andre kapitalformene skal fungere optimalt.

## Relativ vekting av de ulike faktorene

Denne delen av artikkelen tar for seg hvordan informantene vekter de ulike kapitalformene, som skissert i forskningsspørsmålet.

**Tabell 2** Hvor viktig er følgende faktor for gjennomslagskraft?

	N	Min	Maks	M	STD
Organisasjonens faglige kompetanse/ekspertise	13	3	6	5,6	0,88
Organisasjonens nærvær i felt	11	2	6	4,7	1,13
Organisasjonens resultater i felt	11	3	6	4,5	1,21
Organisasjonens størrelse	13	1	5	3,7	1,25
Hvis relevant, organisasjonens evne til å skape medlemsaktivitet	12	1	6	3,6	1,51
Organisasjonens synlighet i media	13	1	5	3,5	1,13
Personlige relasjoner med ansatt/medlem i organisasjonen	13	1	4	3,0	1,08
Organisasjonens politiske ståsted	12	1	5	2,7	1,07
Organisasjonsform (stiftelse, medlemsorganisasjon osv.)	13	1	5	2,4	1,39

1 = lite viktig, 6 = svært viktig. Respondentene ga en skår på hver egenskap og reflekterte rundt nivå. N = 13 (redusert N i tabellen reflekterer at noen av respondentene ikke fant egenskapen relevant).



### **Faglig kompetanse og ekspertise**

Samtlige av respondentene nevnte kompetanse og ekspertise som viktig for at en organisasjon skal bli hørt og oppleves som en nyttig samarbeidspartner. Disse egenskapene ble også rangert høyest av alle kapitalformene. Prosjekter og partnere ute ble sett som viktige kilder til denne kunnskapen. Flere av respondentene ga uttrykk for at faglig kompetanse er viktigere enn en organisasjons størrelse. Proseskunnskap ble også ansett som viktig for å identifisere når i en prosess det er nyttig for myndighetene å motta innspill.

Mens faglig tyngde og faglige innspill er avgjørende for embetsverket, vil klare, korte og tydelige politiske budskap og argumenter kunne være vel så nyttige for å nå politisk ledelse. I noen tilfeller blir faglig ekspertise satt opp mot rent lobbyarbeid, der spissede lobbyinnspill blir sett som lite relevante for rollen som byråkrat:

Jo mer lobbyvirksomhet det er, desto mindre interessant er det for min del som embetsmann. Det er jo noe annet for politikere, som skal lytte til de interesser som finnes. [...] Du hører jo på meg at jeg synes at alminnelig lobbyarbeid er ganske kjedelig å være mottaker av, for det er så forutsigbart. (Intervju)

Faglig kompetanse og ekspertise kan kompensere for liten størrelse. En representant for politisk ledelse gir for eksempel uttrykk for at hen gjerne snakker med en liten organisasjon som har spisskompetanse. Respondentene gir uttrykk for at terskelen er lavere for å få et møte med embetsverket enn for å få møte politisk ledelse. Tilsvarende er terskelen lavere for å få tid med en politiker på Stortinget enn med en politiker i regjeringsapparatet. Aller enklest er det å få møte med rådgiverne på Stortinget. Det vil si at jo nærmere politisk ledelse en organisasjon ønsker å nå, desto viktigere blir innpakningen, og desto mer nyttig er det med spissede innspill. Som en politiker uttrykte det: «Når du skal møte regjeringen, må du i alle fall ha veldig hardcore argumentasjon, for i regjering er det mye mindre tid. Du har ikke tid til å sette deg ned med kaffekoppen og prate» (Intervju).

Faglig tyngde kan forstås som en institusjonalisert form for kulturell kapital som har avgjørende betydning for vellykket påvirkning. Evnen til å tilpasse budskap etter målgruppe krever derimot lingvistisk kapital i form av evnen til å skreddersy innspill basert på findifferensiering av målgruppen.

## **Størrelse og relasjoner**

Både byråkrater og politikere gir uttrykk for at størrelse trolig er enda viktigere for å nå fram i regjeringsapparatet enn for å nå fram i embetsverket. De som påpekte at det kan være vanskeligere for mindre organisasjoner å nå opp, pekte på samarbeid og alliansebygging som en mulig måte å øke sin egen tyngde på. Flere av respondentene trakk fram Forum for utvikling og miljø og Landsrådet for Norges barne- og ungdomsorganisasjoner (LNU) som organisasjoner det er naturlig å samarbeide med, fordi de er paraplyorganisasjoner som når mange.

Størrelse ble forstått på en rekke ulike måter, som antall medlemmer, omsetning, størrelse på et sekretariat eller arbeidets omfang. I realiteten er flere av faktorene i noen grad en funksjon av finansielle ressurser, som er en direkte funksjon av størrelse. Finansielle ressurser er knyttet til kapasitet til å drive prosjekter som gir administrativ overhead, og til et organisasjonsapparat med kapasitet til å skrive søknader (lingvistisk kapital) og drive innsamling fra private givere og næringsliv gjennom sitt rykte (symbolsk kapital). Dermed har størrelse også en vesentlig indirekte betydning som ikke kommer fram i materialet.

Blant refleksjonene respondentene gjorde seg på direkte spørsmål, var at større organisasjoner vil ha opparbeidet seg profesjonalitet over mange år, og at en stor medlemsmasse gir uttrykk for at de representerer et bredt lag av befolkningen. Altså gir det mening å se størrelse som en form for symbolsk kapital som gir økt legitimitet og respekt, i den grad man blir oppfattet som en aktør som snakker på vegne av mange. Respondentene ga imidlertid uttrykk for at de ikke hadde oversikt over verken medlemsmasse eller størrelse på sekretariatet hos organisasjonene de møter. Størrelse synes viktigere for å få gjennomslag i regjeringsapparatet enn for å nå gjennom i Stortinget.

Vi fant en signifikant positiv sammenheng mellom betydningen av organisasjonens størrelse og betydningen av personlige relasjoner med ansatte og medlemmer av organisasjonen ( $rs(13) = 0,76, p = 0,003$ ).

For møter med politisk ledelse er det andre faktorer som kan spille inn, og pågangen for å møte politisk ledelse i form av statsråden eller en statssekretær er høy. Her vil personlig bekjentskap være en stor fordel for dem som er i posisjon til selv å kunne kontakte politisk ledelse på egen kjøll, uten å gå veien om formelle kanaler. Tjenestevei vil være en skriftlig henvendelse til forkontoret, og embetsverket vil så skrive en tilråding der

embetsverket gir en anbefaling om hvorvidt det skal tas et møte, og på hvilket nivå. Til syvende og sist er det statsråd eller statssekretær som har siste ord i saken.

Selv om byråkrater også gir uttrykk for at det er enklere å kontakte folk de allerede kjenner, er de i større grad opptatt av å møte hele bredden av sivilsamfunnet, og av å understreke at de ikke sier nei til å møte noen organisasjoner.

Vi ser altså at nettverk, som vi kan se på som sosial kapital, er viktig. Imidlertid vil kunnskapskapitalen og den lingvistiske kapitalen gi tilgang til enkeltpersoner, som igjen bygger den sosiale kapitalen. Størrelse kan forstås – og ble forstått av informantene – på ulike måter. Målt i antall ansatte eller omsetning kan størrelse også ses som større prestisje og bedre rykte, altså symbolsk kapital.

