

Is symmetrical communication in politics possible?

A comparative study of communication practices among leading New Zealand and Norwegian political public relations practitioners

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Communication Studies

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

This research project has received ethics approval by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee. The reference number of the research project is 13/97.

Signed

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Daniel Drageset".

Date

July 10, 2014

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Abstract

This research compares New Zealand and Norwegian political public relations practice by using the Excellence Theory as the theoretical framework. The thesis applies a qualitative, interpretivist and comparative methodology using interviews as the main method of data collection.

It investigates how practitioners in two countries apt for comparison view the notion of two-way symmetrical communication. Two-way symmetrical is a best-practice model of public relations and was introduced by Grunig (1976) and later became the central concept of the Excellence Theory (Dozier, J. Grunig, & L. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig, L. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006). The theory has garnered critique from several scholars (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012), because it inhibits public relations practice by ‘forcing’ it into normative models of practice.

This thesis affirms the suitability of the Excellence Theory in political public relations practice if it is practiced using a mixed-motive approach, where practitioners combine symmetrical and asymmetrical practices. Four of the six participants in the study expressed views consistent with a mixed-motive approach. Two New Zealand participants, however, displayed largely asymmetrical views. It is argued that Norway’s more entrenched multi-party system, as well as a government more active in facilitating free speech, is conducive to creating a vibrant public sphere in which to practice symmetrical communication.

The thesis also suggests that the emergence of digital and social media is also creating an environment in which it is easier to practice symmetrical communication. This may have benefits to smaller political parties in that it allows greater access to media channels that reach new publics.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In many ways public relations is a natural extension of politics. In democratic countries where publics' opinions are valued, political actors are dependent on communicating their actions to publics. Without any communication, voting publics may question why they voted the way they did, and thus erode the legitimacy of a political actor. Thus, the link between politics and public relations is integral. Yet, the research discipline of political public relations is very new and there is a scarcity of literature (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011). That is also the case in international, comparative public relations (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009; Gordon, 2009).

1.1 Thesis background

This research project seeks to add to the literature in these fields by examining the political public relations in two countries that the researcher argues make an ideal couple for comparison, namely Norway and New Zealand. The two countries are both situated in the Western world, relatively affluent, with a long tradition of democratic practices; in addition, they are similarly sized both in population and size.

Another interesting aspect is that the two countries remain sufficiently separate so that the data in one country is likely not influenced by the data in the other. For instance, if comparing the United Kingdom and New Zealand, historical and cultural ties between the countries might affect the data. This problem is avoided when comparing Norway and New Zealand. Furthermore, the emergence of public relations came somewhat later to Norway and New Zealand than to many other Western countries (Ihlen & Rakkenes, 2009; Motion, Leitch & Cliffe, 2009), making the field of public relations, and political public relations particularly, a little researched topic in both countries.

Significant for the thesis is the nature of political public relations, what it is, how it is practiced, how it may be practiced, theories related to this field, and how this field of study relates to the Excellence Theory (Dozier et al., 1992, Grunig et al., 2006) and the notion of two-way symmetrical communication. Political public relations can be defined as a:

management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals. (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, p. 8)

1.2 Research approach

The theoretical framework of the research project is based on the Excellence Theory (Dozier et al., 1992; Grunig et al., 2006), which is considered seminal to the public relations body of knowledge, and postulates a normative, best-practice approach to public relations. Central to the Excellence Theory is the practice of two-way symmetrical communication, which is a process that uses “research and dialogue to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both their organization and publics” (Grunig, 2001, p. 13). One opposing view to the Excellence Theory will be elaborated, the contingency theory (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot & Mitrook, 1997), which posits that public relations can be better understood on a continuum ranging from total advocacy to total accommodation.

In light of this, the research question formulated for the thesis is: How do political public relations practitioners in key Norwegian and New Zealand political parties view the value of two-way symmetrical communication? As media relations are central to political public relations practitioners’, this research project focuses on the application of two-way symmetrical communication in the interaction between practitioners and members of the media. However, other aspects, such as societal culture and digital

media environments will be explored to give a fuller picture of the landscape in which practitioners operate. This is important, because the landscape determines what kind of public relations practitioners are able to practice.

This thesis applies a qualitative, interpretivist and comparative methodology using interviews as the main method of data collection in order to highlight the views of central political public relations practitioners in two countries apt for comparison. A quantitative, interpretivist approach could also have been taken, or a combination of a quantitative and qualitative approach, which could have included such units of analysis as Facebook posts or tweets from certain political parties, press releases or appearances in radio or television. A qualitative approach was chosen, because it allowed more in-depth research of the opinions among political public relations officers. In a further and larger research project, a quantitative approach could be considered in addition to a qualitative study to allow for triangulation.

It should also be noted that the researcher's background as a Norwegian journalist covering politics has been a key motivating factor for this research. Therefore, his capabilities as a journalist focusing on current affairs in New Zealand and Norway, as well as being a New Zealand resident and Communications student, has been advantageous in understanding the two countries, their politics and in conducting the research, particularly the use of interviews as a research method. Data was collected from interviews with head political public relations practitioners in three main parties in Norway—the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party—and three main parties in New Zealand—the Labour Party, the National Party and the Green Party.

1.3 Thesis structure

Chapter 2 of this thesis, the literature review, examines literature relating to political public relations, and explores how political public relations can be understood and

separated from other forms of public relations. It goes on to present and critique the Excellence Theory and the central notion of two-way symmetrical communication. The contingency theory, a reaction to the normative best-practice idea that the Excellence Theory posited, is presented as a contrary way to understand political public relations.

While the Excellence Theory is central to public relations research, the notion of the 'public sphere' (Habermas, 1989) stands as a fundamental idea in social science research. The Excellence Theory presents a best-practice model for organisations' communicative practices, whereas the 'public sphere' relates to how best to facilitate discussion and deliberation in a democracy. As this thesis more broadly is about communication in two democracies, it is vital to examine this concept. The essential argument here is that a more developed 'public sphere', where numerous voices are heard and a more nuanced discussion takes place, is advantageous for political public relations practitioners. It will offer them more communicative opportunities and thus arguably more chances for symmetrical communication.

The literature review will also present three environmental variables that Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) contend are central to public relations being tailored to a country. They provide a way of understanding how public relations can be practiced in different countries. An examination of how digital media relates to public relations and democracy completes the literature review. Two contrasting views about Twitter, a much-used social media platform for political communicative purposes, will be considered.

Chapter 3 will present the methodology and methods applied in this thesis. It will discuss the following four methodological aspects of the thesis: a qualitative approach, the interpretivist paradigm, using interviews as a research method and detailing the comparative element of the research.

Brennen (2013) explains that qualitative research is about mapping meaningful relations, understanding that reality is socially constructed and supports that the researcher has an active role in the research process. This understanding of research fits well with this thesis, where the viewpoints of political public relations practitioners are central. This is related to the interpretivist paradigm, where the researcher is encouraged to interpret data himself and to make meaning and contextualise his research. Neuman (2000) proposes three steps to qualitative interpretation: a first, second and third order interpretation. The first order involves the researcher understanding what a participant expresses, while a second order interpretation contextualises data and a third order interpretation attempts to translate the data in a theoretical framework, which in this thesis is the Excellence Theory. This process will be used to analyse the interviews in this thesis.

Using interviews as a research method was natural considering that the aim was to map the viewpoints of practitioners. A semi-structured approach was chosen, where the participants were sent the interview framework a week in advance of the interviews in order to be prepared. A set of identical questions was asked of all participants, but follow-up questions varied depending on the answers of the interviewees. This will be discussed in detail in the results chapter.

Finally in the methodology chapter, the comparative study process will be detailed. The research project is situated in two comparative approaches. In the cultural-context approach societies or countries function as the “backdrop for examining a common social process” (Neuman, 2000, p. 403). This thesis argues that it is vital to understand key aspects of New Zealand and Norwegian society to explain how two-way symmetrical communication, and more broadly communication based on Excellence Theory principles, is viewed among practitioners. In the case-study approach, a limited

number of units within societies are compared to identify factors that are constant or vary. Consequently, this research project combines the two approaches in that it compares units both within and across societies to identify how two-way symmetrical communication is viewed and practiced.

Chapter 4 conducts a comparison of New Zealand and Norway based on Sriramesh and Verčič's (2009) environmental variables. It argues that the countries share many similar traits, but that the Norwegian environment is more conducive for practicing two-way symmetrical communication than the environment of New Zealand. The public sphere has been reduced in both countries resulting from commercial pressures (Hope, 2013; Omdal, Bjartnes, Bjerke, & Olsen, 2013); however, a more active government in Norway, with the stated goal of facilitating a healthy milieu for free speech, has been instrumental in maintaining a diversity of media outlets.

Also of importance is how the political systems in each country are engineered. This thesis argues that a multi-party system with several voices competing to be heard is favourable to the practice of two-way symmetrical communication as it arguably leads to more publics to communicate with, and thus offers more opportunities to communicate symmetrically. The thesis argues that the political system in New Zealand has historically been one that allowed only a few voices to be heard, whereas Norway has a much more entrenched multi-party system. These two factors combined may make the Norwegian environment more favourable to communicate symmetrically.

Chapter 5 details the results of this thesis, and is divided into seven parts all related to how the participants practice political public relations and view symmetrical as opposed to asymmetrical communication. The seven subparts of the chapter are: the practitioners' ultimate objectives; the importance of the media in their positions; how they view the media landscape in the country they operate and how this affect their

practice; how digital and social media impact their practice; their views on relationship management; particularly with journalists; the importance of culture; and how they view the dichotomy of a normative approach to political public relations versus a contingency approach. The chapter consists of first-order interpretations, whereby the researcher explains the meanings of interview segments, as intended by the interviewee.

Chapter 6, the discussion chapter, goes further, and explores second and third order interpretations of the data. Firstly, it investigates how the interview segments fit Grunig et al.'s (2006) notion of two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical communication. This section asserts that the New Zealand Labour Party and National Party employ more asymmetrical methods of communication, where merely influencing publics, particularly members of the media, is a goal in itself, and dialogue with publics is not emphasised in their communications strategies. The four other parties, however, displayed a combination of symmetrical and asymmetrical views and practices, which Grunig (2001) argued was conducive with Murphy's (1991) mixed-motive model of communication. Although not purely symmetrically, Grunig (2001) explained that a combination of the two models is in fact a correct application of communication based on Excellence Theory principles.

A key finding was the emphasis most practitioners put on digital and social media. Steinar Haugsvær of the Liberal Party and Andrew Campbell of the Green Party put particular emphasis on this aspect, as they argued it has a democratising effect by allowing smaller political parties considerably easier access to reaching out to publics than ever before. It is suggested that current digital developments will enable two-way symmetrical communication to be practiced to a higher extent, because social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are dialogic in nature. Whether or not symmetrical communication is practiced, however, depends on environmental variables

in each country. Overall, four of the six participants clearly viewed digital and social media as an arena where one can combine symmetrical and asymmetrical communication practices, strengthening the deduction of a mixed-motive approach among the majority of the participants.

The chapter also discusses the participants' views on having an overarching approach to their communications strategy as opposed to a contingency approach, and how culture may influence the practice of political public relations.

Finally, chapter 7 argues that the mixed-motive approach seen among four of the six participants is a fitting description of their practice of political public relations. It is argued that the reason the New Zealand Labour Party and National Party interviewees tilted toward a purely asymmetrical model of communication relates to their dominant positions in the New Zealand political landscape, and their lack of an integrated communications function, which stymies symmetrical communication. Lastly, the developments in digital and social media in recent years may force political public relations practitioners to adopt a more symmetrical approach. The development may erode the notion of shared knowledge, but it will present practitioners with more opportunities to communicate symmetrically. Arguably, the practitioners who are able to take advantage of this will benefit.

Chapter 2 Literature review

This literature review explores both pertinent literature in the field of public relations and media science. Firstly, it examines the emergent field of political public relations, and delineates this field from related public relations disciplines. The section introduces the relational and reputational perspective within political public relations, and analyses how those relate to the communication practices of political parties.

Secondly, the literature review introduces the Excellence Theory, a central and much-debated theory within public relations. The theory is the framework for the thesis, and is used to analyse the findings. J. Grunig, L. Grunig and Dozier (2006) argue that the Excellence Theory is a normative best-practice model for public relations that can, with certain modifications, be applied in most countries and cultures in the world.

Subsequently, a central critique of the Excellence Theory will be presented. Essential to the critique by scholars such as Holtzhausen (2000) and Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2012), is how two-way symmetrical communication, the ideal form of public relations practice according to the Excellence Theory, seeks to establish a dialogue among publics. The critique states that dialogue, which the Excellence Theory recommends, is very difficult, maybe impossible, to obtain because the nature of dialogue involves giving up control to achieve a consensus, which a public relations practitioner would not do.

Thirdly, in the extension of this critique, the literature review will present the contingency theory (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997), which was formulated as a reaction to the Excellence Theory by scholars who found the Excellence Theory insufficient in describing public relations practice. Instead of proposing a best-practice, normative model of public relations, which Dozier et al. (1992) do with the two-way

symmetrical communication, contingency theory posits that public relations is better understood by a continuum ranging from total advocacy to total accommodation (Cancel et al., 1997).

Fourthly, as this thesis is about how democracy relates to public relations, it discusses how best to facilitate communication in a democracy. Habermas's (1989) renowned notion of the 'public sphere', the ideal place where debate and discussions take place, reaching conclusions on the basis of rational dialogue and arguments, is central in modern understandings of fair communication in democracies, particularly when it comes to political communication as that was an area of concern for Habermas (1989). This thesis argues that the concept of a 'public sphere' complements the practice of two-way symmetrical communication, because a healthy public sphere provides more communicative opportunities for the political public relations practitioner.

Fifthly, building on Habermas's (1989) notion of the public sphere, the chapter introduces three views of public relations in a modern-day democracy: it can have a beneficial, neutral, or negative effect (Moloney, 2006). According to Moloney (2006), the most fitting way to view public relations is that it has a negative effect, because it favours the resource-rich over the resource-poor and is more concerned about 'having an argument' rather than 'making' one.

In the sixth part of this chapter, three variables, as designed by Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) to analyse the public relations environment, will be presented, namely infrastructure (including a country's political system, economic development and activism), culture and media landscape. In the seventh and final part, it will be discussed what impact digital and in particular social media have on the practice of public relations, and political public relations specifically.

2.1 Political Public Relations

The field of political public relations is a branch of public relations in which there has been little theorising and research done, according to Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011). However, although the academic discipline of political public relations is new, the practice of it is not. More than 2000-year-old material publicising and glorifying the leaders of ancient Egypt, Assyria and Persia is possibly some of the oldest examples of political public relations (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994). During the American Revolutionary War in the 1770s, revolutionaries invented the slogan “No taxation without representation” (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011), and understood the importance of getting their side of the story to the public first.

2.1.1 Definition

Strömbäck and Kioussis’s *Political Public Relations* (2011) is, according to their own accounts, the first book explicitly focusing on this field. Strömbäck and Kioussis give the following definition of political public relations:

Political public relations is the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals. (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, p. 8)

This definition departs from current professional body definitions of public relations by not including the word ‘mutual’. The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), which is the UK’s leading professional body within public relations, says public relations “is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics” (Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2010, para. 6). The Public Relations Institute of America (PRSA) provides this definition: “Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt

mutually to each other” (PRSA, 2010, para. 3.). A widely cited definition by Cutlip et al. (1994) is similar to the aforementioned: “Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 3). Strömbäck & Kioussis (2011) argue that many definitions mix descriptive, prescriptive and normative elements, but recommend that “what public relations *is* and it *should be* are two separate matters” (p. 4). Hence, definitions of public relations use the word ‘mutual’ to signify two-way communication between an organisation and its publics, in practice this may not be observed as practitioners may deem an asymmetrical or a different type of approach more appropriate to their goals.

2.1.2 Political communication

Political public relations may be seen more as an implementation of political communication. J. McLeod, Kosicki and D. McLeod (1994) define the discipline of political communication as “the exchange of symbols and messages between political actors and institutions, the general public and news media that are the products of or have consequences for the political system” (p. 4). Strömbäck & Kioussis (2011) contend that political communication is more focused on conflicts of power, whereas political public relations “sometimes, albeit not always tend to treat as matters that can be managed or resolved through communication” (p. 6).

However, both political public relations and political communication focus on relationship building formed through communication. How these relationships are built is determined by a number of environmental factors, such as cultural norms and values; laws and constitutions; the media; and political systems (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011). Another similarity between political public relations and political communication theory and research is the central role of the media. The media “in general and mass media in

particular are arguably still the most important sources of information in matters beyond people's own experience" (Strömbäck & Kaid, as cited in Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, p. 5). In addition, political public relations is influenced by political marketing, political campaigning, persuasion, public affairs, political management, and political science.

2.1.3 Relational perspective

As the definitions of public relations suggest, the practice of public relations is not only about the communications output, but also about relationships. According to Zhang (2012), there has been a paradigm shift in public relations theory, which over the last two decades has increasingly focused on relationship management. Cutlip et al. (1994) defines the relational perspective of public relations as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends on" (p. 2).

Strömbäck & Kioussis (2011) claim the relational perspective is a key characteristic of both public relations and political public relations. The emergence of the relational perspective has moved public relations "from an emphasis on influencing opinion through propaganda and persuasion toward an emphasis on establishing, building, and maintaining relationships that, purportedly, are mutually beneficial to an organization and its publics" (Ledingham, 2006, as cited in Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, p. 11).

2.1.4 Reputational perspective

Reputation is a central field of study in public relations research that also closely relates to political public relations. Reputation can be defined as: "Stakeholders' perceptions about an organization's ability to create value relative to competitors" (Rindova, Petkova, Sever, & Williamson, 2005, p. 1033). Although current public relations practitioners seem more interested in focusing on relationship management (Gordon,

2011; J. Grunig et al., 2006; J. Grunig, 2009), some argue (McNair, 2003; Moloney, 2006) that political public relations is more concerned with reputation. According to the latter viewpoint, public relations is about “media and information management tactics designed to ensure that a party receives maximum favourable publicity, and the minimum of negative” (McNair, 2003). Similarly, Moloney (2006) argues public relations is either a manipulative communications tactic or a weak form of propaganda and questions whether public relations and democracy can co-exist. He rejects notions of communicating with publics and mutual understanding as “idealism that cannot be sustained conceptually and about which the evidence is extremely thin” (Moloney, 2006, p. 74).