### ***Nærvær og resultater i felt***

Det går et skille mellom organisasjoner som har prosjekter i utlandet, og organisasjoner som driver rent politisk påvirkningsarbeid i Norge. Men også organisasjoner som ikke selv driver prosjekter ute, kan ha «øret til bakken» gjennom nettverk og samarbeid med sivilsamfunnsorganisasjoner i land Norge er engasjert i. Geografisk nedslagsfelt og kunnskap om utfordringer og hva som fungerer i land der Norge har utviklingsprosjekter, blir vektet høyt av respondentene og kommer også opp som en viktig faktor i de ubundne spørsmålene. Prosjekter i felt blir sett på som en viktig forutsetning for organisasjonenes faglige tyngde og spisskompetanse, slik at de som jobber med internasjonale rammeverk og regelutvikling, gjør det som er relevant på bakken.

Vi fant en signifikant negativ sammenheng mellom betydningen av organisasjonens nærvær i felt og betydningen av organisasjonens evne til å skape medlemsaktivitet ( $r_{s(11)} = -0,68$ ,  $p = 0,021$ ).

Gode resultater gir godt rykte (symbolsk kapital), som igjen kan gi tilgang (sosial kapital). Resultatene ble imidlertid oppfattet som mindre viktig enn den kunnskapskapitalen selve nærværet i felt kunne gi. (Resultater vil imidlertid være avgjørende for å få prosjektfinansiering i neste omgang, men vårt anliggende her er ikke ressursmobilisering i form av støtte over statsbudsjettet.)

## **Organisasjonsform og medlemsaktivitet**

I lys av Saint-Martins (1994) antakelse om at kunnskapskapital og symbolsk kapital i form av demokratisk involvering og sosial kapital i form av nettverkskapital er i ferd med å bli like viktig som prosjektvirksomhet og finansielle ressurser, kunne man forvente at organisasjonsform var av betydning.

Funnene ser imidlertid ikke ut til å styrke denne forventningen. Ingen av respondentene nevner organisasjonens form (stiftelse eller medlemsbasert organisasjon) som svar på åpne spørsmål om hva som gjør at en organisasjon får eller ikke får gjennomslag. Vi skal imidlertid ikke se bort fra at svarene reflekterer at man ikke oppfatter «mange medlemmer» som et kjennetegn ved organisasjonens «form», men at medlemstall også blir sett på som en funksjon av «størrelse». På direkte spørsmål så noen av respondentene det som positivt at medlemsorganisasjoner har et medlemsdemokrati som gjør dem representative.

Som vi så i litteraturgjennomgangen, er de fleste norske utviklingsorganisasjoner hybrider mellom medlemsorganisasjoner og NGO-er. Dette kan bidra til å gjøre den typiske distinksjonen mellom medlemsorganisasjoner og NGO-er mindre relevant for respondentene. En organisasjonsform som derimot dukket opp ubundet, var paraplyorganisasjoner som Forum for utvikling og miljø og LNU, som ble ansett som effektive kanaler både til å nå ut til mange og til å få inn større bredde av perspektiver uten å måtte forholde seg til et stort antall aktører.

En paraplyorganisasjon vil imidlertid skåre både på form og størrelse. Den skårer på form fordi den har medlemsorganisasjoner og demokratiske strukturer for felles politikkutforming. Den vil også kunne skåre på størrelse hvis den har mange medlemsorganisasjoner, som igjen kan ha flere eller færre medlemmer. En byråkrat sier det slik:

Det finnes ikke en statsråd og et embetsverk som ikke vet det at når representanter for sivilsamfunnet ber om et møte, gjør de det på vegne av sine medlemmer. Det finnes paraplyorganisasjoner med mer enn en halv million personer i ryggen. (Intervju)

Selv om form i seg selv ikke ble ansett som viktig, blir demokratiske medlemsorganisasjoner sett som noe som kan gi en organisasjon økt legitimitet og troverdighet (symbolsk kapital). Mens form hadde lav grad av oppmerksomhet, ble medlemsaktivitet noe høyere rangert, i den grad det ble sett på som viktig. En respondent påpekte også at den demokratiske

legitimiteten som ligger i å ha medlemmer og demokratiske prosesser, kan brukes proaktivt i organisasjonenes kommunikasjons- og profileringsarbeid vis-à-vis politikere.

Standardavviket i tabell 2 gir en indikasjon på at respondentene var minst enige om viktigheten av medlemsaktivitet og organisasjonsform, noe som indikerer at det er vanskeligere å si noe definitivt om betydningen av typiske organisasjonsformer (dvs. medlemsorganisasjon kontra stiftelse) med utgangspunkt i vårt datamateriale.

Vi fant som forventet en signifikant positiv sammenheng mellom organisasjonsform og evne til å skape medlemsaktivitet ( $r_{s(12)} = 0,69$ ,  $p = 0,013$ ).

### ***Politisk ståsted***

Ingen av respondentene ga uttrykk for at de ikke ønsket å snakke med organisasjoner som var politiske meningsmotstandere. Det betyr imidlertid ikke at alle blir tatt like seriøst.

Vårt spørsmål om politisk ståsted er formulert på en måte som åpner for mange ulike tolkninger, for eksempel uenighet om problembeskrivelse eller løsning, tempo og ambisjonsnivå, partipolitisk uenighet eller graden av radikalitet. Ut fra funnene er det ingenting som tyder på at meningsulikhet vil være diskvalifiserende, men organisasjoner som blir oppfattet som ytterliggående i den ene eller den andre retningen, vil ha problemer med å bli hørt. På spørsmål om hva som gjør at en organisasjon eventuelt blir tatt mindre seriøst, nevnes urealistiske eller ytterliggående synspunkter, eksemplifisert med organisasjoner som Human Rights Service, Extinction Rebellion, klimafornektere, enkeltpersoner og aktører med kommersielle interesser.

### ***Synlighet i media***

Respondentene vektet synlighet i media i varierende grad. Også her indikerer dybdeintervjuene at dette er viktigere for politisk ledelse enn for embetsverket. Synlighet i media kan forstås som en form for symbolsk kapital, i den forstand at synlighet styrker organisasjonens rykte og prestisje. Samtidig vil synlighet i media, dersom den kommer i form av kronikk- og debattutspill, representere kulturell kapital i form av både institusjonell kulturell kapital og språklig kapital.

## ***Embetsverkets rolle***

De færreste av byråkratene vil si at det er organisasjoner som ikke får innpass i form av et møte med myndighetene. Tvert imot gir respondentene i embetsverket selv inntrykk av at de ønsker å snakke med hele bredden av sivilsamfunnet.

De ulike departementene har også ulik kultur for sivilsamfunnsinvolvering, og folkevalgte i både storting og regjering vil ha sine personlige syn på hva som er sivilsamfunnets merverdi og rolle i politikktutvikling. Dette er ikke nødvendigvis noe byråkrater ønsker å snakke åpent om. Representanter for politisk ledelse erkjenner imidlertid at embetsverket kan ha stor definisjonsmakt i form av bakgrunnssjekk, håndtering av søknader i første runde og tilrådinger. Dette gjelder særlig på områder der en statsård selv ikke nødvendigvis er veldig engasjert. Forespørsler knyttet til budsjett og større saker går til politisk ledelse sammen med en tilråding fra embetsverket. I en travel hverdag kan det lett bli til at en politiker bare følger tilrådingen.

Noen av byråkratene ga uttrykk for at for høy grad av lobbykarakter, idealisme og patos kan bidra til at en organisasjon blir oppfattet som mindre interessant for embetsverket. På spørsmål om hva som kjennetegner de organisasjonene som får innpass, er faglig ekspertise, nærvær og partnere i felt samt tematisk og geografisk relevans de faktorene det oftest vises til. Mens byråkratene i prinsippet lytter til alle, er de særlig opptatt av en faglig dialog om det området de selv arbeider med.

Vi ser en tendens til at embetsverket legger større vekt på kompetanse og dokumenterte resultater, mens politikere i større grad også vektlegger legitimerende faktorer som organisasjonsform og størrelse. Vårt datamateriale er imidlertid for lite til å kunne generalisere statistisk. Derfor behøves mer forskning, kanskje med andre metoder, for sikkert å dokumentere en eventuell systematisk forskjell i vektlegging.