2.1.5 The relational-reputational dichotomy

While business goals in corporations may be to increase and/or improve dialogue with specified publics to achieve positive long-term effects, politics will inevitably be about winning elections and consequently achieving the organisation’s (the party’s) business goals (political platform/party programme). Following Rindova et al.’s (2005) above definition of reputation, an organisation’s ability to create value relative to its competitors in this setting is arguably a political party’s ability to implement policies. In order to be in a position where one can implement politics, it is natural to presume that the party or candidate has won, or at least achieved a favourable result, in the previous election. Stonecash (2013), although writing from an American viewpoint, states that parties have a tendency to be “more concerned with posturing and retaining offices than with representing the publics and responding to problems” (p. 27). He also states that in the current conditions in the American political landscape, political parties employ “efforts to disparage the reputation of the opposing party” (p. ii).

It seems clear that both relationships with and reputation among publics are important to political parties. However, there may also be a dichotomy in how to best understand political public relations. This dichotomy seems to run between market-oriented political public relations, which identifies what stakeholders want and offers it, and relationship management, which identifies jointly held interests and goals as the basis for relationships (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011). For instance, a market-oriented political party will be interested in the behaviour of the voter, with a preferred behaviour being voter registration, donation and voting. A party focused on relationship management, however, is more concerned about the quality of the relationships it forms (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011). Furthermore, a relationship management-focused party seeks mutuality and balance, whereas a market-oriented party seeks dominance and victory. The two are also different by emphasising short-term goals as the most important in the relationship management approach, while a market-oriented party seeks short-term strategies, such as winning an election.

2.2 Excellence Theory

The Excellence Theory, developed by the public relations academics James Grunig, Larissa Grunig, David Dozier, William Ehling, Jon White and Fred Repper, stands as one of the most central contributions to public relations theory in recent years (Dozier et al., 1992; J. Grunig et al., 2009). Berger (2007, as cited in L'Etang, 2008) provided this definition of the theory:

Excellence Theory emphasizes the importance of an empowered public relations function that participates in the dominant coalition and other strategic decision-making arenas so that the practice can help organizations solve problems, become more socially responsible, and acquire and maintain social legitimacy. (p. 163)

In 1984, the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation gave Grunig and five other researchers a US\$400,000 grant that sought to answer two fundamental research questions:

1. How, why and to what extent does public relations make an organization more effective, and how much is that contribution worth in a monetary sense?
 2. What characteristics of the public relations function increase the contribution that communication management makes to organizational effectiveness.
- (Grunig, 2001, p. 21)

The Excellence Theory is vast and encompasses many facets. The team attempted to “develop a broad, general theory of public relations” (Grunig et al., 2006). The study included a comprehensive literature review and a quantitative survey sent out to 321 organisations in the US, Canada and the UK. From those surveys, the team was able to develop 20 key characteristics, of which knowledge to use the two-way symmetrical model of communication was a key finding.

This study will draw on the central aspect of the theory, namely the four models, introduced by Grunig (1976), conceptualised by Grunig and Hunt (1984), which later formed the framework of the Excellence study. The four models are public agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric. The table below summarises the main differences between the different models.

Table 1: Characteristics of four models of public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984)

Characteristic	Model			
	Public Agency/ Publicity	Public Information	Two-way asymmetric	Two-way symmetric
Purpose	Propaganda	Dissemination of information	Scientific persuasion	Mutual understanding
Nature of communication	One-way; complete truth not essential	One-way; truth important	Two-way; imbalanced effects	Two-way; balanced effects
Communication model	Source → Receiver	Source → Receiver	Source → Receiver ← Feedback	Group ↔ Group
Nature of research	Little; “counting house”	Little; “readability, readership”	Formative; evaluative of attitudes	Formative; evaluative of understanding
Where practiced today	Sports, theatre, product promotion	Government, non- profit associations, business	Competitive business; agencies	Regulated business; agencies
Estimated percentage of organisations practicing today	15 %	50 %	20 %	15 %

A model in this context, according to Grunig and Hunt (1984), is a “representation of reality” (1984, p. 21), meaning, as is the case with many models, that it is an idealised form and how public relations is practiced may not be exactly according to this model.

2.2.1 Press Agency model

In the first model, the press agency/publicity model, public relations serves as a propaganda function, with public relations practitioners spreading the faith of the organisation involved, through information with little or no basis in reality (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Although this model can trace its roots several centuries back, Grunig and Hunt (1984) claim it became widespread in the 1830s when one cent newspapers started selling in New York City. Phineas T. Barnum is considered the master press agent of the early age (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Barnum wrote several hyperbolic and even false newspaper articles that promoted his show attractions. He is also known for coining the expressions “there’s no such thing as bad publicity” (as cited in Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 28) and “there’s a sucker born every minute” (as cited in Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.

28). Essentially, public relations practitioners under this model vied for space in media and were said to be “flacking for space”, meaning they would constantly be looking to get “free space in the media for their clients, using every possible trick to take advantage of the newspapers and other media” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 30).

2.2.2 Public Information model

Similarly to the Press Agency model, the Public Information model is also a one-way form of public relations. The major difference, however, is that truth matters in the Public Information Model. The model traces its root to early 20th century US and the journalist-turned-public relations practitioner Ivy Lee. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), businesses saw they needed another kind of public relations to counter so called “muckraking journalists”, who were exposing improper practices among officials and corporations. Lee’s idea was therefore to tell “the truth about an organization’s actions; if that truth was damaging to the organization, then change the behaviour of the organization so the truth could be told without fear” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 31).

While muckraking journalists previously could present a case from one side, because the company did not defend itself or wanted to suppress the news, Lee focused on “interpreting” his client to the public “with the idea of making the organization more responsible to the public” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

An essential difference to the two subsequent models is that the Public Information model did not engage publics in any dialogue. It relied on practitioners understanding of publics. Surveys and other type of research to gauge public opinion were not used in the practice of the model.

2.2.3 Two-way asymmetric model

The central difference of the two-way asymmetric model to the two aforementioned is the act of listening to publics and including their opinion in the formation of a public relations strategy. Public relations practitioners “did research and listened to publics in an effort to determine how best to change their behaviour to benefit the organization” (Grunig et al., 2006, p. 46).

While P. T. Barnum was the leading historical figure in the Press Agency model and Ivy Lee for the Public Information model, Edward L. Bernays was the equivalent for the two-way asymmetrical model. Not only that, Grunig and Hunt (1984) credit Bernays as “the intellectual of early public relations practitioners”. When Bernays died at age 103, he was named the “father of public relations” in a *New York Times* obituary (“Edward Bernays, ‘father of public relations’”, 1995).

Bernays was the nephew of the Viennese psychologist Sigmund Freud, and was said to have been influenced by his famous uncle in applying the development of social science theory to the practice of public relations (Dozier, 1992).

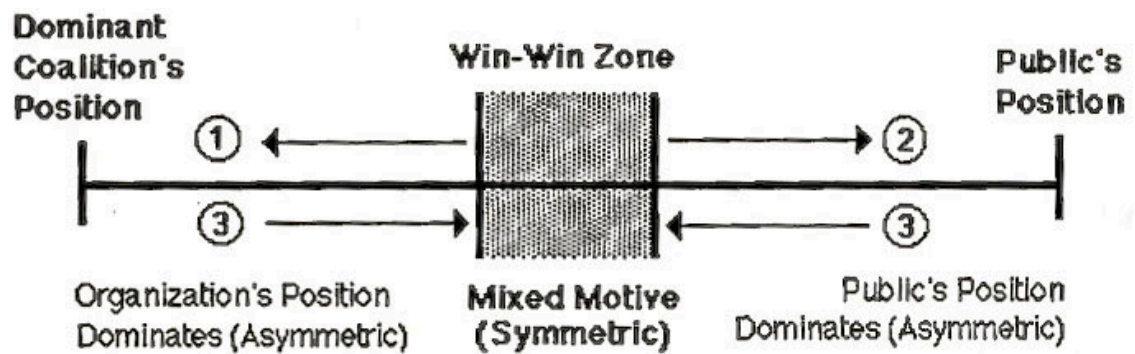
Like other practitioners of the two-way asymmetric model, he [Bernays] most often practiced this role by finding out what the public liked about the organization and then highlighting that aspect of the organization, or by determining what values and attitudes publics had and then describing the organization in a way that conformed to these values and attitudes. (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 40)

An example of how Bernays successfully applied the one-way asymmetrical model was when working for the Venida Hairnet Company. Through a survey on why women wore hairnets, Bernays developed a strategy to slow the trend of hairnets becoming less common (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

2.2.4 Two-way symmetric model

The final model, the two-way symmetrical model, is different from the three above by not using persuasion. Instead, it seeks to balance the interest of an organisation with those of its publics (Grunig et al., 2006, p. 46). Two-way symmetrical communication can be defined as “research and dialogue to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both their organization and publics” (Grunig, 2001, p. 13). By practicing this model, public relations consequently produces better long-term relationships with publics, according to Grunig et al. (2006).

Grunig and Hunt (1984) traced the roots of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations to the early 1950s, and stated that educators “now are just beginning to develop the theories and techniques for a symmetric model” (p. 42). Central to the fourth model is that it has replaced persuasion with understanding and attempts to balance communication between the different parties in the process of communication. In order to practice two-way symmetrical communication, Grunig et al. assert that other “Excellent” conditions of public relations must be present in an organisation. In the following paragraphs some of those conditions will be elaborated.



Type of Practice	Explanation
① Pure Asymmetry Model	Communication used to dominate public, accept dominant coalition's position
② Pure Cooperation Model	Communication used to convince dominant coalition to cave in to public's position
③ Two-Way Model	Communication used to move public, dominant coalition, or both to acceptable "win-win" zone

Figure 1: Two-way symmetrical communication (Dozier et al., 1992)

In the above model, the practice of two-way symmetrical communication is displayed by the two number 3 arrows moving towards each other to the symmetric mixed motive so called “‘win-win’ zone” (Dozier et al., 1992, p. 48). It is assumed that by finding common ground, through dialogue and research, the two communicating parties will both be able to achieve a satisfactory result. However, on both sides of the ‘win-win zone’ unstable and unsatisfactory relationships are prevalent with one party exploiting the other, Dozier et al. argue (1992).

Arrow 1 indicates a position where communication is used to manipulate or persuade publics to accept the dominant coalition’s position. The term ‘dominant coalition’ is defined as the “group of individuals within an organization with the power to affect the structure of the organization, define its mission, and set its course through strategic choices the coalition makes” (Dozier et al., 1992, p. 15). Arrow 2, on the other hand, signify a situation where communication is “used by publics to persuade the organization’s dominant coalition to accept the public’s position outside the win-win

zone” (Dozier et al., p. 49). While arrow 1 exemplifies a situation where publics likely would be unsatisfied with the outcome, arrow 2 exemplifies a situation where the dominant coalition in an organisation would be unsatisfied and likely not content with how the communicator has practiced public relations.

The authors also point out that it is wrong to equate two-way communication with pure cooperation. This would mean that communication is about satisfying publics, Dozier et al. (1992) argue, when it in fact is about reaching a compromise that both parties will accept.

Such an equilibrium must be sufficiently satisfactory so that neither publics nor organizations have cause to regret their actions, given how the other side would have responded. Publics and organizations can be described as cooperative antagonists, looking for a compromise around an issue in which true differences exist between parties. They do not trust each other, nor do they believe everything communicated by the other side. However, they trust each other enough to believe that each will abide by any agreement reached. (Dozier et al., 1992, p. 48)

2.2.5 Generic principles

The Excellence Theory is a normative theory that Grunig (2009) argues may be applied to most countries in the world with appropriate variations taken into account for cultural, political, social and economic conditions. There are eight generic principles of the Excellence Theory, as outlined below, of which two-way symmetrical communication is but one.

1: In empowering the function of public relations within an organisation, the head of communications should take part in the dominant coalition, where high-level decisions are being made.

2: Public relations should also be an integrated communication function, organising the function of public relations into one department within the organisation. Grunig (2009) argues that only in integrated systems “is it possible for public relations to develop new

communication programs for changing strategic publics” (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006, p. 44).

3: Public relations should also be a separate management function, as a diluting of public relations resources to other functions inhibits the potential of public relations to be managed strategically “because it cannot move communication resources from one strategic public to another, as an integrated public relations function can” (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006, p. 45).

4: The public relations function should be headed by a strategic manager rather than a communication technician or an administrative manager that supervises technical services. This is because managers are better skilled in communicating strategically. ‘Strategic thinking’ or ‘strategic communication’ has many subtle variations. The term is used “frequently in organizations and refers to predicting or establishing a desired future goal state, determining what forces will help and hinder movement towards the goal, and formulating a plan for achieving the desired state” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006, as cited in Gordon, 2011, p. 165). A public relations strategy is described by Parkinson and Ekachai (2006) as “messages, themes or guidelines for the overall public relations effort. ... An expression of an idea or messages that will motivate the target public to change to meet the public relations objective” (p. 33). In strategic management, Grunig et al. (2006) emphasise that programmes are conducted on the basis of research and environmental scanning, rather than using routine techniques. In addition, they advocate periodic evaluations of the organisation’s communication efforts. Hence a strategic manager would be one that is equipped in making more overarching decisions when an organisation communicates to its publics, such as which audiences to target, what the goals of the communication strategy should be and how it

should be formulated, instead of a technician, whose tasks are considered more basic not requiring strategic thinking.

5: Grunig (2009) then explicitly names “involved in strategic management” as another generic principle of how Excellent public relations is conducted. As a part of this involvement, the public relations practitioner is therefore expected to conduct environmental scanning “to identify publics affected by the consequences of decisions or who might affect the outcome of decisions” (Grunig et al., p. 38).

6: Moreover, he lists two-way symmetrical communication as a generic principle, because this model of public relations “produces better long-term relationships than do the other models of public relations. Symmetrical programs generally are conducted more ethically than are other models and produce effects that balance the interests of organizations and publics in society” (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006).

7: Fostering diversity in the public relations function by including both genders, as well as public relations practitioners with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, is another generic principle contributing in building an effective organisation, thus creating an “organic structure ... triggering changes in culture, communication, and satisfaction” (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006, p. 54). \

8: Finally, having public relations departments practice ethically would also improve the public relations function, according to Grunig et al. (2006). This principle was not originally included among the generic principles, but was added after a study in Slovenia by Verčič, L. Grunig and J. Grunig (1996, as cited in Grunig et al., 2006) found that Slovenian practitioners saw ethical practice as key to Excellent public relations in order to avoid damage to their “individual reputations as well as to the reputation of the public relations profession” (p. 59).

2.2.6 Critique of Excellence Theory

The Excellence Theory has attracted much criticism, particularly concerning the notion of two-way symmetrical communication. Laskin (2012), who summarised Excellence critique from several scholars, said the two-way symmetrical model was either regarded as “an unrealistic utopia or simply a normative concept” (p. 357).

Holtzhausen (2012) stated that the two-way symmetrical model’s search for consensus is difficult or maybe even impossible. A consensus might be the result of persuasion by one of the communicating parties, hence it is more productive if the parties acknowledge their differences, rather than trying to obtain a consensus on what might be false pretences (Lyotard, 1992, as cited in Holtzhausen, 2000). Holtzhausen also argued the model could be misused by the dominant coalition in an organisation to subdue the other party of a communication process. By applying two-way symmetrical communication inside an organisation the management is more able to manipulate their employees (Holtzhausen, 2000). She further critiques two-way symmetrical communication by terming it a metanarrative, meaning an overriding, dominant idea. Such metanarratives are unfortunate, according to Holtzhausen (2000), who instead advocates public relations methods to be applied dependent on each individual situation.

This critique is similar to the contingency theory (Cancel et al, 1997), which posits that the practice of public relations can be found on a continuum between total advocacy and total accommodation of a public. Contingency theory will be discussed in further detail later.

Murphy (1991) developed the mixed-motive model, where she applied game theory to analyse public relations practice and the public relations models. She likened symmetrical communication with pure cooperation in which one side always tries to accommodate the other, while she saw asymmetrical communication as a zero-sum

game. Mixed-motive games, Murphy (1991) stated, “do not aspire to agreement and congruence but rather to understanding and accuracy, which preserve distinctions between viewpoints” (p. 125). A mixed-motive approach can thus be defined as a combination of two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical communication. Grunig (2001) endorsed the notion of the mixed-motive approach and said his intention never was not to portray the two-way symmetrical model as one of pure cooperation. In fact, Grunig (2001) argued “using the two-way symmetrical model or a combination of the two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical models (called the mixed-motive model) almost always could increase the contributions of public relations to organizational effectiveness” (p. 12). Grunig (2001) further argued that critical scholars who debunk the two-way symmetrical model have misunderstood the model. He underlined that persuasion, debate and arguments do have a place in this model, but that listening, understanding and relationship building also occur.

Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2012) argue that there is a philosophical difference between dialogue and the practice of two-way symmetrical communication. Dialogue is “about giving up some control in the sense of needing to achieve a desired outcome and to contain its content. By doing so, the participant in the dialogic encounter accepts that the outcome is not always predictable” (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012, p. 7). Public relations, however, is about achieving a desirable outcome, and thus it does not support the philosophy of dialogue (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012).

2.3 Contingency theory – it depends

The contingency theory was developed as a reaction to the Excellence Theory. Cancel, Cameron, Sallot and Mitrook (1997) considered the Excellence Theory, and particularly the notion of two-way symmetrical communication, as inadequate in describing public relations practice. As a result, the researchers proposed the contingency theory

summarised by the two words 'it depends'. The authors argue that public relations practice needs to be seen as a continuum ranging from pure accommodation to pure advocacy.

“Advocacy”, which can be defined as “one who pleads another’s cause or (pleads) in support of something” (Guralink, 1984, as cited in Cancel et al., 1997, p. 35), is integral to public relations practice. In this way, a public relations practitioner’s role is likened to that of an attorney, simply arguing the case of one party. Cancel et al. (1997) do not offer a definition of “accommodation”, but Collins English Dictionary & Thesaurus (2006) describes it as “change, settlement, compromise, differences, or to new circumstances; settlement or reconciliation” (p. 8-9). As the definitions of public relations earlier in this chapter demonstrated, fostering mutual beneficial relationships are highly emphasised in contemporary definitions of public relations. In public relations literature, being an accommodator of trust with external publics is one of the functions of public relations practice, according to Cancel et al. (1997). Central to an accommodative approach of public relations is interacting with publics with no presuppositions regarding the outcome of the interaction, similar to two-way symmetrical communication.

Cancel et al. (1997) argue that public relations simply is:

too complex, too fluid, and impinged by far too many variables for the academy to force it into the four boxes known as the four models of public relations. Even worse, to promulgate one of the four boxes as the best and most effective model not only tortures the reality of practicing public relations but has problems, even as a normative theory. It fails to capture the complexity and multiplicity of the public relations environment. (Cancel et al., 1997, p. 32-33)

Instead of arguing like the Excellence Theory does, that one position is superior to another, a contingency theory approach holds that no approach is superior, but each of the approaches can be used given the appropriate context. The contingency theory

approach is endorsed by Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011) as a better way of understanding how political public relations works than the Excellence Theory, because of the “complexity of the various publics, claims, and actions that political organizations face” (p. 21). For instance, they argue that a two-way symmetrical approach would be a more common approach in intraparty relationships, negotiations between parties and policymaking processes, whereas a two-way asymmetrical approach would be useful in election campaigns and for publicity. A contingency theory approach may be especially useful when dealing with the media. According to Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011):

On the one hand, political actors are dependent on the news media for reaching their mass audiences, which calls for an accommodation of the media’s wants and needs. On the other, the interests of the media and of political actors are usually not the same, which rather calls for advocacy toward the media on the part of political actors. (p. 59)

Cancel et al. (1997) argue that changing an organisation’s behaviour or position because of a symmetrical dialogue would be “morally repugnant” (p. 38). The authors argue that it would be impossible for an organisation viewing abortion as murder to compromise with an organisation of the opposite viewpoint. Applying this to a political public relations viewpoint, one could argue that it is not possible to employ a two-way symmetrical, accommodative approach exclusively in a political party’s external communications, simply because there will likely be some viewpoints each political party has that it would refuse to compromise on.

According to Cancel et al. (1997) the correct mix between advocacy and accommodation is contingent upon a variety of internal and external variables. Some of these variables have similarities to Sriramesh and Verčič’s (2009) five environmental variables that they argue can be used in designing a public relations strategy in a given country. Among the external variables Cancel et al. (1997) take into account are degree of government regulation, the relative power of the organisation and the public with

which one is communicating with, the public's perception of the group one is communicating with, and how the media coverage has recently shown the public. Among the internal variables Cancel et al. (1997) discuss are whether it is an open or closed culture in one's corporation, the distribution of decision-making power, the degree of heterogeneity among the employees; how the public relations department fits in the corporate hierarchy; amount of time and funding available to deal with external publics; the personal ethics among the public relations practitioners in the organisation; the ability to recognise potential and existing problems; predisposition towards altruism or negotiation; level of trust between one's organisation and the external public; and ideological barriers between one's organisation and the public.

2.4 The public sphere

Arguably one of the most renowned social science researchers in the 20th century, Jürgen Habermas, introduced the notion of the 'public sphere' in 1962, but was not translated into English until 1989 in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Andersen & Gray, 2007; Habermas, 1989). The idea of the 'public sphere' has a particular relevance to political communication, as this was an area Habermas took a great interest in.

By 'the public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. (Habermas, 1992, p. 136)

Habermas identifies political debates among the early modern bourgeoisie in England, France, and later Germany, as an ideal type of public debate. During this period, political communication took place in "an open, unrestricted fashion, often finding its locus in publicly accessible coffee houses and salons and through the circulation of non-profit media" (Andersen & Gray, 2007, p. 413). This public sphere was, in Habermas's

view, inherently modern because it broke with feudal control over public communication that had existed until that time. In an ideal application of the public sphere, citizens are given unrestricted access to places where one can conduct rational dialogue, discussing issues free of coercion or other pressures. However, with the arrival of media industries and the “commodification of information and political debate as well as the emergence of powerful structures of government in modern nation-states interfering in a range of social, cultural, and economic processes” (Andersen & Gray, 2007, p. 413), the ideal conditions for facilitating the public sphere eroded.

Inspired by Habermas (1989), neo-Marxist researchers (Moloney, 2006; McNair, 2003) have criticised public relations in light of the idea of a ‘public sphere’, and tied public relations to the spread of promotional culture and capitalism. Moloney (2006) states that public relations is “a form of social engineering done with communications to gain the consent of public opinion for capitalist interests” (p. 29). In Moloney’s (2006) view, the emergence of public relations undermines the idea of the public sphere, because it favours business interests rather than creating an open debate with unrestricted access for all citizens.

Although widely recognised for his work, Habermas has been criticised for idealising the early bourgeois public sphere. Sandvoss (2008) points out that he underplayed the significance of the state, and also the alleged accessibility of coffee houses, which were limited to those of a certain social status and economic capital. They also excluded members of the public on the grounds of gender, age, class, ethnicity and/or nationality.

2.5 Public relations and democracy

Central to this thesis is to what extent symmetrical communication reflects the practice of key political public relations practitioners in both Norway and New Zealand. In order to do that it is pertinent to look at how public relations relates to democracy. Political

public relations is by nature dependent on what kind of political system it is operating in. In fact, all public relations activities are dependent on the political system in the country it is practiced. There “is little doubt that public relations practice thrives on public opinion, which would lead one to conclude that only pluralistic societies offer an environment that is conducive for practicing strategic public relations” (Sandvoss, 2008).

Moloney (2006) argues that the most important question about public relations is how it relates to democracy. He sets forward three outcomes of public relations: it can have a beneficial, neutral or negative effect on democracy. Central to the theory of public relations having a neutral effect, Moloney (2006) argues, is the separation between a deliberative, Athenian form of democracy, and a representative, pragmatic, elitist one. The deliberative form of democracy is, similar to what Habermas (1989) advocates, characterised by people thinking and debating in society, reaching a rational and logical conclusion to an argument. The representative form, however, is characterised by competition, with political parties and governments ‘selling’ their policies to voters competing for their votes. The representative model fits public relations, according to Moloney (2006), because public relations represents the ‘voices’ of different actors in society vying for recognition and acceptance of their viewpoints. The neutral view of public relations does not, however, focus on the strength and resources of the actors in society, but simply views it as a “technical component of the promotional culture that has a neutral effect on the democracy in which that component works” (Moloney, 2006, p. 77).

In the beneficial perspective of public relations’ effect on democracy, public relations is viewed as having the potential of being a facilitator for actors in the civil society. In this view, it is the responsibility of the government to provide groups and associations with

“sufficient public goods and entitlements to commit them to publicly imposed order and cooperation” (Rosenblum & Post, 2002, as cited in Moloney, 2006, p. 79). Therefore, in a beneficial perspective, public relations would be made equal to all organisations and groups so that they could compete in the marketplace of ideas in liberal democracies.

Moloney (2006) suggests expanding ‘information subsidies’ to less resourceful groups and organisations in society that normally would not reach a minimum level of operational capacity, thus equalising resources and benefitting society by inviting more voices to the public arena. ‘Information subsidies’ is a term coined by Gandy (1982, as cited in Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009, p. 4) and includes all efforts by public relations practitioners to reduce “the prices faced by others for certain information to increase its consumption” (p. 12). In short, ‘information subsidies’ constitute anything that will provide beneficial attention around one’s organisation, be it a press release, an exclusive interview to one media outlet, or even tweets or Facebook updates that are not directly targeted to the media. ‘Information subsidies’ have become increasingly important in a competitive political public relations environment with several political parties vying for the attention of the news media (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011).

The final view of how public relations influences democracy is that it has a negative effect on it. Moloney (2006) believes this best describes the effect of public relations’ on democracy. Far from being able to equalise the resources, he contends that public relations ‘sours’ pluralism through endless public argument, and tends towards a culture where ‘having arguments’ takes precedence over ‘making arguments’. Hence, according to Moloney (2006), public relations in its current form does not contribute to equalising the different voices of society and is therefore damaging to democracy. The negative effects view holds that public relations is limited to the ones who can pay for it, and that it serves those who are financially privileged. This “asymmetry of communication

expresses and reinforces unequal power relationships” (Moloney, p. 88). Consequently in this view, there are groups and organisations in society that fall short of the necessary resources to make themselves heard.

2.6 Environmental variables in public relations

In order to design a public relations strategy suitable to a given country, Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) argue that one must take into account five variables determining what kind of public relations can be practiced there. The five variables are: political ideology, economic system (including the level of development of the country’s economy), degree of activism, culture, and the nature of the media. Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) collapsed these five variables into three factors: a country’s infrastructure (political system, economic development and level of activism), media environment and societal culture.

2.6.1 Infrastructure

Each of the infrastructural variables is interrelated and influences how public relations is practiced in a country (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009). The two authors argue that public relations thrive on public opinion and that “only pluralistic societies offer an environment that is conducive for practicing public relations” (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009, p. 4). Countries with less developed democratic traditions tend to emphasise one-way communication over two-way communication. A feature of current international developments, the two authors argue, is that more countries are making the transition into being a democracy, although the latest annual report by the non-governmental organisation Freedom House (2013) points to a rocky landscape with several countries experiencing setbacks in the degree of freedom their populations enjoy, whereas others are showing more positive trends. Ninety countries in the world are recognised as “free

countries” by the organisation, which is just one more than what it was in 2002, but 15 more than in 1992 (Freedom House, 2013).

Political ideology is key to the economic development in a country, and in turn how public relations is practiced there, as political decisions affect economic decisions and also the stability of a country. Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) distinguish between three types of political systems: Western industrialised democracies, communist states, and developing countries. A further division can be made between seven types of political systems, where the increasingly common type is the one that is conducive to this study: namely democracies where “multiple parties compete in open elections to earn the right to rule for a predetermined period. ... In democracies, opposition parties have a fair chance of winning power or participate in power sharing as members of a coalition government” (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009, p. 6). The conduct of strategic public relations has the best conditions in pluralistic societies.

Regarding the level of economic development, a market economy is thought to favour pluralism and by extension provides better conditions for public relations. The conditions for public relations also improves in developed countries with strong robust economies, because one will find a higher number of organisational actors and a higher degree of competition among organisations (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009). Also, the level of economic development directly influences variables such as poverty, quality and usage of the Internet, and infrastructure in general such as roads, telephones and railways, which consequently can impact on strategies and techniques public relations practitioners are able to use in a country.

Activism is directly related to the political ideology and economical development in a country, because only in pluralistic societies is activism tolerated. Hence, the more

activism in a country, the greater the number of voices in society and the conditions for public relations will as a consequence improve.

2.6.2 Culture

The link between culture and public relations is evident. In fact, communication and culture are “inseparably linked” (Mersham, Peart, Theunissen, 2009, p. 59). Boon (1972, as cited in Mersham et al., 2009) wrote that culture “renders complex human phenomena communicable” (p. 59). Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) argue that as culture is fundamental in understanding societies, it is vital to take this variable into account when designing public relations strategies in different regions of the world.

There are hundreds of definitions of the term ‘culture’. It can be defined as a “set of attributes and products of human societies, and therewith of mankind, which are extrasomatic and transmissible by mechanisms other than biological heredity” (Kroeber & Kluckhorn, 1952, as cited in Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009, p. 11). A much-used definition in public relations is that of Geert Hofstede, who conducted a large opinion survey on IBM employees in 70 different countries mapping their cultural values. Hofstede (1984, as cited in Hofstede, 2007) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 413).

On the basis of his research at IBM, Hofstede introduced four cultural variables, which included power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and uncertainty avoidance (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011). A fifth dimension, long-term versus short-term orientation, was added in 1991, but recently abandoned for two new ones: namely pragmatism versus normative and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, 2013b). The power distance dimension describes to what extent people in a society accept and expect power to be distributed unequally in society. Societies with a low

power distance strive to equalise distribution in society and are characterised by high social mobility, whereas societies with a high power distance accept a hierarchical order with low social mobility in which everybody has a place (Hofstede, 2013a).

The second dimension, individualism versus collectivism, refers to the continuum between the loosely-knit individualistic social framework on one side, where individuals are left to themselves and expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families, and the tightly-knit framework of collectivism on the other side, where the society is emphasised ahead of the individual (Hofstede, 2013a). In collectivist societies, group goals are more important than individual goals, and the focus is rather on 'we' than 'I'.

The third dimension, masculinity versus femininity, also represents two contrasting views. Masculinity refers to a preference towards heroism, assertiveness and material reward for success, whereas femininity emphasises caring for the weak, quality of life, and a society that is more consensus-oriented (Hofstede, 2013a). The fourth dimension, uncertainty avoidance, is about what extent the members of a society handle uncertainty and ambiguity. Countries with a low uncertainty avoidance score are relaxed when faced with the uncertain prospects of the future, whereas countries with a high score would want to adhere to rigid codes of belief and behaviour to cope with the uncertainty of the future (Hofstede, 2013a).

The new fifth dimension, pragmatic versus normative, is related to the latter. Simply, in countries with a high degree of pragmatism, most people do not have to explain everything, because the intricacies of life are too complex to explain. Normative societies, on the other hand, will emphasise achieving quick results, establishing the absolute truth, and will have a great respect for traditions. The final sixth dimension is indulgence versus restraint, and refers to how much happiness members of a society

allow themselves. An indulgent society will emphasise leisure, and allow a “relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun” (Hofstede, 2013a, para. 6). A society that is described by restraint is consequently the opposite, and suppresses drives that members of the society may have, such as freedom of expression or assembly.

The cultural dimension has been criticised by L'Etang (2008) among others, for not being able to describe anything but the designed variables. It leaves out other details that may be of importance in understanding cultural practice, L'Etang argues. Hofstede (2011) has admitted that the cultural dimensions do not represent a complete analysis of what characterises a culture, and he has, as mentioned, revised his dimensions owing to recent research conducted by Michael Minkov (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011).

2.6.3 Media

The relationship between public relations practitioners and the news media is a much-researched and very important field in public relations (Ledingham, 2006; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011). In fact, according to Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) there is a “near unanimity among authors of public relations literature that the media and public relations have a symbiotic, sometimes contentious, relationship” (p. 14).

Nevertheless, public relations, and political public relations in particular, should not be equated with news management. Political public relations is much broader than strategies for influencing the media. Modern political public relations instead aims “to *build relationships* with others to help achieve political goals, and certainly long-term positive relationships cannot exist when one party aims to deceive, to overpower, or to isolate the other from the truth” (Martinelli, 2011, p. 33). The idea of controlling communication, according to Grunig (2009), comes from a paradigm of public relations practitioners viewing their profession as a messaging, publicity, informational, and

media relations function. Grunig (2009) calls the belief of proficiently being able to control what messages publics are exposed to “an illusion” (p. 4). Unsurprisingly, Grunig (2009) does not endorse this ‘illusion’, and claims publics themselves control what messages they are exposed to.

According to Sriramesh and Verčič, however, mass media do play a vital role in influencing and shaping public opinion (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009). Because of this effect, they argue, media relations remain an important part of public relations professionals’ daily conduct. Owing to the integral link between public relations and media, understanding the media environment in a particular country is key to “develop[ing] strategies for conducting effective media relations suitable to that environment” (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009, p. 17).

Three factors can be used to understand and adapt to the media environment around the world: media control, media diffusion and media access (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009). Media control is essentially about how free the media is in a given country, and whether attempts are made to control editorial content. Editorial freedom is “directly proportional to the level of economic development in a country” (Sriramesh & Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009, p. 18).

Media diffusion is about being able to create exposure for a public relations practitioner’s messages. Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) see it as an essential part of public relations professionals’ jobs to use the media for disseminating information to as wide an audience as possible. In this process, the two authors argue for the importance of creating symbiotic relationships with members of the media, and endorse providing information subsidies to media outlets. However, Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) argue that reaching the media in itself may not provide the public relations practitioner with satisfactory coverage, and so to reach a larger populace one may have to “think of other

media that reach out to these untapped publics” (p. 19). The two authors are mainly concerned with how to reach publics in the developing world, but as the media landscape in Western countries may be seen as fragmented and difficult to navigate, this factor may be applied to developed countries as well.

The final media factor refers to access, and denotes the extent to which “the various segments of a society can approach the media to disseminate messages they deem important” (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009, p. 20). Media in certain countries may be particularly wary of covering activists. In countries where media is more interested in covering activism, there will be more opportunities to practice public relations. Consequently, it is a natural assumption that in countries where the media is accessible to most segments in the country, the tasks of a political public relations practitioner will be of a more varying and diverse nature than in countries where fewer segments of society are able to gain access to the media.

2.7 Digital and social media

Another vital development to both public relations and mass media in recent years is the advancement of digital media and social media, which has greatly impacted the practice of both fields (Grunig, 2009). Social media is “the term given to online technologies which allow users to interact with each other in some way” (Gordon, 2011, p. 339). Anyone can now be “a journalist, members of public can talk freely to each other about organisations, and information is widely available to everyone with little cost and effort” (Grunig, 2009, p. 4). This development has made it much more difficult, maybe impossible, to control communication. Nevertheless, although the new media landscape has become increasingly fragmented (Gordon, 2011), from a strategic communication perspective, political public relations practitioners still “know the media are important

places to begin to build awareness of issues and to perhaps ‘seed’ receiver relationships through message saliency and conveyed personal attributes” (Martinelli, 2011, p. 40).

The notion of controlling communication is also one that is familiar from a journalistic point of view, but that has eroded over the last few years because of social media (Kent, 2013). The ability of journalists to be gatekeepers, controlling the information they disseminate to publics, has been reduced, because publics now regularly are able to get “information of value directly from organizations via social media, hand-held devices, etc. Technology has changed the way that citizens obtain and weigh information, and the way that public relations functions” (Kent, 2013, p. 337).

An increasing number of television and radio channels, coupled with the emergence of the Internet and consequently digital and social media, has led to a fragmentation of how publics obtain information. Writing from a US perspective, Kent (2013) argues that the Internet has broken the idea of shared knowledge. Until the 1980s, there were a limited number of television and radio channels in the US, and because a great proportion of publics paid attention to those media outlets, journalists working there were better able to exercise their traditional role as the fourth estate. Journalists in this period helped keep people informed and served as a safeguard for demagoguery (Kent, 2013). With recent developments, publics have become much harder to reach, and has led to a development where every citizen is his or her own media gatekeeper. Kent (2013) hence echoes Grunig’s (2009) assertion that publics are not greatly influenced by the media, but while Grunig argues that members of publics have always controlled the messages they are exposed to, Kent (2013) attributes traditional media’s decreasing influence to the profusion of television and radio channels and the emergence of the Internet.