## **Konklusjon**

Vi ser at de ulike kapitalformene spiller sammen og forsterker hverandre gjensidig. For eksempel er faglig kompetanse og ekspertise den kapitalformen som tillegges størst vekt, og som flest er enige om. Relativt sett ses faglig kompetanse og nærvær og resultater i felt (altså bistandsprosjekter i utviklingsland) som viktigst, både av politikere og av byråkrater, og vektet

høyere enn for eksempel størrelse. Både politikere og byråkrater sier imidlertid at det er fullt mulig for svært små organisasjoner å få møter og å bli lyttet til, dersom de har spisset kompetanse på et område andre ikke har kompetanse på.

Organisasjonsform og evne til å engasjere medlemmer er de faktorene respondentene er minst enige om betydningen av. Som nevnt kan størrelse i form av medlemmer for en medlemsorganisasjon gi økt synlighet i media, noe som har indirekte effekt på graden av innflytelse. En stor medlemsmasse blir også sett på som noe som gir en grad av representativitet. Derimot finner vi ikke entydig støtte for at medlemsinvolvering i organisasjonens beslutningsprosesser spiller en vesentlig rolle for hvordan NGO-en blir møtt eller lyttet til. Unntaket er paraplyorganisasjoner, som blir oppfattet både som representative og som at de har mange i ryggen. En mulig forklaring kan ligge i de ulike synene på NGO-enes og sivilsamfunnets oppdrag, der interne prosesser gjerne blir sett på som viktigere i forbindelse med politisk påvirkning og samfunnsendring enn når det gjelder tjenesteleveranser.

Denne studien har undersøkt påvirkning av internasjonale prosesser. Gjennom intervjuene ble det imidlertid nokså klart at påvirkning av internasjonale prosesser har mye til felles med politisk påvirkning generelt. Det er grunn til å forvente tilsvarende resultat i studier av andre politikk-områder. Funnene i intervjuene indikerer at vekten av de ulike faktorene er knyttet til mottakerens plassering i myndighetsapparatet. Jo høyere opp mottakeren er, desto viktigere ser det ut til at faktorer som synlighet, størrelse og relevans vil være. Med en kvantitativ tilnærming vil det kunne avdekkes om dette funnet har generell gyldighet.

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## KAPITTEL 11

# Kommunikasjon er ikke en del av puslespillet – det er puslespillet: ledelseskommunikasjon fra et kompleksitetsperspektiv

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**Abstract:** This chapter explores management communication, which is an important corner of the strategic communication discipline. Management communication denote communication from managers to internal and external target groups where the goal typically is to create visions and establish trust in the management. Yet, how we understand and approach management communication depends on how we conceptualize what an organization is. We argue that the field of management communication rests on a positivistic theoretical foundation inspired by scientific management and system theory thinking. In these perspectives, managers can “stand outside” the systems they have designed themselves, and point to parts and pieces that should be changed or adjusted in a certain way. However, if we look at organizations from the perspective of complexity theory, organisations and managers’ communication are understood as ordinary everyday actions, interactions, and processes, and it is thus impossible to extract the manager from this interaction. We therefore propose an alternative approach to management communication that is based on complexity theory. By employing a complexity theory approach to management communication, management should be exercised to influence communication themes that nurture the experience of people’s belonging and identity for the organization. From a complexity approach, management communication is formulations of initiatives and emerging themes that are perceived as meaningful by the organization.

**Keywords:** management communication, system theory, complexity science, meaning

## Innledning<sup>1</sup>

En betydelig andel av kommunikasjonslitteraturen benytter en rekke metaforer for å forklare hva kommunikasjon er, det være seg *livsblodet* i organisasjonen, *transportveien* for vitale ressurser (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007) eller *oljen* som smører funksjonene (Goldhaber, 1993). I ledelseskommunikasjon forstås lederens viktigste jobb som å kommunisere på måter som bidrar til at organisasjonen når sine overordnede mål. Slike metaforer og teoretiske innramminger mener vi tingliggjør kommunikasjon. Dessuten fører denne tankegangen til at kommunikasjon frikobles fra menneskene i en organisasjon og dermed gjør kommunikasjon til en uavhengig variabel. Kommunikasjon forstås dermed også som noe som kan planlegges, og som noe som vil kunne føre til at virksomheten når sine overordnede mål. En slik tankegang kan vi kjenne igjen innenfor en rekke fagfelter. Tankegangen kan for eksempel spores i strategifaget, med Harvardprofessoren Michael Porter i spissen (Pettersen, 2020). Dette konseptuelle og teoretiske kapitlet kritiserer en slik forståelse av kommunikasjon for å være positivistisk, og vi foreslår en kompleksitetsteoretisk inngang til ledelseskommunikasjon. Kompleksitetsvitenskapen blir anvendt i ledelses- og organisasjonsfag, og vi mener at kommunikasjonsfaget i større grad også bør være orientert den veien. På den måten vil vi få en annen forståelse av kommunikative aspekter ved ledelse enn dem som gis i den øvrige kommunikasjonslitteraturen. Mer spesifikt adresserer vi tre spørsmål i dette kapitlet:

- 1) Hvilke teoretiske perspektiver kjennetegner ledelseskommunikasjonsfaget?
- 2) Hva risikerer vi å overse med disse perspektivene på ledelseskommunikasjon?
- 3) Hva kan kompleksitetsteori tilføre ledelseskommunikasjonsfeltet som kan være til nytte for dagens organisasjoner og ledere?

Kapitlet er strukturert som følger: Vi begynner med å presentere kommunikasjonsbegrepet, fordi de ulike kommunikasjonsperspektivene påvirker hvordan man forstår begrepet kommunikasjon, og derfor også hvordan man ser for seg at en leder (kan) kommunisere(r) (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014). Deretter viser vi hvordan særlig ett av disse perspektivene er knyttet til ledelseskommunikasjon og organisasjoner. Dette er etterfulgt av en

1 Kapitlets tittel er inspirert av B. W. Hennestads artikkel «Kan bedriftskultur ledes?», publisert i *Magma*, 2004.

presentasjon av kompleksitetsteoriskolene, som vi deretter viser hvordan ledere kan anvende i deres kommunikasjon i dagens organisasjoner. Vi konkluderer med at vi ved å anvende et kompleksitetsteoretisk rammeverk på ledelseskommunikasjon vil få frem betydningen som sosiale relasjoner, mikroaktiviteter og samtaler har for ledelseskommunikasjon, og hvordan organisatoriske virkeligheter blir tolket og konstruert. Denne måten å tenke rundt ledelseskommunikasjon er relativt ny, noe vi mener er viktig fordi verken kommunikasjon, organisasjon eller ledelse er noe en virksomhet har, men noe mennesker gjør. Dette kapitlet viser hvilke perspektiver som preger ledelseskommunikasjon, og det har som ambisjon å presentere en ny og alternativ måte å tenke rundt nettopp ledelseskommunikasjon.

## Kommunikasjonsbegrepet

Forenklet opererer vi gjerne med to hovedperspektiver på hva kommunikasjon er: 1) kommunikasjon som overføring av budskap og 2) kommunikasjon som deling av budskap. I det første perspektivet ses kommunikasjon som en lineær prosess fra en avsender til en mottaker. Her kan vi knytte metaforen *transport* til kommunikasjon. Et budskap *sendes av gårde* til en mottaker. Ifølge Carey (2001) har overføringsperspektivet sitt opphav i metaforer knyttet til geografi og transport. I det 19. århundre var kommunikasjon og transport nærmest synonyme begreper, avstedkommet av innovasjoner innen telegrafi og jernbane. Det sentrale i denne oppfatningen er overføring av budskap for å utøve kontroll. Det underliggende og logiske premisset i overføringsperspektivet er at språket representerer og gir et objektivt bilde av verden. Så lenge begge parter snakker eller forstår samme språk, vil meningsinnholdet tre frem. Betydningen og meningsinnholdet er altså direkte knyttet til ordene. Det er gjennom overføring, snakking og lytting meningsinnholdet overføres fra sender til mottaker. Utfordringen er dog å forklare hvorfor ikke alle oppfatter det samme budskapet på samme måte (Johannessen, 2011).