According to Kent (2013) this development has a detrimental effect from a democratic standpoint. Instead of the media taking the role as an ‘educator’ and an agenda-setter (Kent, 2013), the power has increasingly shifted towards publics with the increasing use of so called ‘user-generated content’ defined as “any form of content such as video, blogs, discussion form posts, digital images, audio files, and other forms of media that was created by consumers ... and is publically available to other consumers” (*UGC*, 2012, para. 1). A feature of user-generated content, as the name suggests, is that it is created outside professional routines and practices (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014). Consequently, social media have placed the “burden of learning about important information and weighing sources of information, squarely on the shoulders of the average citizen” (Kent, 2013, p. 338). In this view, despite social media providing a plethora of avenues for expressions, it still has an inhibiting impact on democracy.

Furthermore, Kent (2013) disputes that social media is facilitating an improved dialogue among members of society, because dialogue is more than just tweeting status updates and posting content onto one’s Facebook account. Dialogue represents a give and take process, Kent (2013) argues, which occurs between two people or in small groups that observe strict rules of decorum to maintain fairness. He therefore proposes to develop new forms of social media that would better facilitate communication between individuals, and not regard them as customers, which he argues is the case today as many forms of social media are filled with advertisement. This new form of dialogue therefore cannot be conducted on Twitter or Facebook, which Kent (2013) argues are poorly designed for substantive discussions, but will have to take place in wholly new social media platforms. Furthermore, he contends that the identity of participants must be public and verifiable, clear rules for participation must exist, and experts and divergent voices should be encouraged to take part.

Grunig (2009) seems less pessimistic about the prospects of using social media in a manner that is conducive to two-way symmetrical communication:

The new digital media have dialogical, interactive, relational, and global properties that make them perfectly suited for a strategic management paradigm of public relations – properties that one would think would force public relations practitioners to abandon their traditional one-way, message-oriented, asymmetrical and ethnocentric paradigm of practice. (Grunig, 2009, p. 6)

He argues that the Internet has empowered publics, making them less constrained by information that is given to them, and more able to find information themselves, not just from journalists. Moreover, the process of environmental scanning has been made easier by the emergence of digital media. One can for instance use media monitoring tools such as Google alerts to follow an organisation or an issue that may have implications for how one wants to communicate. Grunig (2009) explicitly names Twitter, a micro-blogging platform launched in 2006 allowing users in 140 characters to formulate a message (Pentina, Basmanova, & Zhang, 2014), as a new social media outlet that is helpful in facilitating two-way symmetrical communication.

Irrespective of one's position on the potential of social media in democracy and for facilitating real dialogue, it seems clear that social media do play a role in understanding the media landscape of today. As a result, "future investigations of political media relations should move beyond mainstream media analyses and include comparisons with all different types of media in order to broaden our understanding of news management processes in politics" (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, p. 318).

Chapter 3 Methodology

This thesis applies a qualitative, interpretivist and comparative methodology using interviews as the main method of data collection in order to highlight the views of central political public relations practitioners in two countries apt for comparison.

Six political public relations officers, representing three leading political parties in Norway and three in New Zealand, were interviewed. The interviewees' relationship with members of the media and publics interpreted through the Excellence Theory, which is the basis of public relations knowledge, will serve as the methodological framework for this thesis.

Firstly in this chapter, it will be argued that a qualitative approach is needed in this research project, as it focuses on the experiences and viewpoints of participants, not on quantifiable data, which is typical of quantitative studies. Secondly, the research question in this thesis, and what it entails, will be discussed. Thirdly in the chapter, the interpretivist paradigm and its application to this thesis are elaborated. A process of first, second and third order interpretation will be introduced as the method of analysing the interview data. The central argument here is that interpretation encourages the researcher to make meaning and contextualise the research, which is necessary in order to understand how the participants view and practice two-way symmetrical communication.

The fourth section discusses the use of interviews as a research method. It argues a semi-structured approach is ideal as it provides the research with a useful framework, but also allows exploration of unexpected findings during the course of the interviews. The section also details issues related to identifying and contacting the interviewees, ethical considerations, and a discussion on advantages and disadvantages about using the interview as the main method of data gathering. Finally, the fifth section of the

chapter provides a rationale for comparing New Zealand and Norway, arguing that the two countries relative similarity offers an ideal situation in which to conduct a comparative approach. A cultural-context and a case-study comparative research approach are introduced as models in which this comparative research project may be understood.

3.1 A qualitative approach

Qualitative research is not always appropriate for every research question, it depends on what kind of research it is and what one is trying to achieve (Silverman, 2005). In this section, it will be argued that a qualitative approach is appropriate for this study, as it is of interest what views political public relations professionals in Norway and New Zealand hold about communicating to their publics.

Qualitative research in social sciences is described as “interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical in nature. Using language to understand concepts based on people’s experiences, it attempts to create a sense of the larger realm of human experiences” (Brennen, 2013, p. 4). Quantitative research, on the other hand, uses “numbers and numerical correlations within value-free environments to measure and analyze the causal relationships between variables” (Brennen, 2013, p. 3). While quantitative research by some has been as more authentic and scientific than qualitative research because of its quantifiable nature, qualitative research is about mapping meaningful relations, understanding that reality is socially constructed and supports that the researcher has an active role in the research process (Kvale, 1996, as cited in Brennen, 2013).

Another delineation should be made between what constitutes ‘methods’ and what constitutes ‘methodology’. Silverman (2005) defines methodology as “the choices we make about cases to study, methods of data, gathering, forms of data analysis etc., in

planning and executing a research study” (p. 378). Ragin (1987, as cited in Lor, 2011) also argue that methodology is a broad, overarching concept, when stating that social science methodology does “not concern mere technique; it concerns the relationship between thinking and researching. The key concern here is impact of the organization of the investigation and the structure of the data analysis on how the investigator thinks about the subject” (p. 1). Methods, on the other hand, refers to specific methods one uses to execute ones methodology, such as interviews, focus groups, and audio or video recordings (Silverman, 2010).

This qualitative, interpretivist methodology of textual data was chosen because it would capture the views of political public relations practitioners in Norway and New Zealand, and using interviews as the main method would best serve this purpose. Qualitative research seeks to go deeper, and explain something in more depth, than what quantitative researchers do. The data collected in qualitative research is characterised by a high degree of trustworthiness and authenticity (Brennen, 2013); however, qualitative researchers are less likely to generalise their findings as they are looking for meanings rather than facts. This is also true for this study where the data represent only the views of the individuals interviewed, and by extension to some extent the parties they represent. Qualitative researchers do not “operationalize research terms, construct hypotheses, conduct experiments, measure data or replicate findings” (Brennen, 2013, p. 15).

3.2 Research question

A feature of a qualitative research methodology is the formulation of a research question. Quantitative studies, on the other hand, formulate hypotheses (Brennen, 2013). Importantly, research questions should be clearly stated, specific and researchable; it needs to be possible to answer them. Brennen (2013) recommends

qualitative research questions to be open-ended in order “to understand a variety of potential responses, experiences and connections (p. 20). The research question for this study was formulated to capture two geographical regions, a theoretical framework, and to include a variety of potential data. This is the research question of this thesis is:

How do political public relations practitioners in key Norwegian and New Zealand political parties view the use of two-way symmetrical communication? As media relations are central to political public relations practitioners’, this research project focuses on the application of two-way symmetrical communication in the interaction between practitioners and members of the media. However, other aspects, such as societal culture and digital media environments will be explored to give a fuller picture of the landscape in which practitioners operate. This is important, because the landscape determines what kind of public relations practitioners are able to practice.

The Excellence Theory, of which two-way symmetrical communication is an integral part, provides a well-tested theoretical framework for research. Although focusing on the notion of two-way symmetrical communication, the data will be analysed using the Excellence Theory as the framework. This is because the other features of the Excellence Theory reinforce and provide necessary conditions for the practice of two-way symmetrical communication (J. Grunig, L. Grunig & Dozier, 2006). However, to limit the scope of the study, the focus of this research project is on two-way symmetrical communication, the central aspect of the Excellence Theory. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the three environmental variables presented by Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) provide a useful way of comparing the two countries in a way that is conducive to the practice of public relations.

Alternatively or additionally, this research project could have applied a questionnaire involving several actors within political public relations. Furthermore, instead of

conducting interviews, data emanating from political public relations professionals, such as tweets, Facebook posts, press releases, or YouTube uploads, could have served as the units of analysis. With such an approach, one might have better understood how two-way symmetrical communication is practiced, but it would not have focused on the views of the political public relations practitioners. However, research from a New Zealand or Norwegian perspective on how new digital media may or may not facilitate two-way symmetrical communication in present-day political public relations by analysing political content in channels such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter, would certainly be valuable and enrich the literature in the field.

3.3 Interpretivist paradigm

Interpretation as methodology can be used both quantitatively and qualitatively. In essence, interpretation is about assigning significance and giving coherent meaning to your data (Neuman, 2000). This study applies interpretation because it is a useful way of making meaning of the data from the participants.

Interpretation in a quantitative study would involve interpreting one's data, usually expressed in numbers as percentages or in another statistical form, and verifying or disproving an hypothesis. A qualitative researcher, on the other, interprets data by:

giving them meaning, translating them, or making them understandable. However, the meaning he or she gives begins with the point of view of the people being studied. He or she interprets data by finding out how the people being studied see the world, how they define the situation, or what it means for them. (Neuman, 2000, p. 148)

There are three steps in qualitative interpretation (Neuman, 2000). First-order interpretation involves a researcher understanding the meaning of the collected data as seen from the perspective of the interviewee, or whatever is being examined. A “researcher’s discovery and reconstruction of this first-order interpretation is a *second-*

order interpretation, because the researcher comes in from the outside to discover what occurred” (Neuman, 2000, p. 148). Lindlof and Taylor (2011) posit that the researcher constructs symbolic links, or tropes, that tie the first-order meanings to second-order concepts that explains the patterns of the first-order data. This “act of translation adds tremendous value to a study by using theories, other conceptual devices, and your own imagination to understand the data and their analytical categories in a new light” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 266). The process of assigning first and second order interpretation is used to analyse the interview data in this study

This process is key to this study, as the interviewees’ viewpoints would be of a lesser value if they were only presented isolated, as opposed to contextualising the data and adding value to them. For instance, when one of the interviewees said that she viewed “building our organisation” as her main objective, the researcher may argue this is conducive with the notion of two-symmetrical communication and the Excellence Theory, because it empowers the public relations function within the organisation. This is a subjective deduction of the data, but the study’s methodology allows and encourages such deductions to be made. Neuman (2000) views second-order interpretation as contextualising data, and third-level interpretation as moving to a broader level of interpretation where theoretical frameworks are drawn in and understood on the basis of the second-order interpretation. Hence, the above interpretation may be said to be a third-level interpretation of the data.

Exemplars are another feature of an interpretivist approach. An exemplar is “a segment of data used to shape and advance an argument” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 268). Exemplars can take the form of an interview excerpt, or it can be a longer episode from multiple sources. Exemplars function as ‘apt illustrations’, or descriptions of an event that illustrates a general principle (Gluckman, 1961, as cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

In this study, interview segments of how communicative practices in political parties may or may not be conducive with the notion of two-way symmetrical communication will serve as exemplars.

When “you are ready to develop an interpretation from the results of the data analysis, these incidents, especially the most compelling or representative ones – are shaped into exemplars” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 269). Exemplars, Lindlof and Taylor (2011) argue, are the best evidence a researcher can present, because they perform the work of, and act as the substructure for, interpretative claims. Without exemplars, the claims of a qualitative study would be unpersuasive (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

3.4 Interview as a research method

An interview is a “focused, purposeful conversation between two or more people” (Brennen, 2013, p. 27). A research interview can be divided into three different types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured open-ended conversations. In this research, semi-structured interviews were selected, which allowed for in-depth responses where interviewees could elaborate.

Semi-structured interviews are based on a pre-established set of questions that are asked to all respondents (Brennen, 2013). There is, however, a much greater flexibility in this interview form compared to a structured interview, allowing for follow-up questions to allow the interviewee to elaborate on something he or she said. A structured interview, on the other hand, uses a standardised procedure with questions that include a limited range of responses and are open to a minimum of interpretation. Structured interviews also do not permit improvisation and follow-up questions. As the results chapter will show, many clarifying answers were given when interviewees were asked follow-up questions. Unstructured interviews focus more on the emotions and feelings of the interviewees, as well as the meaning within the words that are spoken. Because the

viewpoints of the interviewees were the focus of the study, it did not seek to uncover feelings or emotions, which would require an unstructured interview approach.

The difference between a quantitative interview and a qualitative interview should also be noted. A quantitative interview approach is concerned with the collection of quantifiable facts that in turn can be used to generalise something.

A qualitative interview strives to understand the meanings of information, opinions and interests in each respondent's life. Through face-to-face, in-depth conversations using semi-structured or unstructured interview questions, qualitative interviewing explores respondents' feelings, emotions, experiences and values within their deeply nuanced inner worlds. (Brennen, 2013, p. 28)

Listening is a central part of conducting qualitative interviews, and was integral in the interview process in this thesis. Interviewers, Brennen (2013) argue, must listen carefully to the conversation and remain open and flexible throughout the interview.

The interviews may take unexpected turns and detours, and the interviewer should be aware of that. During the research interviews, 'detours' were taken when the researcher felt the need to explore a topic in more detail. Some of the detours did provide data and exemplars valuable to answering the research question, whereas others were of less value.

However, there were times where follow-up questions might have been asked that could have led to valuable detours, but the researcher was not on the alert. The interview framework could possibly also have been applied less rigorously at times to allow a smoother execution of the interviews. In general, however, the approach worked well; the researcher collected the necessary data, and the interviewees voiced no objections to the conduct of the interviews. Arguably, the researcher's background as a radio journalist conducting interviews on a daily basis provided him with a familiar research method to that of his profession.

3.4.1 Ethical framework

In research projects where the subjects of one's research are not already in the public domain, an ethics application must be submitted. The ethics application for this research project was approved on May 17, 2013, allowing the researcher to conduct the six qualitative interviews he sought. In this study, all the interviewees were provided with an information sheet about the research project, as well as an interview guide at least seven days before the interview was conducted. Before the interviews could commence, all interviewees also had to sign a consent form that detailed the process of the thesis project.

As a researcher, making sure each interviewee has given an informed consent is paramount (Brennen, 2013). Informed consent is the act of giving information about the research that is relevant to the interviewees' decisions about whether to participate, making sure subjects understand the information given to them, and ensuring that participating is voluntary (Silverman, 2010).

The consent form ensured the interviewees that they:

- Could contact the researcher at any time up until the submission of the thesis for any questions.
- Would be sent the quotes they contributed for approval, and if they wanted, also the full thesis when completed.
- Had the right to withdraw from the research project at any time, and also had the right to retract or amend comments they make.
- Had read the information sheet, and understood the project and their contribution.

Moreover, the consent form, as well as preceding email correspondence with the interviewees, made clear that the interviews would be audiotaped and subsequently

transcribed. The transcripts with the Norwegian participants were first transcribed in Norwegian and then translated into English by the researcher.

While each respondent has the right to privacy (Brennen, 2013), not disclosing the names of the interviewees and their respective political parties was not considered to be a pressing concern in this research project. As demonstrated in chapter 1, political public relations depends on an open and transparent society where multiple actors compete to voice their views in the marketplace of opinions. In a situation such as this, it would be surprising if the interviewees felt they needed to hide their identities. Despite all the participants being experienced and trained sources, it was made clear that only their names and the political parties they work for would be disclosed in the thesis, and no personal information unless authorised by them would be published.

3.4.2 Identifying and contacting interviewees

Three main and comparable political parties in each country were represented in this research project. The Labour Party in Norway is the ‘sister party’ of the Labour Party in New Zealand, both parties being based on social democratic principles of politics and situated centre-left in the political spectrum (Bull, & Tvedt, 2013; Aimer, 2013).

Similarly, the Conservative Party in Norway is the ‘sister’ party of the National Party in New Zealand, both being conservative, centre-right and based on free-market principles (Garvik, Notaker, & Tvedt, 2013b; James, 2012). The Green Party in New Zealand and the Liberal Party in Norway, although not directly compatible in their overall policy platform, have the environment and ‘green’ policies as their main agenda (Garvik, Grimnes, & Tvedt, 2013a; The Green Party, 2012), and thus share many of the same concerns.

The main criterion for selecting the participants was that they held senior positions in the parties’ communications departments. In addition, in order for the data to be able to

be compared, the positions held by the participants needed to be fairly equal. Ideally, the most senior communications adviser of each party would participate. However, it was difficult to have interview with the same positions because of three reasons.

Firstly, neither the National Party nor the New Zealand Labour Party (henceforth referred to as ‘the NZ Labour Party’) had employed one individual in charge of all of the communications’ efforts in the respective parties. Such an individual was only employed in election years, according to Julian Robins, the NZ Labour Party interviewee.

Secondly, and more germane, the researcher found after approaching four communications employees that no one employed in the National Party is permitted to take part in research projects (National Party source, personal communication, 2013). A secondary solution was found by contacting Michelle Boag, a previous President and Communications Manager of the party and still involved in various capacities.

Lastly, the organisation of the political parties in both countries affected the communication employees’ roles and relation to the parties. In both New Zealand and Norway, there are separate communications departments for the members of parliament, the government and the pertaining ministries, and for some parties also for the central party organisation. It is not the mission of this research project to analyse the organisational structure of the political parties the participants represented, but it is of importance to note that they are structured differently than other organisations. Four of the interviewees were employed in the central organisation of their political parties, whereas two were not. Julian Robins was at the time of the interview the Chief Press Secretary of the then NZ Labour Party leader David Shearer. Michelle Boag, as mentioned, no longer held a formal position in the National Party.

Julian Robins at the NZ Labour Party was interviewed on August 2, 2013, three weeks before the resignation of David Shearer as leader of the party. Robins was at the time in all likelihood the individual at his party most suitable for participation in this research project. As the Chief Press Secretary of the leader of the opposition, he had the responsibility of overseeing how David Shearer, and by default the NZ Labour Party as a whole, communicated (Robins, 2013). Also note that all the Norwegian political parties in this research project are referred to by their commonly accepted English names. Arbeiderpartiet's name in English is 'the Labour Party', to distinguish it from its New Zealand 'sister party', the terms 'the Norwegian Labour Party' and 'the NZ Labour Party' will be used where it is otherwise unclear. Venstre's English name is 'the Liberal Party', and Høyre's is 'the Conservative Party'.