I det andre perspektivet ses imidlertid kommunikasjon som en dialogisk aktivitet (Bakhtin, 1986; Gadamer, 1975; Wittgenstein, 1997). Kommunikasjon ses her på som noe som foregår i et samspill. Mens man i det første perspektivet ser kommunikasjon som overføring av budskap fra A til B, er man i det andre perspektivet opptatt av hvordan mening etableres. Fremfor å rette oppmerksomheten mot avsender, budskap, kanal og mottakere, rettes blikket her mot tegn (semiotikken). Et tegn er en konvensjonell eller kjent forbindelse mellom et uttrykk og et meningsinnhold. Det betyr

at for at noe skal kunne være et tegn, må menneskene kjenne til hvilken mening som skal legges i ulike uttrykk. «Kvikklunsj» vil for eksempel bety påskefjellet for mange nordmenn, mens for en person utenfor en norsk kontekst og kultur vil ikke «kvikk lunsj» forbindes med andre meninger enn et hurtig måltid. I semiotikken undersøkes tegnet, man ser på hvordan tegnet rommer mening, og på hvordan det relaterer seg til dem som bruker det. Man undersøker også systemene og kulturen tegnet inngår i. Med andre ord er kommunikasjon her forbundet med at mening blir til, og at kommunikasjon er derfor noe som skapes sammen (Fiske, 1990). Det er i dette perspektivet vi plasserer oss teoretisk. Vi er kritiske til den tradisjonelle oppfatningen av kommunikasjon fordi denne plasserer mennesket og organisasjonen som separate enheter, i subjekt–objekt-relasjoner. Det tradisjonelle ledelseskommunikasjonsperspektivet med sitt søkelys på effektivitet, kontroll og makt følger også slike ideer. Tanker om standardisering, homogenitet og hierarki har preget både forskningen og lærebøkene i ledelse og organisasjonsteori (Sætre, 2009), og vi trenger å løfte frem andre, nyere perspektiver. Et perspektiv på kommunikasjon som deling er nært knyttet til sosialkonstruksjonismen. Kjernen i sosialkonstruksjonismen er at vi gjennom relasjoner og interaksjoner skaper og forstår virkeligheten. Språket speiler ikke virkeligheten, men skaper den (Gergen, 2009). For Weick (1969) er organisasjonen gjentakelser hvor prosesser skapes gjennom kommunikasjon. Gergen (2009, s. 144) og Falkheimer og Heide (2018, s. 28) mener Weick er den som hatt størst betydning når det gjelder å påpeke sammenhengen mellom organisasjonen og kommunikasjon. Andre sentrale bidragsyttere til perspektivet kommunikasjon som deling er Gergens (2009) analogi om organisasjonen som en arena av samtaler, og Shaws (2002) perspektiver på hvordan samtalene i organisasjonen har potensial til å endre organisasjonen. Det er dog gjerne det første perspektivet på kommunikasjon vi kan kjenne igjen i ledelseskommunikasjon, som er én av flere betegnelser som strategisk kommunikasjon favner.

## **Ledelseskommunikasjon *quo vadis*?**

En hyppig brukt definisjon av strategisk kommunikasjon viser til organisasjonens målrettede bruk av kommunikasjon for å oppfylle sitt overordnede oppdrag og mål (Hallahan et al., 2007, s. 3). I dag er det allment akseptert at virksomheter må forholde seg til, kommunisere med og påvirke ulike interessenter, som kunder, eiere, ansatte og viktige interessegrupper.

Det finnes knapt den ledelsesteori der man ikke er opptatt av kommunikasjon, fra det utforskende om hva kommunikasjon er, til det normative om hvordan lederen bør kommunisere for å nå definerte mål. Strategisk kommunikasjon figurerer i litteraturen under ulike betegnelser, det være seg ledelseskommunikasjon, virksomhetskommunikasjon, organisasjonskommunikasjon eller omdømmeledelse, PR og strategisk kommunikasjon. Det disse teoretiske inngangene deler, er at kommunikasjon ses på som uløselig knyttet til organisasjonen den kommuniserer på vegne av. En av de første som påpekte viktigheten av den tette forbindelsen mellom kommunikasjon og organisasjon, var Chester Barnard i klassikeren *The functions of the executive* fra 1938. Barnard understreker her at organisasjoner er relasjoner mellom mennesker som arbeider mot et bestemt mål. Her er det et gjensidig avhengighetsforhold mellom organisasjonen og lederens rolle, på samme måte som det er en relasjon mellom organisasjonen og markedet. Ifølge Barnard ([1938]1968) var kommunikasjon en av lederens viktigste arbeidsoppgaver for å sikre organisasjonens *effektivitet*. For å lykkes var det viktig at det forelå tydelige interne kommunikasjonskanaler som alle i organisasjonen både kjente og hadde tilgang til. Kommunikasjonslinjene skulle dessuten være korte og direkte. Kommunikasjon er for Barnard (1968) uløselig tilknyttet det å oversette mål til handling og derav virksomhetens målsetting (Pettersen, 2020). En interessant sidebemerkning er at Barnard (1968) var inspirert av Talcott Parsons. Parsons er en av frontfigurene i funksjonalismen, en teoretisk retning som dominerte sosiologien i 1950- og 1960-årene, derav antakelig også tittelen til Barnards bok: *Ledelsens funksjoner*. Forenklet forklarer funksjonalismen handlingsmønstre og institusjoner med henvisning til deres funksjon eller rolle innenfor en større sosial sammenheng. Funksjonen til familien er for eksempel å produsere barn. Funksjonen til en leder er å forsøke å nå organisasjonens målsettinger. En hovedkritikk mot retningen var dog at den ikke forklarer konflikt.

I ledelseskommunikasjonslitteraturen videreføres tankegangen beskrevet ovenfor om kommunikasjon som uløselig knyttet til måloppnåelse. Kommunikasjon betraktes som en av de viktigste *ferdighetene* en leder kan besitte (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). En god leder kommuniserer godt og leverer gode resultater. Ifølge Brønn (2018) handler ledelseskommunikasjon primært om å formidle kunnskap. Oppmerksomheten er rettet mot hvordan ledere bygger relasjoner med ansatte og andre betydningsfulle interessenter (Brønn, 2018). Lederen skal realisere organisasjonens mål, og kommunikasjon skal bidra til å utvikle en felles visjon om selskapet,



etablere og opprettholde tillit til organisasjonens ledelse, initiere og administrere endringsprosessen samt bidra til at ansatte identifiserer seg med selskapet.

Litteraturens beskrivelse av ledere som utformere av strategiske planer og meddelere av disse gjennom en veldefinert struktur med den hensikt å fremkalle forutsigbare og effektive tiltak betegnes som et tiltalende, men villedende bilde (Bolman & Deal, 1996). Kritikken er at beslutninger ikke blir fattet, men vokser frem av flytende og iblant forvirrende serier av samtaler, møter og memorandummer (Bolman & Deal, 1996). På samme måte blir planer og strategier sjelden slik de var planlagt og tenkt (Pettersen, 2020). Hvordan vi tenker rundt og forstår organisasjoner, får følgende konsekvenser for hvordan vi tenker om (og praktiserer) kommunikasjon. Vi kan kjenne igjen tankegodset i ledelseskommunikasjon beskrevet ovenfor i en bestemt måte å tenke rundt hva en organisasjon er.

## Arven etter Galileo, Descartes og Newton

Ifølge Gergen og Thatchenkery (2006) og Johannessen (2011) drives fortsatt den store andelen av moderne teori og praksis i organisasjonsvitenskapen av en rådende idé om at mennesker, grupper, organisasjoner og samfunn er separate enheter eller «ting» (Hosking & McNamee, 2006). En slik tingliggjøring foreslår at det er mulig å trekke en grense rundt organisasjonen. Det er ikke en fysisk grense, men en abstrakt grense som gjør det mulig å se på organisasjonen som et fysisk objekt. Det er en abstrakt tingliggjøring som skal gjøre det mulig å modellere, analysere, designe og kontrollere organisasjonen. Denne tingliggjøringen åpner for forestillingen om at organisasjonen har et indre og et ytre miljø. Det ytre miljøet, plassert utenfor grensene til organisasjonen, er for eksempel markeder, konkurrenter, myndigheter og teknologisk utvikling. Det indre miljøet består av et sosialt, teknologisk og administrativt delsystem. Hvor grensen går mellom det indre og det ytre miljøet, er ikke alltid klart, men det er lederens ansvar å definere den. I tillegg må lederen designe, styre og mestre ulike prosesser i de ulike delsystemene, for eksempel innovasjonsprosesser, omstilling, reorganisering osv. (Stacey, 2007; Johannessen, 2011).

Slike prosesser er ment å bidra til å produsere helheten. Dette tenkes som et systemnivå utenfor, men i samspill med individet. Denne helheten presenteres ofte som et komplekst, dynamisk og åpent system som tilpasser seg omgivelsene. Den grunnleggende ideen er at lederne står utenfor

systemene de selv har utformet. På avstand kan de analysere og studere systemet, gjøre helhetsvurderinger, kommunisere og informere om planlagte tiltak (Johannessen, 2011).

Tanken om organisasjoner som systemer har resultert i ulike teorikonsepter og -tradisjoner. En av disse er kybernetikken, et perspektiv som er påvirket av ingeniører og mekanikk. Innenfor kybernetikken er man opptatt av hvordan systemer og maskiner regulerer seg i retning av predefinerte standarder og mål (Solsø & Thorup, 2015). I moderne ledelses- og organisasjonsteori er organisasjonen systemet, og lederen er en objektiv aktør som kan designe og påvirke systemet. Denne oppfatningen av organisasjonen som både et levende og et mekanisk system ble utfordret av det som benevnes *andre ordens kybernetikk* (Bateson, 1972). I andre ordens kybernetikk kan organisasjonen forstås *som om* den er systemet. Ideen om lederen som en objektiv aktør er også til stede i dette perspektivet og følger derfor også en idé basert på styring og kontroll. Det er fra denne tradisjonen begreper som positiv og negativ tilbakemelding («feedback») og tilbakemeldingsløyper («feedback loops») stammer fra.

Hvorfor blir slike forestillinger om organisasjonen som noe som kan kontrolleres, nærmest tatt for gitt? For å svare på dette spørsmålet må vi vende blikket tilbake til den vitenskapelige revolusjonen som fant sted på 1500-tallet, med Copernicus, Galileo og Kepler som hovedfigurer, og som fortsatte utover 1600-tallet med Descartes og Newton (Fløistad, 1991). Her ble synet at evige og tidløse naturlover ikke kunne oppdages gjennom åpenbaringer, men via menneskelig fornuft. Blikket rettes hovedsakelig mot enkeltmennesket og mot naturvitenskapelige og observerbare hypoteser om omgivelsene. Dette tankegodset kan vi kjenne igjen i to senere historiske tradisjoner som har hatt stor betydning for hvordan organisasjoner har blitt betraktet i litteraturen: 1) scientific management (taylorismen) med dens ideer om effektivitet, spesialisert arbeid og funksjonell ledelse og 2) systemteori. Disse teoretiske perspektivene danner bestemte syn på relasjoner og interaksjoner i organisasjoner. Fra et scientific management-ståsted følger en logikk om at dersom ansatte har klare, enkle og tydelige arbeidsinstruksjoner og følger disse, vil produksjonen være effektiv. Ledernes oppgave er å stå utenfor produksjonen og planlegge, koordinere og kontrollere de ansatte gjennom regler de skal følge. I systemteori er menneskelig frihet, deltakelse og interaksjon «ekskludert» og plassert utenfor enheten eller systemet. Dette problemet gjenkjennes i den dominerende organisasjonsdiskursen. Et forsøk på å løse denne utfordringen gikk ut på

å utvide systemets grenser. Dette kan innebære ulike former for demokratisk deltakelse eller å prøve å innlemme kunnskap og kontinuerlig læring i systemene, for eksempel vist gjennom begrepet lærende organisasjoner. Man ser for seg at en rekke prinsipper og teknikker vil sikre samarbeid innenfor et system eller en organisasjon, men lederen står fortsatt utenfor eller på grensen til systemet, og skillet mellom leder og organisasjon (og dermed de andre organisasjonsmedlemmene) opprettholdes (Stacey, 2007; Johannessen, 2011).

Da systemteoretikere utviklet sine bidrag, overførte de denne årsaksammenhengen direkte til menneskelig interaksjon (Stacey, 2007). De antok med andre ord at organisasjoner er levende organismer der ulike deler og helhet kan utvikles samtidig. Denne ideen lever i beste velgående den dag i dag. «Delene» jobber sammen for å flytte «systemet» til et modent stadium, for eksempel gjennom en plan eller strategi som strekker seg over flere år. Det er lett å forestille seg organisasjonen som et spatialt (romlig) objekt hvor lederen kommuniserer fra ett system til et annet. Det er lett å tenke slik fordi vi opplever det slik, og fordi store deler av litteraturen sier at det er slik.

## Kompleksitetsteoriene

Som et motstykke til det rådende systemteoretiske synet har forskere søkt alternative forklaringer for å forstå og beskrive hva som foregår i organisasjoner. Slike felter beskrives noen ganger som kompleksitetsteori og bygger på fire hovedområder: i) kaosteori, ii) teorien om dissipative strukturer, iii) komplekse adaptive systemer og iv) komplekse responderende prosesser. Kompleksitetsperspektivet eller -tenkningen trekker på alle disse fire retningene for å forstå menneskelig atferd og kommunikasjon. Vi gjør derfor kort rede for disse fire teoriene.

**Kaosteori** er en matematisk teori som har sitt utspring i systemteori, og som prøver å forklare hvordan stabilitet og ustabilitet samspiller i systemer med ikke-lineære interaksjoner. Kaosteori er orientert mot modellering av gjentakelser av egenskaper over tid for å forstå egenskapene til det dynamiske forholdet. Resultatene viser hvordan bevegelser kan veksle mellom sykluser med stabil atferd i en dramatisk ustabil atferd. Dynamikken i matematisk kaos er et paradoks. Det stabile og ustabile, forutsigbare og uforutsigbare eksisterer på samme tid. Endringer i stabilitet kommer fra egenskapene til selve systemet og ikke utenfra. Det betyr at systemet i seg

selv ikke kan skape noe nytt, men er avhengig av innblanding (at noe skjer). Værsystemer er et eksempel på naturlige kaotiske systemer (Johannessen, 2002). Kjennetegnet på værsystemer er at vi vet hvilke grenser de beveger seg innenfor, men vi kan ikke si nøyaktig hvilket vær vi får over en lengre periode. Vi vet omtrent hvordan vintervær og sommervær er, uten at vi vet hvilket vær vi får i neste uke. Værsystemer kan modelleres med et sett matematiske regler, hvor resultatet av én beregning er input til den neste beregning. Denne prosessen er basert på gjentakelse av en matematisk algoritme, og de ulike parametrene kan trekke systemet mot et spesielt atferdsmønster. Grensene til mønstret er forutsigbare, men systemet kan ikke bevege seg til et annet mønster (Johannessen, 2002). Slik kan vi vite hvordan været oppfører seg. Den samme tankegangen har vært forsøkt overført til organisasjoner, for eksempel ved å beskrive hvordan informasjon, som ordrer, beveger seg gjennom en forsyningskjede (Johannessen, 2002). Men mennesker er ikke matematiske algoritmer som beveger seg i forutsigbare mønstre. Snarere er det tvert om. Men innsikten som kaosteori gir omkring atferdsmønstre og uforutsigbarhet, utfordrer den etablerte systemtenkningen i organisasjoner, samt tradisjonelle vitenskapelige tanker om linearitet og forutsigbarhet (Solso & Thorup, 2015; Stacey 2007).