Below is a list of the interviewees in this research project:

- Andrew Campbell, Communications Director of the Green Party (NZ)
- Julian Robins, Chief Press Secretary of the New Zealand Labour Party at the time of the interview
- Michelle Boag, former President and Communications Manager of the National Party (NZ)
- Steinar Haugsvær, Head of Communications of the Liberal Party (Norway)
- Pia Gulbrandsen, Head of Communications of the Norwegian Labour Party (Norway)
- Sunniva Ihle Steinstad, Head of Communications of the Conservative Party (Norway)

3.4.3 The questions

The interviews in this research applied chiefly open-ended questions, to which respondents could give any answer (Neuman, 2000). A closed-ended question, on the

other hand (e.g. is the media your most important target audience?), gives the participant the possibility to give a definite and short answer.

There are several benefits and drawbacks to open and close-ended questions. In an open-ended question, the participant could answer in too much detail, the answer could be too general, and different participants may give different degrees of detail in their answers (Neuman, 2000). On the other hand, open-ended questions permit an unlimited number of possible answers, unanticipated findings can be discovered, they reveal a respondent's thinking process, and also permit adequate answers to complex issues. Close-ended questions are easier and quicker for participants to answer, they give answers that are easier to compare, and provide the researcher with an easier coding process. However, Neuman (2000) argues, they force people to make choices they would not make in the real world, and often participants with little or no knowledge choose to answer.

The open-ended approach allowed participants to explicate on issues that could be challenging to explain with just one or two sentences. When the researcher wanted a clearer answer, however, he did ask close-ended follow-up questions on several occasions. This approach is endorsed by Brennen (2013), who suggests starting the interview with an 'icebreaker question', an uncontroversial and 'easy' question used to set off the interview, before moving on to a combination of open-ended questions interspersed by close-ended follow-up questions to seek clarification and delve deeper into the topic of the question.

3.4.4 A discussion on the interview

In a qualitative interview, the researcher's role is to "encourage authentic, useful and in-depth responses from each respondent" (Brennen, 2013, p. 34). The best qualitative interviewers, Brennen (2013) argues, are creative, flexible and open to trying a variety

of different strategies. There are obvious pros and cons with using a qualitative interview approach in general, and a cross-cultural interview approach such as this specifically. Silverman (2010) notes that the data emanating from interviews, although accurate from the participants' perspective, may still reflect a narrative through which they interpret or describe the world. The other way of looking at a qualitative interview, he explains, is to view it as a description of the "gritty realities of people's lives" (Silverman, 2010, p. 154).

Brennen (2013) remarks that several researchers are worried that interviewees are not providing factually correct information. In this thesis, the opinions of the participants are the central focus, and so factual-based comments are secondary. In this research project, however, the participants' factual responses may be considered valid as they are expected 'to getting their facts right' regularly talking with members of the media who depend on factually correct answers.

Concerning the cross-cultural aspect of the thesis it should be noted that the researcher is not a native English speaker, and so could lose nuances in the interviews that first language speakers would pick up. On the other hand, interviews with the Norwegian participants were conducted via Skype, which may be less rich than conducting interviews in person. Also, all pertinent documents, such as the interview invitations, the project information sheet, as well as the interview guide, were originally written in English before they were translated into Norwegian by the researcher. Even with great care taken to ensure a proper translation of all documents, nuances can be lost and inaccuracies can occur in a process such as this. However, with the interviews conducted in Norwegian, the researcher could possibly pick up nuances, both from a linguistic and a cultural viewpoint, which might have been lost or not fully understood in the interviews with the New Zealand participants.

3.5 Comparative approach

In this study a comparative approach is used to highlight differences and similarities between political public relations practitioners both within and across the countries of New Zealand and Norway. In order to explain why similarities and differences between practitioners in the two countries exist, it is of importance to look at relevant aspects of both countries that may help explain how political public relations is practiced in the two countries. The three environmental variables proposed by Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) act as a framework for the comparison. That said, this research project can only provide a brief look at relevant infrastructural, cultural and media related aspects of the two countries; investigating all aspects would not be feasible. Comparative research is:

the term widely employed to describe studies of societies, countries, cultures, systems, institutions, social structures and change over time and space, when they are carried out with the intention of using the same research tools to compare systematically the manifestations of phenomena in more than one temporal or sociocultural setting. (Hantrais, 2009, p. 2)

Ragin (1994, as cited in Neuman, 2000) describe the discipline as examining “patterns of similarities and differences across cases and try[ing] to come to terms with their diversity” (p. 401).

This study is most closely related to case-study comparative research, but also employs elements of the cultural-context research approach (Kohn, 1987, as cited in Neuman, 2000). The former focuses on a limited number of cases, and examines them in depth. It does not make broad generalisations, but compares units within societies. This method is helpful for identifying factors that are constant or that vary among a few cases (Ragin, 1987, as cited in Neuman, 2000). In this research, it seeks to identify how common two-way symmetrical communication is among the participants, how it is viewed and practiced. In that sense, two-way symmetrical communication is a factor that can either be constant or vary among the cases in this research project.

In the cultural-context approach, a researcher studies cases that are surrogates for types of societies or units. Societies or countries function as a “backdrop for examining a common social process” (Neuman, 2000, p. 403). In this research, it is argued that it is of importance to investigate certain aspects of Norway and New Zealand, as they influence how political public relations may be practiced in each country.

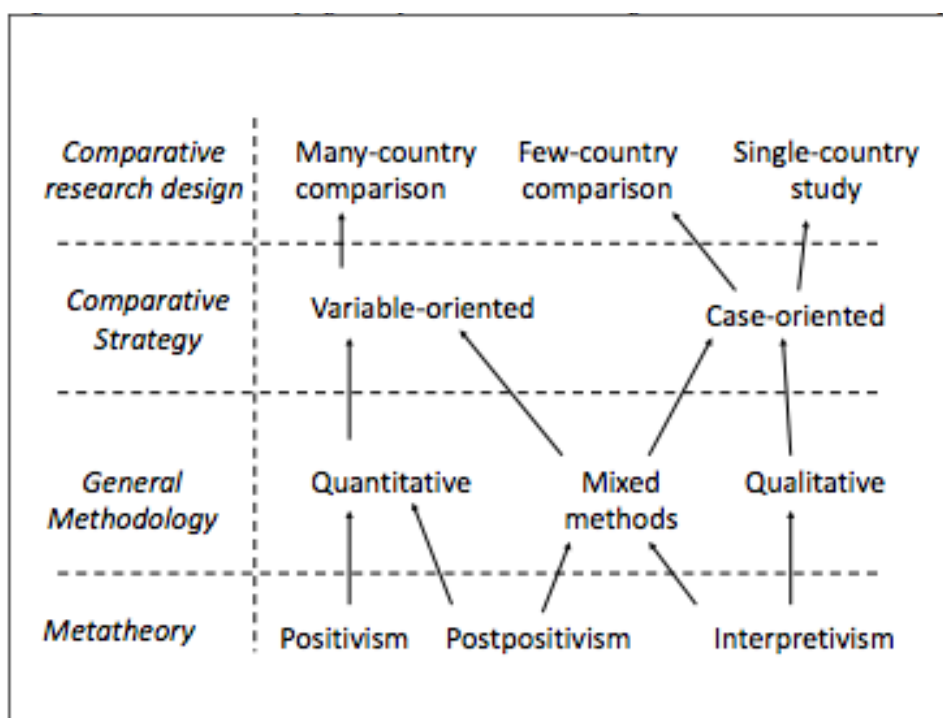


Figure 2: A relationship of comparative methodological choices (Lor, 2011)

Based on the above table, which shows different approaches to country research, this research project is interpretivist, analysing semi-structured interviews against the framework of the Excellence Theory, and is qualitative in looking for meaning rather than statistics; it is case-oriented by analysing semi-structured interviews from six participants, and uses a ‘few-country’ comparative research design focusing on environmental variables in Norway and New Zealand.

3.5.1 Method of agreement and method of difference

The method of agreement and method of difference is a much used and well-tested method for making comparisons developed by John Stuart Mill in the 1800s and still used today (Neuman, 2000). The method of agreement “focuses a researcher’s attention on what is common across cases. The researcher establishes that cases have a common outcome, then tries to locate a common cause, although other features of the cases may differ” (Neuman, 2000, p. 428). In this method, one looks for as many similarities as possible to explain the common outcome in cases.

The method of difference can be considered a ‘double application’ of the method of agreement. In this approach, which often is used in conjunction with the method of agreement, the researcher first locates cases that are similar in many respects but differ in a few crucial ways. The researcher then “pinpoints features whereby a set of cases is similar with regard to an outcome and causal features, and another set whereby the cases differ on outcomes and causal features” (Neuman, 2000, p. 428). These two methods provide a useful method of analysing the differences both intra-nationally and cross-nationally in this research project.

3.5.2 Equivalence

It is critical to briefly touch on the importance of equivalence among the subjects of one’s study. Neuman (2000) argues that without “equivalence, a researcher cannot use the same concepts or measures in different cultures ... and this makes comparison difficult, if not impossible” (p. 409). This concern was highlighted earlier when the positions of the participants were discussed. It is obviously not ideal that not all of the participants held the same positions, but as mentioned, it was not feasible to recruit six participants with identical positions, because of the National Party’s reluctance in participating and the NZ Labour Party’s less prominent communications department in

a non-election year. This is an aspect that is important to be aware of as it does affect the data; nevertheless, this thesis argues the research it presents is still valuable, because it highlights a group of people where there is a scarcity of previous research. There are also equivalence issues in relation to translating documents from English to Norwegian and transcripts from Norwegian to English that the researcher has been aware of during the process of this research project.

Chapter 4 Norway and New Zealand – a comparison

The relative similarity between Norway and New Zealand make the two suitable for a comparative methodological approach, but there are significant differences between the two countries that will be discussed and analysed in this chapter.

A situation where the units of analysis are separate and distinct from each other, but yet relatively similar is ideal for a comparative study. The ‘Galton Problem’, as outlined by Neuman (2000), highlights issues that may arise when there are too many similarities with the units of analysis. If the units are subparts of a larger unit, the validity of the research may also be compromised. Neuman (2000) illustrates the problem by the following example:

If the units are the states and provinces in Canada, France and the United States, a researcher discovers a strong association between speaking English and having the dollar as currency ... Obviously, the association exists because the units of analysis (i.e., states or provinces) are subparts of larger units (i.e., nations). The features of the units are due to their being parts of larger units and not to any relationship among the features. (p. 404)

The New Zealand-Norwegian context largely avoids this problem as they are distinct and separate from each other because of their different historical trajectories, languages and cultural practices. Despite this, the two countries share many similar traits: the size of their populations, development levels, some cultural values (Hofstede, 2013a), relative isolation, geographic features (such as mountains and fjords), indigenous minority populations (the Māori and the Sami), and being export-oriented economies largely dependent on a small number of resources (oil and gas for Norway, dairy and meat products for New Zealand). This makes Norway and New Zealand sufficiently different to be separate and distinct from each other, but sufficiently similar to warrant a comparative approach.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the political system in each country is key to what kind of political public relations one can practice. Moreover, Sriramesh and Verčič (2009) argue that it is “essential to conduct comparative research on the linkage between various political ideologies and public relations” (p. 5). In another paper, Sriramesh (2000) recommends testing conceptual frameworks empirically in different parts of the world. In the following sections, the thesis will use the variables proposed by Sriramesh and Verčič (2009), detailed in the preceding chapter, with a particular emphasis on the political systems and the media landscapes of Norway and New Zealand. As this thesis is concerned about political public relations, it is of high importance to understand how the democracies differ and how this can impact political public relations, as well as how the media landscape in the two countries may differ and may contribute or inhibit the practice of political public relations.

4.1 Infrastructure of New Zealand and Norway

This section provides an analysis of the political history of both countries, albeit rudimentary, but sufficient to contextualise how the respective democratic systems function and affect the practice of political public relations.

Both Norway and New Zealand are arguably progressive countries with deep-rooted liberal values; they are also, however, relatively small, somewhat isolated countries, where ‘everybody knows everybody’. Norway’s population of 5.1 million (Statistics Norway, 2013b) is 12 per cent larger than New Zealand’s population of 4.5 million (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). In addition, Norway’s landmass is 21 per cent larger than New Zealand’s (The World Factbook, 2014b).

Both Norway’s and New Zealand’s founding documents were written in the first half of the 19th century, only 26 years apart. Norway’s democracy started with the 1814 Constitution (Grunnloven), when Norway acquired one of the most democratic

constitutions in Europe (Østerud & Selle, 2006), which led to modern-day Norway (Sejersted, 2013a). The 1814 Constitution established Norway as an independent state. Although Sweden forced Norway into a union later the same year and Norway thus had to relinquish being an independent state, the Swedish government accepted the Norwegian constitution, and the creation of institutions such as the Norwegian Central Bank, Norwegian courts, the first university in the country, and a separate Norwegian government (Sejersted, 2013a).

From 1380 to 1814, Norway was in a different union with Denmark, where Norway had far less powers than in the union with Sweden. After the introduction of the absolute monarchy in 1660, all the power resided with the King of Denmark. The 1814 Constitution reversed the situation, and although Norway remained a monarchy with the king being the head of state, the monarch needed support in the Norwegian parliament, the Storting. The Norwegian constitutional monarchy was thus in place (Sejersted, 2013a). Another important historic year for Norway was 1884 with the introduction of parliamentarianism, which meant that the government needed support in the Storting to remain in power (Sejersted, 2013b). This gave birth to the Liberal Party (Venstre) in 1884, Norway's oldest political party, quickly followed by the Conservative Party (Høyre), and the Labour Party (Arbeiderpartiet) three years later (Sejersted, 2013b). In 1913, Norway introduced universal suffrage, the fourth country in the world to do so. New Zealand in 1893 was the first to introduce universal suffrage.

While the 1814 Constitution is of pivotal importance to Norwegian history, New Zealand does not have a constitution. It does, however, have a founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840. The Treaty of Waitangi was a written agreement between the British Crown and more than 500 Māori chiefs (Orange, 2012). Subsequently, New Zealand became a British colony and Māori became British

subjects. As European settlement expanded, Māori felt the Treaty did not provide them with protection. In 1975, however, the Treaty of Waitangi Act established the Waitangi Tribunal “and began a radical shift in the role of the treaty in the nation’s life” (Orange, 2012, para. ‘Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975’). New Zealand has since attempted to make financial reparations for previous wrongdoings against Māori (Motion, Leitch, & Cliffe, 2009).

The British Parliament passed the New Zealand Constitution Act in 1852, and the General Assembly (today the House of Representatives) first met in 1854. New Zealand became a self-governing territory in 1856 (Wilson, 2013). Contrary to Norway, however, New Zealand did not have to fight for the right to become independent. Through various moves, New Zealand gradually gained more independence. A year that may be considered as the year of independence though was 1947, when the Statute of Westminster was adopted by New Zealand, confirming that Parliament alone had the power to make laws for the country. However, by 1907 New Zealand’s time as a colony ended, and it operated as a dominion (Wilson, 2013).

The history of New Zealand political parties is fractionally younger than Norway’s. The country’s first party, the Liberal Party, was formed in 1891. However, the oldest party still in existence is the NZ Labour Party (Aimer, 2012), formed in 1916 as a workers’ party. The National Party, New Zealand’s biggest and most successful party, was formed in 1936 after the Reform Party and United Party merged (James, 2012). The Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, currently the third biggest in the country, was formed in 1990 (The Green Party, 2012). Its predecessor, the Values Party was formed in 1972 and was, according to the Green Party, the first national green party in the world.

Even though Norway is located in the ‘old world’, it was in many respects a colony of Denmark, then a dominion of Sweden. It was not until 1905 that Norway gained full independence. This came after more than 40 years of brewing nationalism and anti-Swedish sentiments. In fact, Norway declared independence unilaterally on June 7, 1905, without prior consultation with Sweden. A referendum held in Norway on the question of independence gave only 184 no votes and 368,205 yes votes. After a few concessions from Norway, Sweden accepted the dissolution of the union without going to war (Sejersted, 2013a).

Østerud and Selle (2006) argue that Norway’s fight for independence in the late 1800s also contributed in spreading democratic values. Demanding “national independence and democratic reform [were] two sides of the same coin” (Østerud & Selle, 2006, p. 553). The Liberal Party and the Labour Party were in the forefront of the demand for democratic reform and national independence, while the Conservative Party tried to preserve the union with Sweden (Sejersted, 2013b).

This thesis argues that because the modern day states of New Zealand and Norway are much younger than many other Western countries, this has influenced the practice of political public relations. The historical trajectory of both Norway and New Zealand have laid the foundations of two countries with conditions largely conducive to the practice of political public relations, where a high degree of activism and criticism of established institutions are readily accepted, and even encouraged, and where transparency and fairness are important values. There are, however, differences between the countries that are of significance in explaining how political public relations can be, and is, practiced. The following sections will present and discuss some of the most central aspects in understanding what conditions political public relations practitioners face in Norway and New Zealand.

4.2 Political systems

Norway and New Zealand are both unitary states, as opposed to federal states, defined as a system where “most or all of the governing power resides in a centralized government” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013, para. ‘unitary system’). Both countries are also representative democracies, also known as indirect democracies, where the populace elects representatives to represent them in the national parliaments.

The Norwegian Parliament, the Storting, is a unicameral body, to which 169 members are elected every four years. The New Zealand Parliament is also unicameral, and at the 2011 general election 121 members were elected to the House of Representatives to serve a term of three years (Election results, 2011). Seven of those are exclusively Māori seats. In Norway, the Sami people, an indigenous people of northern Scandinavia making up around one per cent of Norway’s population, have their own parliament making recommendations to the Storting on Sami affairs, but no direct seats to the national parliament (Berg-Nordlie, 2013).

A difference between the two countries is how members of parliament (MPs) are elected. In Norway, it is done on a proportional basis, while New Zealand uses a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system, which was passed after a referendum in 1993 and introduced in conjunction with the 1996 general election. This is also a difference from the United Kingdom and the Westminster system of which much of New Zealand’s political system is based (Marsh & Miller, 2012). The MMP system is a “proportional voting system in which the voter has two votes, one to elect their representative and one for their preferred party” (Motion, Leitch, & Cliffe, 2009, p. 115). Prior to 1996, New Zealand used a so-called ‘first past the post’ system, which favoured the two major centralised parties, Labour and National. In the 2011 general election, the MMP system particularly favoured the Green Party and the New Zealand First Party. All of the Green

Party's 14 current MPs are so-called list seats (Electoral Commission, 2011a), meaning that none of them would have been represented with the previous system. All eight of New Zealand First Party's MPs are also list seats. In order for a party to win any list seats it needs at least five per cent of the national vote, and smaller parties would therefore struggle to be represented with a sizable contingent in parliament. In total, 51 of the 121 seats were list seats. A referendum held in conjunction with the 2011 general election gave a 58-42 per cent majority for keeping the current MMP system (Electoral Commission, 2011b).