**Teorien om dissipative strukturer** trekker inn viktigheten av å ta høyde for tidsbegrepet. «Dissipativ» betyr «resultatet av en irreversibel prosess». Vi kan for eksempel ikke gjenskape fortiden helt eksakt, og vi kan heller ikke se inn i fremtiden. Likevel er det bemerkelsesverdig hvordan vi handler som om det var motsatt (Johannessen, 2002). Vi viser gjerne til fortiden for å begrunne våre handlinger når vi planlegger for fremtiden (Johannessen, 2002). Ledere oppfører seg ofte på samme måte, og derfor er et av de viktigste argumentene til kompleksitetsvitenskapen at vi må ta inn over oss hva *tid er*. Teorien om dissipative strukturer henter inspirasjon fra kjemiske systemer og termodynamikken til ikke-likevektssystemer for å forklare dette poenget. For kjemiske systemer som befinner seg langt fra likevekt, det vil si i nærheten av kaos, viser det seg at støy og svingninger er svært viktig. Orden kan skapes av disse svingningene og skjer gjennom en prosess med spontan selvorganisering. Denne ordensdannelsen kalles dissipativ struktur. I overført betydning innebærer dissipativ struktur at vi ikke kan forutsi hva som vil skje i fremtiden (Johannessen, 2002), noe som gjør det vanskelig å planlegge, blant annet kommunikasjon.

**Komplekse adaptive systemer** viser til dynamiske systemer som har evnen til å tilpasse og endre seg innenfra eller som del av omgivelser i

endring. Her rettes blikket mot de enkelte agents eller aktørers bevegelser for å forstå et system som en helhet. Typiske eksempler er flokker av fugler, nevroner eller maurtuer, alle fenomener med høy grad av interaksjon. Teorien beskriver systemer med et stort antall enheter eller aktører som hver oppfører seg i henhold til sine egne prinsipper for lokal interaksjon (Johannessen, 2002; Stacey, 2007). Det er for eksempel ingen lederfugl (aktør) som setter en kurs som de andre (systemet) følger. I motsetning til den tradisjonelle systemanalytiske tradisjonen blir ikke det komplekse adaptive systemet sett på som et system som kan brytes opp i biter og analyseres. Det gir for eksempel ikke særlig mening å studere enkelte stærfugler i en formasjon bestående av flere hundre tusen individer som flyr med lynraske vendinger. Hele systemets egenskaper vokser frem gjennom en uforutsigbar prosess. Man har ingen kontroll på utviklingen, og man kan ikke påvirke utfallet av tiltak.

Gjennom datasimuleringer forsøkes denne interaksjonen gjenskapt ved at hver agent programmeres med et sett regler eller instruksjoner for hvordan den skal opptre med andre agenter i en lokal interaksjon. Man kan for eksempel simulere trafikksystemer i store byer eller utviklingen av nasjonale økonomier (Johannessen, 2002). Atferden til komplekse adaptive systemer er et resultat av lokal interaksjon, der unike aktører gjennom utallige gjentakelser av selvorganiserende interaksjoner produserer en rekke nye globale mønstre (som flokkformasjonene til stærfugler). Disse globale mønstrene kan over tid observeres på makronivå (Solsø & Thorup, 2015). Et viktig poeng for temaet vi diskuterer i dette kapitlet, er at slike mønstre som er beskrevet ovenfor, trer frem uten et overordnet opplegg eller en plan. For at innsikten fra komplekse adaptive systemer skal kunne brukes på menneskelig interaksjon, kreves dog en nøye fortolkning innenfor en sosiologisk og psykologisk forståelse av menneskelig atferd (Johannessen, 2002). Dessuten må vi akseptere at dersom disse tankene skal ha overføringsverdi til organisasjoner og mennesker, må vi akseptere at det finnes organisasjonsmessige mikrotilstander, det vil si tilfeldige hendelser i atferdsprosesser (Johannessen, 2002). Hovedpoenget i komplekse adaptive systemer er å innse at det ikke er i stabilitet trygghet ligger (Johannessen, 2002). Stabilitet er unaturlig og representerer en tilstand hvor ingenting utvikler seg, men hvor alt gjentar seg, hvor ingen lærer noe nytt, og hvor lite kreativitet skjer.

Teoriene ovenfor viser til både et naturvitenskapelig og et sosialvitenskapelig fundament. En slik kombinasjon gir opphav til Staceys (2007)

teori, der organisasjoner ses i et radikalt nytt perspektiv som han kaller «komplekse responderende prosesser» (*complex responsive processes*, CRP).

**Komplekse responderende prosesser (CRP)** er et teoretisk forslag fra Stacey (2007) hvor det er verdt å merke seg at begrepet «adaptive systemer» er endret til «responderende prosesser». Ifølge Stacey (2007) er ikke menneskelige organisasjoner systemer. Tvert om er menneskelig aktivitet prosesser som hele tiden uttrykker seg gjennom responser overfor omgivelsene, enten de er selvskapt eller er svar på ytre stimuli (Johannesen, 2002). I det komplekse samspillet med andre mennesker trer det frem handlinger som sammen utgjør et mønster som verken kan forutsies eller brytes ned i én forklarende analyse. Organisasjonens virkelighet skapes av relasjonene til – og samspillet mellom – mennesker. Organisasjoner beskrives i CRP som komplekse og selvorganiserende. Det betyr at kommunikasjon er noe som skjer lokalt, og at samtaleemner eller -temaer skapes, reproduseres og transformeres. Konsekvensen er at folks forhold til hendelser og ideer endrer og utvikler seg over tid. På samme måte vil strategiske planer – programmer for organisasjonene som en «helhet» – for eksempel eksistere bare når folk diskuterer dem i sine lokale interaksjoner (Stacey, 2007).

En annen viktig tanke i CRP er at mennesker, organisasjoner og samfunn er aspekter ved samme fenomen, det vil si at de står i et forhold og ikke som grupper på ulike nivåer. Mennesker samhandler og formes gjennom sosial interaksjon. Slik dannes fellesskap. Denne måten å se på organisasjoner gjør det mulig å tenke at fremtiden kontinuerlig konstrueres gjennom prosessene bestående av menneskelig interaksjon, som er *kommunikasjon* (Stacey, 2007). Vi forlater dermed begrepet «organisasjon» til fordel for «organisering», som vektlegger et handlingsperspektiv. Organisering er en kontinuerlig reproduksjon av visse interaksjonsmønstre. Siden mennesker har evnen til spontanitet og fantasi, er nøyaktig gjengivelse av samtaler og handlinger rett og slett umulig. Noen samtaletemaer stabiliserer seg og blir til kultur, andre temaer forsvinner eller får andre betydninger. Mening og identitet kommer frem i interaksjoner. Mening etableres kontinuerlig fordi mening ikke er noe som skjer hos den enkelte, men i relasjonen (Stacey, 2007). Her kan vi derfor ta opp tråden igjen der vi begynte i dette kapitlet, med forskjellene i hva som legges i begrepet kommunikasjon. I *kommunikasjon som deling av et budskap*, i likhet med CRP, forstås kommunikasjon som en dialogisk aktivitet, og som noe som foregår i et samspill. Vi tar med oss disse tankene tilbake til ledelseskommunikasjonsfeltet.