Motion, Leitch and Cliffe (2009) argue that the introduction of the MMP system is important to the practice of political public relations in New Zealand as it "has made lobbying and power brokering a lot more important and influential in the machinations of government. Lobbying government on behalf of organisations has, therefore, become an important role for public relations consultancies" (p. 115). The MMP system has arguably also opened up for more voices in the public sphere, as two parties clearly have benefitted from the system. In addition, the number of MPs has increased from 80 in 1993 to 121 in 2011, thus also bringing more voices to the fore. Marsh and Miller (2012) are also positive about the MMP system, saying it has led to a more:

effective, responsive and accountable parliament and government. As well as providing greater diversity of representation, as exemplified by the multiplicity of elected parties, ethnicities and other social groups, the New Zealand parliament has assumed a more influential role in scrutinising and constraining the powers of government (p. 333).

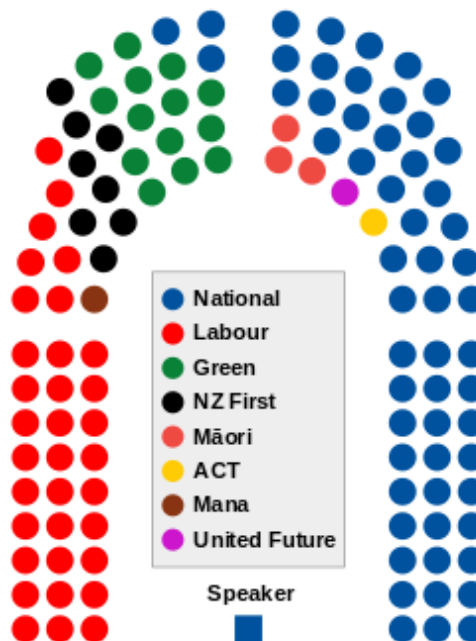


Figure 3: New Zealand House of Representatives after 2011 general election (Wikipedia, 2011)

The above figure shows that the National Party holds 59 of the 121 seats in the New Zealand House of Representatives. The party received just over 47.3 per cent of the vote. Furthermore, the Labour Party holds 34 seats (24.4 per cent of vote); the Green Party holds 14 seats (11 per cent of vote); New Zealand First Party won eight seats (6.5 per cent of the vote); the Māori Party won three seats (1.4 per cent of vote), the Mana Party (1.08 per cent of vote), the ACT (Association of Consumers and Taxpayers) New Zealand Party (1.07 per cent of vote) and United Future New Zealand (0.60 per cent of vote) all won one seat each. The New Zealand Conservative Party received 2.65 per cent of the vote, but did not win any MPs. Four other parties contested the election without winning any seats, all of which received a limited number of votes (Election results, 2011).

In the New Zealand context, a difference should be made between the terms ‘cabinet’ and ‘government’. A cabinet “is the group of government ministers that meets regularly to deliberate on major political issues” (Eichbaum, 2012, para. 1), meaning that there

can be ministers, or associate ministers, outside the cabinet. Currently, New Zealand is ruled by a minority National Party government, called the ‘fifth National government’. It consists of 20 Cabinet members, all of who represent the National Party, plus five National Party ministers outside of the Cabinet. In addition, two Māori Party MPs have ministerial portfolios, as well as the one United Future MP (Department of the Prime Minister, 2014). Thus, ‘government’ refers to all MPs with ministerial responsibilities, whereas ‘cabinet’ only includes the most central.

The fifth National government came to power following the 2008 general election. National Party leader and current Prime Minister of New Zealand, John Key struck separate agreements with the ACT, United Future and Māori parties, which were continued after the 2011 general election. All the Cabinet positions were retained in the National Party, while each of the smaller parties received ministerial portfolios (Marsh & Miller, 2012). The ACT Party, however, resigned its ministerial portfolios in October, 2013 (Davison & McCracken, 2013).

Both the New Zealand House of Representatives as of 2011 and the Norwegian Storting as of the general election in 2013, consist of eight parties. While New Zealand for most of the 20th century had a “rigidly disciplined two-party system” (Nemoto, Pekkanen, Krauss, & Roberts, 2012, p. 505), in which the NZ Labour Party and the National Party were the two main parties, Norway has used a proportional system of representation since the 1921 general election (Berg & Sterri, 2012). Hence, despite not having more parties in parliament, Norwegian voters might be more familiar with a high number of party choices. At the 2013 general election, seven out of the eight parties in the *Storting* received a vote tally above the four per cent threshold, which is required for being allocated proportional MPs. In New Zealand, only four parties managed the same.

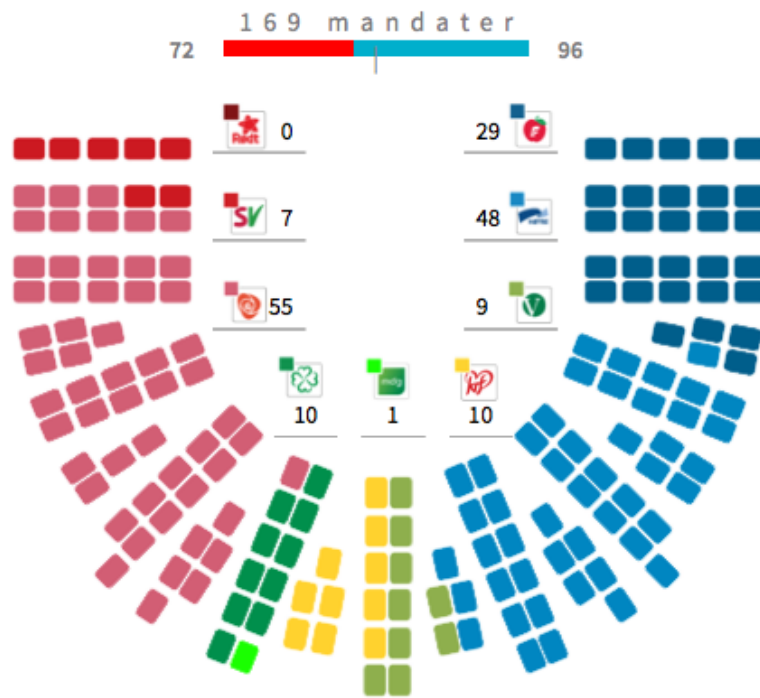


Figure 4: The Norwegian Storting after the 2013 general election (VG, 2013)

The above figure shows the composition of the Storting after the September 9, 2013 general election. The Labour Party (light red) is the biggest party with 55 MPs (30.8 per cent of vote), the Conservative Party (light blue) won 48 MPs (26.8 per cent of vote), the Progress Party (dark blue) holds 29 MPs (16.3 per cent of vote), both the Christian Democratic Party (yellow, 5.6 per cent of vote) and the Centre Party (dark green, 5.5 per cent of vote) won 10 seats in the 2013 election, the Liberal Party (olive green in centre of figure, 5.2 per cent of vote) holds nine seats, the Socialist Left Party (bright red, 4.1 per cent of vote) won seven seats, and the Green Party of Norway (bright green, 2.8 per cent of vote) holds one seat in the Storting. The far-left Red Party received 1.1 per cent of the vote, but no MPs. In addition, six parties received between 0.1 and 0.6 per cent of the vote without winning any seats. Another six parties contested the election (Valgresultater, 2013).

The numbers 72-96 at the top of figure 2.2 refers to the number of MPs for parties in support and against the current government. The current Norwegian government

consists of the Conservative Party and the Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet), with the Liberal and the Christian Democratic parties having signed an ‘agreement of cooperation’ with the government parties. The agreement outlines goals for the government’s policies in the period 2013-2017 and secures the two minor parties influence by being the first point of contact for the government parties’ negotiations in the Storting (Høyre, Fremskrittspartiet, Venstre, & Kristelig Folkeparti, 2013). Similar to New Zealand, the Norwegian government is therefore also a minority government, needing support from other parties in the Storting to obtain a majority of MPs needed to pass new legislation. In the eight years prior to the 2013 general election, a majority government consisting of the Labour, Socialist Left and Centre parties ruled Norway.

From the make up of each country’s legislative assembly, it seems clear that Norway has a more deeply entrenched multi-party system. Although New Zealand has moved away from the ‘rigid two-party system’ with the introduction of the MMP system, the top two political parties still acquired about three quarters of the votes in the last general election, or 93 of the 121 seats in the House of Representatives. The two biggest parties in Norway in comparison, Labour and the Conservative Party, won 57 per cent of the votes and 103 of the 169 seats in the Storting. One could argue that the multiplicity of political parties in Norway makes a political public relations practitioner’s job more challenging. A more diverse political landscape could for instance make the task of environmental scanning more demanding in that the political public relations practitioner may have an interest in knowing the positions of the political parties that a good portion of publics listen to the opinions of.

The current political landscape of New Zealand may seem to be further tilting in a direction favouring an array of political parties. Edwards (2014) coined the upcoming 2014 New Zealand election year, the “year of the micro party”, arguing that “minor

political parties will play a central role in this year's election campaign" (para. 1). There is also an ongoing debate about further reform of the electoral system, with a 2012 review, among other things, recommending that the threshold for being allocated list seats should be dropped from five to four per cent (Electoral Commission, 2012). At the time this thesis was being finalised, no recommendations had been implemented, with the chief commentator of the *New Zealand Herald* alleging that the National Party's "brushing aside of electoral commission advice [was] an act of self-interest which diminishes our democracy" (Armstrong, 2014, para. 1). According to Armstrong, the National Party would lose MPs in subsequent elections by implementing the Electoral Commission's recommendations, and has thus refused to act on the advice that was given.

4.3 Economic development

The two countries share a similar historical trajectory in their economic development, but Norway has become economically much stronger in the last two decades largely owing to its oil and gas industry. Both countries have historically had a large degree of government intervention in their economies; however, starting in the 1980s reforms took place in both countries to deregulate the economies. New Zealand was "transformed ... from being one of the most controlled to one of the most deregulated economies in the world" (Motion, Leitch, & Cliffe, 2009, p. 118). This deregulation, although controversial and much debated, has resulted in a surge in public relations opportunities and strategy-oriented work in the country (Motion, Leitch, & Cliffe, 2009). Similarly in Norway, Ihlen and Rakkenes (2009) argue that the developments in the 1980s, where "'change' and 'market orientation' had become overriding values" (p. 475), meant that public institutions became more concerned with their reputations, and thereby placed a higher emphasis on public relations.

Today, however, the Norwegian economy seems to be stronger than the New Zealand economy. Norway has generated a substantial wealth owing to oil and natural gas reserves, primarily in the North Sea (Berg, 2014). The surplus created by the oil and gas industry is invested in a sovereign wealth fund, which in early 2014 was the world's biggest, valued at approximately NZ\$1 trillion (Norges Bank Investment Management, 2014). New Zealand's equivalent, the superannuation fund, has a value of some NZ\$25 billion (New Zealand Superannuation Fund, 2013).

Although being comparable countries in many variables, Norway has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that is significantly higher than New Zealand's. In 2012, the GDP per capita in Norway was 65,640 international dollars, compared to New Zealand's 32,219 dollars (World Bank, 2013). Norway is thus the third wealthiest country in the world, whereas New Zealand is number 25.

Another substantial difference between the two countries is the funding of political parties. In 2012, Norwegian political parties had an income of 548 million Norwegian kroner (NZ\$110 million) (Statistics Norway, 2013a), of which 403 million kroner emanated from a government-controlled scheme that distributes money to political parties following a pre-determined key. Out of the 403 million, just over 70 per cent (292 million) were given to the three biggest parties; the Labour, Conservative and Progress parties. The 145 million kroner (NZ\$29 million) that was not public support came mostly from donations or membership fees.

In New Zealand, there is no equivalent scheme distributing funds to political parties. Instead, parties are allocated funds from the Parliamentary Service and Ministerial Service, and so are receiving only indirect public support (Edwards, 2007). The main benefactor of those two is the Parliamentary Service, according to Edwards (2007). In 2012-13, political parties in New Zealand received NZ\$15.6 million from the

Parliamentary Service, with NZ\$6.8 million going to the National Party, and NZ\$4.9 million to the Labour Party. New Zealand parties do have other sources of income, such as donations, but they do not play an important role.

Despite widespread ideas that business donations play a central role in funding politics in New Zealand, there is evidence that their contributions are of decreasing importance ... Both National and Labour have reported less interest from big business in making donations. (Edwards, 2008, p. 6)

To the extent the above numbers are comparable; it suggests that Norwegian parties have a more comfortable financial situation than their New Zealand counterparts. Both of the above numbers come from non-election years, where external funding is less prominent, which make them more suitable for comparison.

4.4 Cultural characteristics

Hofstede's renowned cultural dimensions provide a useful platform for comparing Norwegian and New Zealand culture, and discussing the possible implications for political public relations.

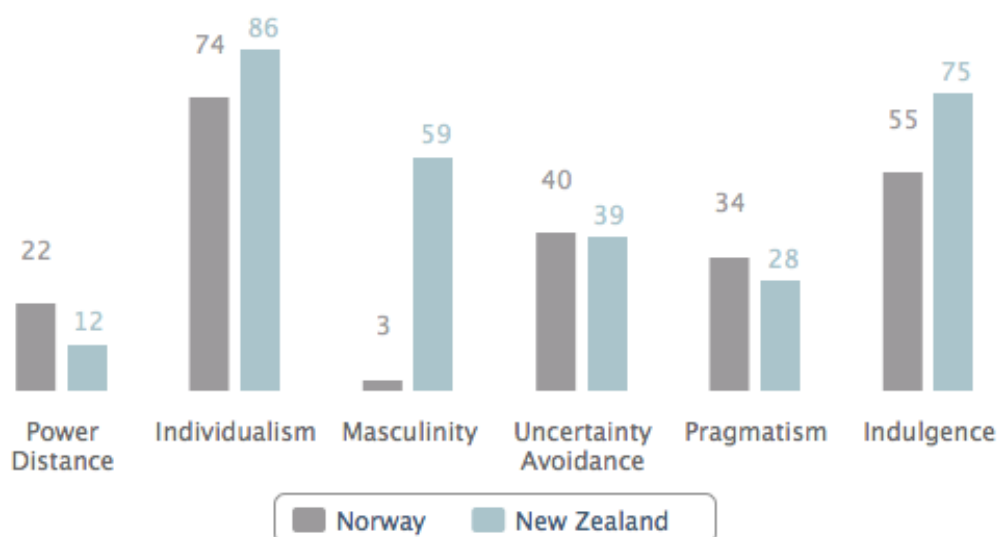


Figure 5: Norway and New Zealand cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2013c: 2013d)

The above figure reaffirms the suitability in conducting a comparative study on Norway and New Zealand, because it suggests that the two countries are largely similar. The scores in Hofstede's cultural dimensions range from 0 to 100, but as Hofstede (2013a) argues the numbers only make sense when one country is compared to another, thus highlighting cultural differences that are important for a public relations practitioner to take into account.

In the case of Norway and New Zealand, the one marked difference is the dimension of 'masculinity-femininity' in a society. Norway's score of three makes it the second most feminine country among the 100 countries in the cultural dimensions database (Hofstede, 2013d). New Zealand, on the other hand, with a score of 59, is considered a masculine society (Hofstede, 2013c). A feminine score means that "the softer aspects of culture are valued and encouraged such as levelling with others, consensus, 'independent' cooperation and sympathy for the underdog" (Hofstede, 2013d, para. 6). A masculine score, however, indicates that the society "will be driven by competition, achievement and success, with success being defined by the 'winner' or 'best-in-the-field'" (Hofstede, 2013c, para. 6). In this context, it seems a feminine society, which Hofstede (2013d) expressly says emphasises consensus, would be more in line with the notion of two-way symmetrical communication. Organisations in a society where winning is the focus could possibly be less likely to adjust their business goals in order to reach the so-called "win-win zone" than in societies where consensus is more valued.

It should also be noted that this dimension does not necessarily connote Norway as a more gender equal society than New Zealand. Levine (2012) argues that "fairness and equality" are central values to New Zealand. However, New Zealand is only ranked 31st in the United Nation's (UN) Gender Inequality Index (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2013). Norway is ranked fifth. Among the factors Norway

outperforms New Zealand are percentage of female population with tertiary education (95 to 82) and percentage of female representation in parliament (39 to 32). Grunig et al. (2006) specified that fostering diversity and including both genders would facilitate Excellent communication departments.

In all other cultural dimensions, Norway and New Zealand are relatively closely matched. The low power distance scores indicate that the countries employ an informal and direct way of communication, hierarchy is established for convenience, and employees expect to be consulted about any changes in their organisations. Applying this to the communication of political public relations, one may surmise that practitioners are more likely to value every publics' opinion, if not equally, then at least take all publics' opinions onboard, because superiors and people in power are expected to be accessible to publics, and failure to do so would constitute a breach of the society's culture.

The nearly identical scores in 'uncertainty avoidance' indicate that both countries are fairly pragmatic cultures. Although exhibiting a focus on planning, plans can be changed on short notice and improvisations made (Hofstede, 2013c). Neither Norway nor New Zealand is averse to taking risks, and consequently "there is a larger acceptance for new ideas, innovative products and a willingness to try something new or different, whether it pertains technology, business practices, or foodstuffs" (Hofstede, 2013c, para. 10). This trait is highly relevant to political public relations, as this is a field that has changed rapidly as technology has advanced in recent years. As a result, practitioners in both countries may be likely to try out new methods of communicating.

The relatively low scores in pragmatism indicate, among other things, that both countries are focused on achieving quick results (Hofstede, 2013d). This trait could inhibit two-way symmetrical communication, as dialogue and reaching the "win-win

zone” potentially could require time and effort, and thus hinder quick results. Both countries are also predominantly individualistic countries, with New Zealand having a somewhat higher score than Norway (86-74). In individualistic societies people are expected to look after themselves and their family only. This “means that the ‘Self’ is important and individual, personal opinions are valued and expressed. Communication is explicit” (Hofstede, 2013d, para. 5). In collectivist countries, on the other hand, there is an emphasis on belonging to groups. Conceivably, a situation such as this means that a political public relations practitioner needs to communicate to more publics, simply because the society is more fragmented than in a collectivist society.

Only the masculinity dimension has a bigger gap between Norway and New Zealand than the dimension of indulgence. This dimension refers to how much people enjoy their lives and try to control their desires and impulses. According to Hofstede (2013c), New Zealand is an optimistic and indulgent country, whereas Norway has an inconclusive score, making it neither optimistic nor pessimistic. This dimension is possibly of little relevance to political public relations, but one could deduce that optimistic societies would be more inclined to have a positive view of public relations efforts than societies that are less optimistic.

To complement Hofstede, one other central cultural similarity with implications for political public relations, will be discussed, namely egalitarianism. Both countries have arguably displayed many traits of an egalitarian society. According to Selle and Østerud (2006), egalitarianism:

has been a strong force in the normative fabric of Norwegian society. The state has been closely tied to forces on the centre-left [of the political spectre, ie the Labour Party] for more than a hundred years ... The forces on the political right have been relatively weak and the elites have been flexible in accommodating popular demands. (p. 554)

Østerud and Selle (2006) further argue that the character of Norwegian capitalism is part of the explanation for the egalitarian nature of Norway, with a universalistic and expansive welfare system. Based on this background, the last general election has been described as an historic win for the Conservative Party and the right side of the political spectre (“En historisk sterk valgseier”, 2013, September 9).

In New Zealand, consciousness of class has always been weak (Jesson, 1992) compared to other Western countries. The “illusion of classlessness was linked to an egalitarian ethos, typical of the frontier, with equality cast in terms of individual opportunity” (Jesson, 1992, p. 2). In Norway’s case, most of the nobility disappeared in the Middle Ages, and noble titles were formally abolished in the nineteenth century (Østerud & Selle, 2006). Hence, the lack of stratification in both the Norwegian and New Zealand society contributed to the development of an egalitarian culture, which in turn has had ramifications for how politics and thereby also political public relations have been conducted.

4.5 Media systems

Although there are key similarities between Norway and New Zealand in terms of their economic, political and cultural development, the differences are more noticeable in how the media has developed in both countries. The state plays a bigger role in Norway’s media, and there is a higher degree of diversity in the Norwegian media landscape compared to New Zealand’s, where commercialism has a bigger influence. This development impacts political public relations as it limits the practitioner’s channels for communicating and reaching out to his or her publics, and arguably also the ability to conduct two-way symmetrical communication.

With only a few exceptions, media in New Zealand are “commercially owned and commercially driven vehicles whose primary aim is to deliver audiences to advertisers”

(Bishop, 2009, p. 117). The trend towards commercialisation, or financialisation, has increased since 2010, according to Hope and Myllylahti (2013), and has led to most of the media market being owned by foreign transnational corporations. Only one of the four media companies operating in New Zealand is owned by a media corporation, as opposed to private equity or venture capital firms with media investment being only a part of their portfolios. This development is worrying because financial owners “have no inherent interest in any particular media industry or sector” (Hope & Myllylahti, 2013, p. 204). The main objective of financial owners, “especially private equity firms, is to maximise their returns. ... The short-term imperatives of financially owned media corporates have forced them to cut thousands of journalism and editorial related jobs. This has exacerbated the trend toward more commercial content” (Myllylahti, 2013, p. 9). This trend has happened at the same time as digital media have emerged. This has led to an increasing number of media consumers moving to digital platforms, and thus reduced the income from advertising in print media, which in turn has intensified the financialisation of New Zealand media (Hope & Myllylahti, 2013).

When commercial imperatives become increasingly important, the consequences for media content are arguably not conducive with facilitating a healthy public sphere, which includes political debate and an array of publics’ opinions being voiced.

What is officially done in the name of the free market and consumer choice can lead to concentrations of corporate power that not only homogenize the media sphere, but also systematically eliminate the level of quality content and constrain the capacity of media institutions to deviate from market-based formulas. (Phelan & Owen, 2010, p. 28)

As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the New Zealand interviewees opined that the media landscape of New Zealand was unsatisfactory, because of a lack of “quality” journalism and the number of media outlets. They argued that a vibrant and diverse

media landscape was to their advantage, as they would have more channels through which they could reach their publics.

On this background, this thesis argues that recent developments in the New Zealand media landscape have inhibited political debate, and made two-way symmetrical communication more difficult. For instance, it would be beneficial for a political public relations practitioner to operate in a media environment that served a wide range of content, as that would give the practitioner more channels in which to communicate in. Phelan and Owen (2010), investigating international reporting in New Zealand news media, found that New Zealand journalism, because of current trends within journalism, have largely outsourced coverage of foreign affairs to international media agencies, and thus, they argue, news on this topic has been commodified. Hope (2012) argues that the corporate 'colonisation' New Zealand media has experienced has subverted the potential of a mass-mediated public sphere in the country. He does, however, assert that digital media, especially blogs, has displaced mainstream media "as a forum of critical journalism and strident debate" (p. 19).

Norway's media system is characterised by a much higher degree of state interventionism, although the media in Norway has also drifted towards commercialism in recent years (Vaagan, 2008). This situation should not be confused with the state censoring media content, but rather the state trying to secure a plurality of media, so that freedom of expression is upheld. A 2001 white paper produced by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture on the state and the future of Norwegian media concluded "it is an increasingly important objective to develop a media policy that ensures freedom of expression, plurality and quality in the media" (Kulturdepartementet, 2001, para. 3). Vaagan (2008) asserts that "Norwegian media – print and online newspapers, TV, radio

and the Internet – are all in varying degrees shaped by the forces of the free market but are harnessed, regulated and supervised by state intervention” (p. 23).

It is important to note that there are a number of worrying trends in the media industry in Norway, such as a decreasing number of journalists and consequent ‘blind zones’ occurring in the media coverage, and a general fall in newspaper circulation (Omdal, Bjartnes, Bjerke, & Olsen, 2013). Therefore, this section does not seek to portray the media landscape in the two countries as opposites. The thesis rather argues that while the situation in the New Zealand media is critical with regards to facilitating good conditions for a public sphere and freedom of expression, it is not as critical in Norway because of a more active government.

It is clearly outside the scope of this thesis to do a full comparison on the two countries’ media systems, but it is critical to give an analysis of the media systems as they impact greatly on the communicative practices of political public relations practitioners in New Zealand and Norway.

One aspect that is of relevance to elaborate on is language. The official language of Norway is Norwegian, a language that is hardly spoken by any non-Norwegians.

Although both Māori and New Zealand Sign Language have statuses as official languages, English is by far the most widely spoken language in the country, with about 90 per cent of the population being first language speakers of English (The World Factbook, 2014a). As English is arguably the ‘language of the world’, New Zealand journalism becomes more prone to the forces of globalisation, whereby English language content can be imported and easily consumed by the New Zealand audience. Hans Tore Bjerkaas, former CEO of Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK), the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation:

stressed the importance of high quality as a key factor for the survival of NRK, relating quality to the use of the Norwegian language: 'NRK's simple way to see the future is that we are a quality deliverer of Norwegian-based, Norwegian-language content, on all platforms in the future. (Larsen, 2010, p. 271)

This leads on to another difference between Norway and New Zealand, namely how the two countries value public service broadcasters, with Norway arguably placing high emphasis on it and New Zealand low. NRK is the licence-funded public service broadcaster of Norway, operating three nationwide television channels, three nationwide radio channels, as well as a number of regional and digital-only channels. It is fully owned by the Norwegian state, and the Ministry of Culture acts as the General Assembly and governs its statutes (NRK, 2013a). In Norway, every household possessing a television receiving signals is due to pay a licence fee every six months ("Forskrifter om fjernsynsmottakere", 2004). The licence fee for 2014 is 2,729 Norwegian kroner (NZ\$538), to be paid in two instalments (Njarga & Moflag, 2013). In late 2013, there were just under two million households paying licence fees (Fardal, 2013), and 88 per cent of the population using one or more of NRK's services on an average day (NRK, 2013b). A high number of viewers, listeners and readers are important for NRK to justify the licence fee. In 2012, NRK had an income of 5,123 million kroner (NZ\$1,015 million), of which 4,950 million kroner (981 million NZ\$) – more than 96 per cent – came from licence fees (Medie Norge, 2013a). According to the Norwegian Media Authority, a government body assigned with overseeing Norway's media landscape, the NRK has six societal missions.

NRK shall facilitate and strengthen democracy

NRK shall be available for the broad public

NRK shall strengthen Norwegian language, identity and culture

NRK shall strive for high quality, plurality and innovation

NRK's public service broadcasting services shall be of a non-commercial nature

NRK shall offer attractive content online, on mobile TV and other digital platforms (NRK, 2012, para. 4).

Larsen (2010) notes the increasing emphasis NRK has placed on the role as public service media (PSM), as opposed to public service broadcasting (PSB). There are three other media outlets in Norway regarded as PSB, two radio stations and one TV station, all of which are commercial, and none of which include digital platforms as a part of their PSB mission. NRK, Larsen (2010) argues, has used new digital media as a way of advancing and reinventing their PSB mission. Universal coverage is generally considered the most important PSB principle (Debrete, 2009), and thus extending this principle to also include a strong presence on digital platforms could strengthen a PSB broadcaster's credentials as a proponent for democracy and free speech. NRK's website, nrk.no, has arguably managed this transition, and was in early 2014 the second most visited Norwegian website with just over one million daily unique users ("Topplisten", 2014).

Of importance here is to show how free speech and a public sphere are facilitated and fostered through PSB broadcasting in an environment of increasing globalisation and commercial pressures, and show that Norway and New Zealand have chosen different paths on this matter.

There are three state-owned PSB broadcasters in New Zealand: Television New Zealand (TVNZ), which is the main state-owned free-to-air TV broadcaster, Radio New Zealand and Māori Television (McMillan, 2013). None are funded by licence fees, but Radio New Zealand and Māori Television rely largely on government funding. In Norway, NRK encompasses both television and radio, whereas in New Zealand it is divided between Radio New Zealand and TVNZ. NRK also encompasses a separate Sami radio

station, as well as Sami television programmes, thus containing all elements of New Zealand's PSB broadcasters in one organisation.

According to Cocker (2008), broadcasting in New Zealand has been a public policy failure. He argues that the "policy approach has not met public expectations and needs and has failed to meet the goals of broadcasting in a democratic polity" (Cocker, 2008, p. 39). In the 1980s, with only minimal consultation, public officials inspired by the predominant neo-liberal school of thought, deregulated New Zealand's broadcasting market. In 1999, the NZ Labour Party introduced a Charter for PSB television broadcasting "emphasising the cultural and democratic deficits of a television sector that had become so thoroughly commercialised over the preceding decade that the National-led government was seeking to privatise TVNZ" (Thompson, 2011, para. 3). However, according to Thompson (2011), the new Charter failed because it raised the expectations of PSB broadcasting too high, and because "changing TVNZ's 'ingrained' commercial culture would require a 'neutron bomb' and that the challenge of balancing the commercial and Charter priorities was akin to 'rendering unto God and unto Caesar at the same time'" (para. 7). The Charter was removed by the current National government in 2009, and instead increased the amount of money to the New Zealand On Air scheme, making programmes "about New Zealand and New Zealanders" (Bishop, 2009, p. 127).

Still, 90 per cent of TVNZ's income came from advertising in 2012 (McMillan, 2013). This "has raised questions over TVNZ's ability to deliver quality public-service broadcasting, in particular news and current affairs" (McMillan, 2013, para. 7). The reason is that TVNZ needs to compete with non-PSB and non-state-owned broadcasters for advertising. In order to attract advertisers, it needs a high number of viewers; and in order to lower expenses it needs affordable content. Thompson (2009) argues that the

National government's broadcast policies favour the Sky network, which has a monopoly in the pay-TV market in New Zealand. Without state intervention, Thompson (2009) asserts, free-to-air channels will not be able to buy so-called 'premium content', and missing out on this content would consequently threaten the sustainability of TVNZ.

Both Norway and New Zealand's newspaper landscape have had a downward trend as online media has become more pervasive in society in recent years. Yet again, however, government intervention is a main difference between the two countries. Since 1969, Norway has run a government-funded newspaper support scheme, whose objective was "to limit the closure of newspapers and sustain a diversified daily press" (Medie Norge, 2013b, para. 1). The bulk of the funding is awarded to so-called 'number 2 papers', newspapers who are the second biggest in circulation in the towns they are situated, local newspapers with a small circulation, as well as opinionated newspapers, such as the left-wing *Klassekampen* or the Christian *Vårt Land* (Medie Norge, 2013b). In 2013, 344 million kroner (NZ\$68 million) were awarded to 84 of Norway's some 220 newspapers ("Produksjonstilskudd", 2013).

In 2008, the total newspaper circulation in New Zealand was about 700,000, while it was 2.2 million in Norway, according to a report (2010) by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In two countries with approximately the same number of inhabitants, this is a considerable difference that would impact the practice of political public relations. Both countries have experienced annual falls in circulation of six to eight per cent since 2008 (Mossin, 2014; Myllylahti, 2013; Omdal et al., 2013). The ratio of journalists seems to reflect the differences in circulation with about 3,000 journalists in Norway and 1,100 in New Zealand (OECD, 2010).

Table 2: Top 10 Norwegian newspapers 2012 (Opplag, 2013).

<i>Name of Newspaper</i>	<i>Circulation</i>
Aftenposten	225,981
VG – Verdens Gang	188,354
Aften	96,100
Dagbladet	88,593
Dagens Næringsliv	82,889
Bergens Tidende	76,817
Adresseavisen	70,089
Stavanger Aftenblad	61,636
Fædrelandsvennen	35,441
Drammens Tidende	31,026

Table 3: Top 10 New Zealand newspapers 2012-13 (New Zealand Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2013)

<i>Name of newspaper</i>	<i>Circulation</i>
New Zealand Herald	158,521
The Dominion Post	78,643
The Press	74,495
Otago Daily Times	37,909
Waikato Times	34,317
Southland Times	26,303
Hawkes Bay Today	22,646
Taranaki Daily News	21,121
Bay of Plenty Times	17,647
Manawatu Standard	14,642

Table 2 and Table 3 display that the top 10 newspapers in Norway have a substantially higher circulation than the top 10 newspapers in New Zealand. Even if one accounts for Norway's slightly higher population, the difference between the countries is clear.

Again, this exemplifies Norway's relative strength vis-à-vis New Zealand concerning media access. By having more newspapers available to the populace, political public relations practitioners have more ways of communicating with publics, and thereby a better infrastructure within to operate.

The NGO Reporters Without Borders rate Norway third on its 2014 World Press Freedom Index, while New Zealand is ranked ninth. The NGO expresses satisfaction with the state of freedom of speech in Norway. The "models of respect for media freedom are in northern Europe. Finland, Norway and the Netherlands have led the index for years. Their success rests on solid constitutional and legal foundations" (Reporters Without Borders, 2014b, para. 3). Despite New Zealand's top 10 rating, Reporters Without Borders claim there is a "growing government mistrust of the media and their watchdog role" (Reporters Without Borders, 2014a, para. 11), citing two recent instances where journalists' data have been compromised.

All the interviewees in this study highlighted the importance of digital media in present day political public relations, and this it is pertinent to also looking at how developed each country's digital infrastructure is. While the above has shown considerable differences between Norway and New Zealand in the arena of traditional media, they seem to be evenly matched in their digital infrastructure – both being advanced countries, where a political public relations practitioner would have ample opportunity to utilise different forms of digital media.

According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), 95 per cent of the Norwegian population are defined as Internet users (ITU, 2013), meaning they have used the Internet at least once during the last 12 months. In New Zealand, 89.5 per cent of the population are considered Internet users. Norway is thus ranked third and New Zealand tenth in the world. Facebook is widely used in both countries, being by far the

most common social media channel in Norway, and a close second in New Zealand. In November 2013, 75.2 per cent of Norwegian Internet users (2.95 million) were also Facebook users (Bennett, 2014). The number of Facebook users in New Zealand was 2.4 million in November 2013 (Adcorp, 2013), which is close to 60 per cent of its Internet users, and thus quite comparable to Norway.

Twitter, however, seems to be more widespread in Norway with almost a quarter of its Internet users (913,000) using the microblog channel (Bennett, 2014). In New Zealand, less than nine per cent of Internet users (350,000) use Twitter (Adcorp, 2013). The interviewees also identified YouTube and Instagram as digital platforms where they operate. YouTube is the most popular social media channel in New Zealand with over 2.5 million users, 62 per cent of Internet users. YouTube is the third most common social media channel in Norway, according to Bennett (2014), with only 1.07 million users, 27 per cent of Internet users. Usage of Instagram, on the other hand, increased dramatically in Norway during 2013, with 926,000 users reported in November 2013, up from 668,000 just six months prior (Bennett, 2014), close to a quarter of Norway's Internet users. In New Zealand, there are 314,000 Instagram users, less than eight per cent of the Internet users (Adcorp, 2013).

This makes the New Zealand and Norwegian digital infrastructure fairly similar, but with Twitter and Instagram much more used in Norway, and YouTube far more used in New Zealand. There may be methodological differences in how the data were gathered in each country, but overall it may seem Norway's digital infrastructure is fractionally more advanced than New Zealand's.

Chapter 5 Results

Before presenting the results, it is of importance to reiterate the research question of the thesis: How do political public relations practitioners in key Norwegian and New Zealand political parties view the use of two-way symmetrical communication? As media relations are central to political public relations practitioners, this research project focuses on the application of two-way symmetrical communication in the interaction between practitioners and members of the media. However, other aspects, such as societal culture and digital media environment were explored to give a more complete landscape which influences the type of public relations practice. This is important, because the landscape determines what kind of public relations practitioners are able to practice.

In order to answer this question, the researcher asked the participants a range of questions that also covered other parts of the Excellence Theory. Grunig et al. (2006) argue that the likelihood of the use of two-way communication being present in organisations increases when the other generic principles are in place. It is therefore key to investigate practitioners' views of all elements of the Excellence Theory.

Lieber and Golan (2011) question the validity of two-way symmetrical communication to political public relations. They argued political public relations is more contentious in nature and that a contingency theory approach would be a more accurate description of the field. As this chapter will show, however, two-way symmetrical communication was valued, and among some interviewees increasingly used, largely because of the emergence of social media. Nevertheless, all participants also used asymmetrical methods, and as will be discussed in the two next chapters, a mixed-motive approach seemed to be a fitting description of four of the six participants' practice.

This chapter is divided into seven parts each providing evidence to understand how the interviewees practice political public relations and how they view symmetrical communication. Section 5.1 details what the participants regard as their ultimate objectives. Section 5.2 explores what importance the interviewees place in a successful interaction with the media.