## Ledelseskommunikasjon fra et kompleksitetsperspektiv

Som nevnt er ledelseskommunikasjon i litteraturen i all hovedsak uløselig knyttet til måloppnåelse og personlige ferdigheter. Lederens kommunikasjon skal bidra til å utvikle en felles visjon om selskapet, etablere og opprettholde tillit til organisasjonens ledelse, initiere og administrere endringsprosessen samt bidra til at ansatte identifiserer seg med selskapet. Lederen kan stå på «utsiden» av organisasjonen eller systemet og peke på tiltak som bør gjøres for, for eksempel, å iverksette endringsprosesser, en ny visjon og så videre. Planlegging og tiltak er med andre ord to stikkord. Innen CRP forstås kommunikasjon derimot som et grunnleggende paradoks bestående av forutsigbarhet og uforutsigbarhet (Johannessen, 2011; Stacey, 2007). Kommunikasjon er ikke noe som kan planlegges, både fordi vi ikke kan vite så mye om fremtiden, men også fordi lederen er del av organisasjonen, ikke en figur som kan stå utenfor denne virkeligheten og kikke inn. Kommunikasjon er noe som skjer i samspill og samtaler med andre, og det oppstår både «forståelser» og misforståelser hele tiden. Slike forståelser er ikke representative for verken en ytre virkelighet eller en indre menneskelig erfaringsverden. Det som oppstår, er forståelser som skaper nye innadrettede og utadrettede kommunikasjonshandlinger. I denne prosessen blir vi oppmerksom på hvilke mennesker vi kommuniserer godt med (og hvilke vi ønsker å unngå). Kommunikasjon er på den ene siden uforutsigbar, fordi det er umulig å vite hundre prosent hvilken mening som skal tilskrives noe som helst. Samtidig er kommunikasjon til en viss grad forutsigbar, fordi mennesker har evnen til å innta andres holdninger gjennom empati (Mead, 1934). God ledelseskommunikasjon fra et kompleksitetsperspektiv handler derfor ikke utlukkende om å formulere presise budskap. Ledelseskommunikasjon handler vel så mye om å forstå det ofte komplekse samspillet mellom mennesker og grupper. Dette krever av ledelsen en utviklet empatisk evne til å forstå de emosjonelle aspektene ved interaksjonen (Solsø & Thorup, 2015, s. 44).

Den tradisjonelle litteraturen innen organisasjon og kommunikasjon har derimot ofte normative perspektiver på det som foregår i organisasjon. I CRP hevdes det imidlertid at hverdagen i organisasjonen er stabil og ustabil på samme tid, mennesker samarbeider og konkurrerer på samme tid, mennesker inkluderes og ekskluderes, og konsensus og uenighet eksisterer samtidig. Det finnes ikke *én beste praksis*. I stedet utspiller det seg et



paradoks; en kreativ og destruktiv natur som skjer i ordinære samtaler som utspiller seg i lokale situasjoner (Johannessen, 2011, s. 138). Dette er kommunikasjon mellom mennesker som på samme tid både konkurrerer og samarbeider i vanlige hverdagslige interaksjoner og samtaler som ikke nødvendigvis alltid er trygge eller harmoniske. I alle sosiale situasjoner er det noe som er uforutsigbart og tvetydig. Det vil hele tiden være usikkerhet om hvilken mening som gjelder (Dehlin, 2005, s. 76). Virkeligheten vil alltid fortone seg subjektiv og intersubjektiv. Det interessante spørsmålet er *hvordan vi forholder oss* til virkelige situasjoner og utfordringer, *ikke hvordan vi skal løse abstrakte problemer* i en tenkt eller idealisert kontekst.

Kompleksitetsteoriene har, som gjennomgangen viser, både likheter og forskjeller. Vi finner CRP mest meningsfylt fordi mennesker er handlende og spontane vesener med følelser og egen vilje.

## Implikasjoner for praksis og videre forskning

Kommunikasjon har en nærmest mytisk status i organisasjons- og ledelseslitteraturen. Organisasjonens suksesser forklares ofte med kommunikasjon. Men også feil og manglende måloppnåelse tilskrives kommunikasjon. De gangene kommunikasjon ikke bidrar til å oppfylle bedriftens målsettinger, plasseres skylden typisk hos sender (leder) eller hos mottaker (medarbeider) eller tilskrives støy på linjen. I det første tilfellet må leder trenes i kommunikasjon, eller en kommunikasjonsrådgiver formidler på vegne av sender. Hvis det er mottaker det er noe galt med, iverksettes tiltak for å øke motivasjonen og engasjementet hos medarbeideren. I det siste tilfellet plasseres feilen i omgivelsene, fra utformingen av kontorer og kontorlandskaper til organisasjonskulturen (Johannessen, 2011). Dette speiler den klassiske dominerende overføringsmodellen og følger en kybernetisk tenkning hvor lederen går inn og justerer slik at systemet er i likevekt. Man trenger kun å justere der feilen ligger, og så vil ting gå seg til. Samtidig er det en forestilling at kommunikasjon skal virke harmoniserende. Vi mener at en slik systemtenkning og overføringsperspektivet har bidratt til myter om hva vi kan forvente av ledelseskommunikasjon. Disse mytene er til hinder både for videre forskning og for utøvelse av ledelse og kommunikasjon.

Innenfor CRP stiller man seg som nevnt skeptisk til forestillingen om menneskelig kommunikasjon som overføring av budskap (Stacey, 2007). Mennesker uttrykker seg gjennom kroppslige handlinger og koordinerer disse handlingene for å samarbeide. Dette gjør det vanskelig å kontrollere



eller styre kommunikasjon, for mening skapes ikke av lederen alene, men i interaksjon med omgivelsene. Dette perspektivet inkluderes dog sjelden i den tradisjonelle organisasjonslitteraturen. I stedet får vi som sagt reproduisert forestillinger og myter. Som Kotter formulerer det:

They [managers] do not function in a crisply designed environment or direct through formally delineated organizational channels, of systematically set and follow formal plans – in other words, they don't fit the stereotype. (Kotter, 2000, s. 156)

Kotter beskriver lederens hverdag nærmest som improvisasjoner. Når ledelsesfunksjoner skal diskuteres, skjer det innenfor en ramme av begreper som planlegging, kontroll og organisering, men det som kjenner det som faktisk foregår, er lange dager, fragmenterte episoder (hendelser) og muntlig kommunikasjon.

I et kompleksitetsperspektiv er ikke lederen en distansert og objektiv observatør. Lederens rolle og identitet vokser i stedet frem i samspill med andre mennesker. En leder er ikke en person som «vet» hva som er riktig for organisasjonen, og som meddeler hvordan dette skal være. Fordi slike forventninger skapes, involverer lederen seg gjerne i aktiviteter som fjerner oppmerksomheten fra der organisasjonen vokser frem, som er i de daglige samtaler mellom virksomhetens mange mennesker og personene de er i kontakt med (Johannessen, 2002, 2011). Fremfor å se på organisasjonen som et spatialt (rom) objekt, kan vi anvende en temporær (tid) forståelsesramme. Da vil vi kunne forstå organisasjoner som kommunikasjonsmessige handlingsmønstre som vokser frem i lokale interaksjoner mellom mennesker. Fra et slikt ståsted blir det umulig for ledere å bestemme verdier, forandre kulturer eller flytte helheter eller organisasjoner i en tenkt retning. Ledelse fra et CRP-perspektiv er *sosiale relateringsaktiviteter* hvor koordinerte intensjoner kontinuerlig skapes, gjenskapes og potensielt forandres i samspillet mellom mange mennesker. Ledelse er formuleringer og kommunikasjon av initiativer og fremvoksende temaer som anerkjennes av andre som meningsfulle, selv om resultater ofte ikke er kjent ennå. Ledelse og ledelseskommunikasjon fremstilles derimot gjerne i litteraturen som et metodevalg eller en verktøykasse. Effektiv ledelse handler dermed om å velge den riktige kommunikasjonsformen og den rette kanalen. Resultatet blir gjerne at lederen kommuniserer fraser og klisjeer, som «ledergruppen har tatt ansvaret for visjon- og strategiimplementering». Innen CRP er man skeptisk til en slik instrumentell tilnærming. I stedet rettes søkelys

mot refleksivitet, dømmekraft og lokal interaksjon. Refleksjon kan forstås som å gjøre seg tanker rundt tidligere erfaringer, både individuelt og kollektivt. Effektiv ledelseskommunikasjon handler her ikke om én metode som kan anvendes i alle tenkelige situasjoner, men heller om forsøk på å kommunisere klokt i flertydige, komplekse og usikre situasjoner. Dette krever at lederen hele tiden reflekterer over sin deltakelse i interaksjoner og situasjoner. Å bruke praktisk dømmekraft på ledelseskommunikasjon betyr å forholde seg og snakke om det som *faktisk* foregår i organisasjonen. Samtaler, presentasjoner og orienteringer i organisasjonen fjernes ofte fra de direkte erfaringene og gjenfortelles (eller tar en form) som preges av klisjeer eller tomt *business lingo*; ansvaret for implementering av strategisk visjon og verdier er gitt ledergruppen (Solsø & Thorup, 2015).

Lederen bør beherske denne sjargongen, men utsagn som vist over, gjør det vanskelig å fordype seg reflektere over hva vi faktisk opplever i de lokale interaksjonene.

Før vi avslutter kapitlet, oppsummerer vi hovedpunktene vi har diskutert, i tabell 1.

**Tabell 1** Forskjellene mellom hovedpunktene i ledelseskommunikasjon slik den er fremstilt i storparten av litteraturen, og CRP som ledelseskommunikasjon

	<b>Ledelseskommunikasjon</b>	<b>CRP som ledelseskommunikasjon</b>
<b>Kommunikasjon er ...</b>	... overføring av budskap fra avsender til mottaker.	... etablering av budskap i dynamisk samspill med andre, med inspirasjon fra semiotikken.
<b>Ledelseskommunikasjon gjøres ...</b>	... fra leder til ansatte og i kraft av personlige egenskaper.	... gjennom ikke-planlagte hverdagslige interaksjoner og samtaler.
<b>Oppmerksomheten rettes mot ...</b>	... planer og mål i en spatial forståelsesramme.	... handlinger i en temporær forståelsesramme.
<b>Kommunikasjon skjer ...</b>	... i systemer som har indre og ytre grenser.	... i relasjoner gjennom hverdagslige mikroprosesser.
<b>Kommunikasjon har til hensikt å ...</b>	... nå organisasjonens overordnede målsettinger.	... skape mening, fellesskap, kreativitet og endring.
<b>Ledelsen kommuniserer ...</b>	... gjennom nedfelte verdier og visjoner.	... gjennom temaer man ønsker å rette oppmerksomheten mot.
<b>Organisasjonen søkes i retning ...</b>	... harmoni og forutsigbarhet.	... usikkerhet, uforutsigbarhet, konflikt og makt.
<b>En organisasjon er ...</b>	... et helhetlig system som kan styres.	... komplekse og selvorganiserende prosesser.

(Fortsat)

Tabell 1 (Fortsat)

	Ledelseskommunikasjon	CRP som ledelseskommunikasjon
<b>Kjennetegn på lederstil er ...</b>	... transaksjonsorientert lederstil, basert på instrumentelle, økonomiske transaksjoner og ytre motivasjon.	... at ledere retter oppmerksomheten mot egen deltakelse i lokale situasjoner.
<b>Epistemologisk forankring i ...</b>	... positivisme.	... fenomenologi og sosialkonstruksjonisme.
<b>Inspirert av ...</b>	... scientific management, systemteori samt et dualistisk tankegods arvet fra Galileo, Descartes og Newton, basert på naturlover og det observerbare i verden.	... Hegels tanker om selvet, Elias' filosofi om hvordan sivilisasjonen har oppstått gjennom interaksjon mellom mennesker over lang tid, og Meads teorier om utvikling av selvet gjennom kommunikativ interaksjon.

Vi vil nå avslutte og konkludere.

## Avslutning

Vi har i dette konseptuelle kapitlet foreslått en alternativ måte å tenke rundt ledelseskommunikasjon enn den som tradisjonelt gjerne fremstilles i litteraturen. Tre spørsmål har veiledet teksten. Som svar på det første av disse spørsmålene (Hvilke teoretiske perspektiver gjennomsyrrer ledelseskommunikasjonsfaget?) kommer det frem at litteraturen er preget av en tradisjonell forståelse av organisasjoner og kommunikasjon (se tabell 1). Organisasjoner ses her gjerne på som systemer med en utside og en innside, og kommunikasjon ses på som overføring av budskap. Dette medfører at vi overser at ledere er del av organisasjonen, og at kommunikasjon er verken en egenskap hos lederen eller noe som kan planlegges, slik vi spør oss i forskningsspørsmål 2 (Hva risikerer vi å overse med disse perspektivene på ledelseskommunikasjon?). Det som fungerte i organisasjonen i går, er ikke garantert å fungere i morgen. Vårt tredje spørsmål er hva kompleksitetsteori kan tilføre ledelseskommunikasjonsfeltet som kan være til nytte for dagens organisasjoner og ledere. Her viste vi hvordan komplekse responderende prosesser (CRP) flytter oppmerksomheten vår fra planlegging og kontroll til det ordinære hverdagslige livet i organisasjonen. Ved å rette blikket mot menneskelige interaksjoner og det dynamiske samspillet mellom ansatte i en organisasjon blir det vanskelig å snakke om innsiden og utsiden av organisasjonen, fordi

det gir lite mening å snakke om innside og utside av menneskelige handlinger, interaksjoner og kommunikasjon. Selvorganiserende prosesser i organisasjonen skaper et utall av ulike kommunikasjonstemaer mellom mennesker, noe som innebærer at det er vanskelig å lede eller styre en organisasjon. Det lederen imidlertid kan gjøre, er påvirke temaene som ansatte snakker om, og som skaper mening og tilhørighet til organisasjonen.

Tradisjonelt har ledelseskommunikasjon vært orientert mot forhold som verdier, organisasjonskultur og visjoner. Dette bidrar til at ledelseskommunikasjonen får et dårlig rykte og feiler på det den skal bidra med: mening, kunnskap og samhold. Vi mener snarere at organisasjonskultur i likhet med kommunikasjon viser til de daglige interaksjonene. Kommunikasjon er ikke en del av puslespillet; kommunikasjon *er* puslespillet. Lederen bør derfor ta del i samtalene, være observant på temaer som vokser frem, og uttrykke disse temaene hvis det er sjanse for at de kan endre samtalemønstrene. I stedet for å kommunisere og forsøke å lede hele systemet bør lederen rette oppmerksomheten mot sin egen deltakelse i lokale situasjoner og interaksjoner.

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