As the media landscape in each country is important for determining how one can practice political public relations, the interviewees' opinions on the media landscape they operate in is investigated in section 5.3. As discussed in the literature review, digital media, and in particular social media, may contribute in facilitating two-way symmetrical communication. Consequently, section 5.4 presents the interviewees' viewpoints on how digital and social media influence their practices.

Culture is another significant aspect that can impact the participants' practice, and in section 5.5 the interviewees' opinions on how culture may impact their practice will be examined. Section 5.6 looks at the extent to which interviewees apply a contingency theory approach in their practice. Finally, section 5.7 details the interviewees' views on managing relations, primarily with journalists, and suggests how they relate to the notion of two-way symmetrical communication.

5.1 Ultimate objective

The researcher asked all interviewees what they considered to be the ultimate objective in their position. Although they claimed their prime objective was to contribute to win elections for their political party, the emphasis varied considerably along the country dimension. Norwegian practitioners focused on building their party's communication both within the party and among voters, while New Zealand practitioners viewed election victory as their focus. This may be owing to fewer communications people employed in New Zealand political parties. As mentioned in the previous section 3.3,

Norwegian political parties are economically stronger than New Zealand parties, which may influence the communication practices. Julian Robins, who at the time of the interview was the Chief Press Secretary of the New Zealand Labour Party, formulated this clearly:

Robins: My ultimate objective is the election of David Shearer as Labour Prime Minister. [Shearer resigned as Labour leader on August 22, 2013, and was replaced by David Cunliffe on September 15.] ... The goal is to get him good media coverage, for him to get his messages out, for him to communicate the vision and the policy of the Labour Party, and I'm sort of the guy that helps that happen.

Pia Gulbrandsen, Head of Communications at the Norwegian Labour Party, expressed a similar sentiment, but also stressed other factors:

Gulbrandsen: One objective is of course contributing in winning the election. To communicate clearly and concisely and reach who we want to; that is of course of incredible importance overall. Then we have many full-time politicians in the Labour Party, so it's important that we manage to be recognisable in all channels and on all levels. We also try to build our own strong channels, so that we can be in direct contact with people, so that is a very important part of my job, because there is really nobody else in the Labour Party with responsibilities for that.

Consequently, Gulbrandsen and Robins have different responsibilities. While Gulbrandsen is responsible for the overall external communication of the party, Robins' remit was to attain positive media coverage for his party and the former leader of the party, and it excluded responsibilities in the digital domain that Gulbrandsen emphasised in the above answer.

Similar to Robins, Michelle Boag, former President and Communications Manager of the National Party, also viewed the ultimate objective of her party's communications strategy as facilitating an election victory: "The objective is always to support the campaign in order to win elections. That's what political parties are all about – winning elections."

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the Conservative Party and the National Party are ‘sister parties’, both being centre-right, market-oriented, conservative parties. Sunniva Ihle Steinstad, the Head of Communications of the Conservative Party, in contrast to Boag, stated her ultimate objective was “to coordinate on all levels”. She described her position as continually making “sure the Conservative Party has a unified communication, what we say, what we write and how we look. And that goes for all links of the party, from individual members and all the way to the top.”

Similar to the other New Zealand participants, Andrew Campbell, Communications Director of the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, also attributed high importance to the media:

Campbell: I think my ultimate objective is for people to view the Green Party favourably and vote for us as a result of that. And I think the way in which we do that is to get into the media as much as possible. I think that the more that people see you in the media, the better; that when we’re in the media as frequently as possible, we’re there in a professional way, so what we’re saying and how we look sits consistently and sits well with people, and they empathise or agree with it.

Steinar Haugsvær, Head of Communications of the Liberal Party, a close match to the Green Party because of its environmental policies, emphasised media liaising less than Campbell:

Haugsvær: My job as Head of Communications in the Liberal Party involves being Head of Communications in a broad sense: communications work, marketing work, press work as well as organisational work ... It involves everything – everything from press work to ads, to producing material and most things.

Researcher: What do you consider to be your ultimate objective in your position?

Haugsvær: Building our organisation.

From this it seems the Norwegian practitioners have a broader remit and are less outcome-focused than their New Zealand counterparts.

5.2 Importance of media

Being a political public relations practitioner is more than just media relations, but as politicians depend on media coverage to reach their publics it is arguably of high importance to maintain beneficial relationships with the media. As mentioned in chapter 1 Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011) define political public relations as:

the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals. (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, p. 8)

Although not mentioning the media specifically, the definition certainly includes interacting with the media as part of the process that seeks to influence, establish, build and maintain relationships with key publics. But it does not say how important media relations are. This section will highlight the high emphasis the interviewees place on media relations, and suggest how it can be understood from an Excellence Theory perspective.

Researcher: How central is it for your party organisation to achieve positive media coverage?

Campbell: I think it's one of our key objectives. ... How a party is presented and perceived in the media is critical, especially for a smaller party. Like for example if we're launching an idea or an initiative, just announcing it, I mean, we don't have a budget that means that idea get out to hundreds of thousands of people. We rely on the media to cover our events, to cover our policy launches, to cover what we're doing in order for it to be known and understood to the mainstream media, you know to the public. We do have other mechanisms for directly communicating, you know, leaflets and all those sorts of things, but they're very expensive, and you know, we can only do them every so often. So it's very, very critical to the public understanding us, and I think particularly in opposition it's very, very critical to them getting a sense of kind of what we're for and what we're against and our role in terms of opposing the government and stuff. ... I think it's kind of like what comes first the chicken or the egg. Obviously our policies and our people and all of that are very, very important, but without getting that message out it's all kind of for nothing.

Campbell argues the Green Party is dependent on media coverage to run the party successfully. He also maintains there is a balance between appealing to publics and other organisational activities requiring resources.

Researcher: So would you say that it's more important to have positive media coverage for a small party rather than a big party?

Campbell: I think positive media coverage is important for any party, but I think for a small party it makes up for the lack of presence in people's consciousness or in the communities or all of those things.

Positive media coverage is possibly even more important for a smaller political party.

As explained in chapter 3, New Zealand has historically had a rigid two-party system with the Labour and National parties. The two parties still had close to three quarters of the vote in the 2011 general election, and Campbell's interview segments may be understood in this context: to make a challenge to the two big, traditional parties, positive media coverage is key, and thus media relations become a central task within the party. Haugsvær said a successful media interaction was "very important", but also pointed out that it does not necessarily have to be positive coverage:

Haugsvær: On Saturday we had a big story in *Aftenposten*, where the Liberal Party defended the paternity leave. ... In that sense we distinguish ourselves from the Christian Democratic Party, the Progress Party and the Conservative Party, so that we are the only non-Socialist party defending and wanting to sustain and even expand the paternity leave quota. That is not necessarily a positive story, right? It depends on the eyes that see. Some would argue it is a negative story, and some would argue it is a positive story, but it is at least our story, as the only party on the non-Socialist side that defends the paternity leave quota in the parental leave scheme. But what's most important is to get out with our political messages, and that is a big challenge for a party, which although it is in growth, still is smaller than many of the others.

Similar to Campbell, Haugsvær expressed difficulties obtaining media coverage being a small party. He underlined achieving media coverage that helped the party stand out, rather than exclusively positive coverage. Boag, on the other hand, said achieving positive media coverage was "a critical factor" and a successful interaction with the

media was “very important”. Ihle Steinstad of the Conservative Party maintained that positive media coverage is significant, but argued for a more holistic approach:

Ihle Steinstad: That [positive media coverage] is important, of course it is important. It is through what people see in the media they form an impression of what the parties stand for and what the parties do, and what you also deliver of politics, what we in fact intend to do. So it is very important, but it is not a goal in and of itself ... It is not what we work for primarily, but it is a condition, and in a way our media coverage is what we are measured on, or that is what determines if we meet our targets, which of course is to have as many people as possible wanting to vote for us, and to have as many people as possible becoming new members and having an active party organisation. So in that sense it is important, but it is not an independent goal in and of itself.

Researcher: You’re saying it is a condition; is it a condition to achieve your goals about winning elections and execute your policies?

Ihle Steinstad: Not solely. It is not exclusively the most important, but it is one of many aspects that play into it. If you had received nothing but negative media coverage in all media outlets in the entire country, that is a hypothetical case, but that would of course influence the public, and that would influence us and all the other things. So it is important for us that we in a way achieve positive or neutral media coverage to achieve what we want. And positive media coverage would mean we get media coverage about our policies, and that is a goal in itself, to convey what the Conservative Party is for, and when the Conservative Party conveys what the Conservative Party is for, then that is positive coverage.

Ihle Steinstad seems to stress that the most important aspect of a political party is to execute its policies. As a part of that process, positive or neutral media coverage will contribute positively. It would arguably be of little relevance for a political party to achieve positive media coverage if that coverage did not result in the party realising its policy objectives. Boag did not make the same distinction, and possibly placed a higher importance of attaining media coverage as a goal in itself. Robins argued that a political party in opposition needs media coverage to survive:

Robins: You don’t have the ability to do much in opposition except through the media. We can’t implement policy. We can’t roll out and spend government money. We can’t do much anything except get in the media, and so media is critical, it’s oxygen for an opposition party, and it’s your only way to convince voters that you have the package of policies and solutions and the people. Because it’s also, it’s very much about the people—people they have to trust and know that

they have the goods to run the country. So media is hugely important for an opposition party. It is also for government, but in my role—because we don't have the other levers of government—we have to work through the media to an incredibly large degree.

Robins views media coverage as critical in his political public relations practice.

Gulbrandsen at the Norwegian Labour Party also finds media coverage to be very important, but when asked how important a successful interaction with the media is for her she focused on the collaborative effort within the party in achieving that:

Gulbrandsen: The contact I have with journalists is important, but we have ten full-time employees in the party involved in handling the press. The Party Secretary has an own press officer in addition, so that we overall have a successful interaction is, I believe, more important that I alone have a successful interaction.

Researcher: And how central is it for your party organisation to achieve positive media coverage?

Gulbrandsen: That's obviously very important. But I believe it is a big difference for a party that's in the media's spotlight absolutely all the time to control if it is positive or negative in the same way as you can many other places. There are many different agenda-setting interests. Obviously we try to set the agenda as much as possible ourselves, and hopefully it [the media coverage] is positive. But it's a lot of work, possibly even more, to answer everybody's attacks on us.

Gulbrandsen explains that as a consequence of the Labour Party being the biggest political party in Norway, and at the time of the interview the ruling party, they receive 'free' coverage. Hence, the objective shifts to control the media coverage rather than attain it. She also explains that because the Labour Party organisation has ten man-years in the communications department, the interaction with the media does not rely solely on her. A difference between Gulbrandsen and Robins is exemplified in their answers on how many times a day they interact with the media. Although they both emphasised that it varies considerably, Robins said he could not "imagine having less than 10-15" media enquiries a day, while Gulbrandsen said "two to three times a day possibly".

Overall, the New Zealand interviewees seem more focused on attaining media coverage than the Norwegian interviewees, viewing it as a crucial task. The Norwegian participants, although maintaining it was important, highlighted a broader approach. This finding may indicate a tendency to value an asymmetrical approach in New Zealand more than in Norway. It might also be a function of the resource situation. Instead of a fundamental difference between the two countries, a shortage of resources may to some extent force a bigger emphasis on attaining media coverage. The less saturated nature of the New Zealand media landscape arguably also means it is more difficult for political public relations practitioners to attain media coverage. Taking these variables and findings into account, a more asymmetrical practice of political public relations may seem to be more dominant in New Zealand than Norway.

5.3 Political public relations and media landscape

Given the current trends in journalism discussed in section 3.5, one may see public relations as on the rise, and journalism falling behind. In the present climate in both countries with a decreasing number of journalists, and increasing commercial pressures, it may be argued that journalism's traditional ideals of agenda-setting and investigative 'muckrakers' are less pronounced today than they used to be. Most of the interviewees acknowledged the current downward trends in journalism, but expressed that it was only 'one part of the picture', and because of the necessity to be present on more media platforms today, their job, they argued, had become more demanding. Haugsvær argued that recent media developments have been beneficial to political public relations practice, but did not seem to view the trends in the media landscape as problematic.

Haugsvær: There were far more journalists in ... 2012 compared to 2006 when I started working in the *Storting*. I don't have any figures to show you, but I'm sitting with a feeling that there are more journalists in 2012 compared to a few years back. At the same time, you are correct that the circulation is falling. Also, journalists have to provide material on more platforms now. Even though

the circulation of *Dagbladet* is decreasing, dagbladet.no is still one of Norway's biggest online newspapers.

Researcher: But what I'm wondering Steinar is how this [recent media developments] has impacted the Liberal Party's communications?

Haugsvær: I don't think it has changed the communication.

Haugsvær argued that asking how a demise of traditional media coupled with an increasing commercial pressure had affected political public relations, was only looking at recent developments from one side. He asserted that if one looks at the Norwegian media landscape overall, it has improved in the last two decades:

Haugsvær: You [the researcher] took one small part of the Norwegian media and communications reality and talked about media as being a bit conflated, the need for music and sound bites and so on—maybe it is correct in relation to radio, TV, newspapers, online newspapers, but there are so many other channels in addition now: Facebook, the parties' own websites, which makes the totality here one that we cannot overlook. It makes the communications reality of 2013 better than 1993.

This is an important point, because although print media circulation in both Norway and New Zealand has decreased, usage of digital media has increased more than the drop in newspaper readership (Mediebedriftenes Landsforbund, 2013), and so it is highly likely that being a successful political public relations practitioner has become more challenging, as one has to satisfy demands on more platforms. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the number of journalists has decreased in both countries, which arguably has led to less quality journalistic content in the media. Norway has managed to mitigate these trends by a government actively engaged in facilitating a public sphere, whereas New Zealand has had less government intervention, which has contributed to a degradation of its public sphere as commercial pressures have increased. Campbell expressed a similar pragmatic sentiment to Haugsvær:

Researcher: Do you see negative aspects of this development whether the journalists have perhaps less say than they used to?

Campbell: No, I mean, I think people are still engaging with the media in different forms, and I think that it's okay to have both [social and traditional media].

Neither Campbell nor Haugsvær view recent media developments as problematic, and rather focus on how their parties' communication strategies can adapt to the changing media landscape. Gulbrandsen of the Norwegian Labour Party echoed the view that political public relations practitioners do not view digital media as a means of 'bypassing' journalists and thus avoid criticism from the media, but rather emphasised the democratising potential of social media:

Gulbrandsen: I think it's very few among us who view it [social media] primarily as an opportunity to bypass journalists, but rather a way to talk directly to voters. And there are of course very many MPs in the Storting that never really get to voice their opinions, at least not in the nationwide press. They never really get coverage. Journalists usually run after the same 20-30 MPs for instance, so I think it's a way to get more [elected officials to] get coverage in the media and possibly act as spokespersons on different areas, which I think is pretty important and shows that our system of elected officials is broader than those you usually see on *Dagsrevyen* [the main evening news programme of the NRK].

Researcher: Is that something you've noticed, that some of the less profiled Labour Party politicians have received more attention because of activity on social media?

Gulbrandsen: Yes, definitely. I would say that Hadia Tajik [former Minister of Culture] is an outstanding example of that. Before the 2009 general election when she was elected to the Storting for the first time she was not a well-known figure nationally, so what we did with her was really pioneering digital storytelling and video-telling. And that again led to a lot of attention, so she was invited to [the talkshow] *Grosvold*; she was invited to *Nytt på Nytt* [the TV programme with the highest viewership in Norway]; she built up a profile in social media that was very unique at the time.

Similar to Campbell and Haugsvær, Gulbrandsen downplays the consequences of the current media developments, and emphasises the potential of social media. By arguing that social media can highlight little-known Labour Party politicians, she emphasises the democratic potential of social media. She also gives the example of Hadia Tajik to back up her claim. In fact, Gulbrandsen sees recent media developments as positive for the practice of political public relations in Norway:

Gulbrandsen: I feel that our entire society is shaped by being more on a Twitter wavelength. ... I think it is a good thing for our politicians that they do not only relate to *Aftenposten* or to the NRK where you can talk for three minutes, but also have to be shorter and more concise. It needs to be a sharpening of the message to break through the noise.

Researcher: What do you think are the consequences of this in the seen from the voters' points of view?

Gulbrandsen: I hope at least it can contribute in more people being interested. I still think that those who have a particular interest find the information they're looking for and in the length and the depth they want. However, parties have improved in appealing to the great number of people who not necessarily are very interested, but can be interested in short drops or news stories. So I think it's good to have a plurality in the way we express ourselves, that we have become shorter and more concise.

The argument seems to be that news media's shorter format is beneficial to the practice of political public relations, because it encourages 'sharper messages', which in turn possibly can be more easily understood by the party's publics. Interpreting this from an Excellence Theory point of view, one could argue that although losing nuances of a more contextualised message, the more pointed messages are advantageous because they are able to break through the noise of today's diversified media landscape and reach the party's publics. In itself, this form of communication is asymmetric as it emphasises the sender side of the communication, but a dialogue based on two-way symmetrical principles cannot begin until a communicative effort has been made and the message has been received by the party's publics. Thus, it is logical that 'breaking through the noise' of the media is an objective for political public relations practitioners, and it can arguably also contribute in facilitating two-way symmetrical communication, although it is merely one step in that process.

Robins argued that as mainstream media in New Zealand has declined, it is a more difficult task for the NZ Labour Party, especially while in opposition, to get media coverage:

Robins: I do think it is hard for an opposition party at times to be cut through into the news media because of the constraint of resources and, you know, column inches or air-time because there's a growth in infotainment and entertainment news and reporting, and because of the asymmetrical nature of the battle between government and opposition ... Governments make news happen; it's much harder for opposition parties to make news happen. There are far fewer tools in the toolbox. So I think it's probably harder now than it has been previously for an opposition party to get sustained media coverage. We can get bad media coverage pretty easily by stuffing up, but media coverage that is positive in nature or get your messages out, or is on the issues you want to talk about [is much harder to get media coverage for]. We can issue five press releases about house prices; it doesn't necessarily mean anyone's going to report them. You've got to understand what the media needs, so that you can get yourself into it.

Researcher: But in summary, you are concerned about the development of the news media. Would you say that?

Robins: As a person I am. As a former journalist I am. As a press secretary I work with whatever media that is there, and I can't really control that. So all I have to do is to try and understand it and work with it and make the most of it.

Campbell also recognised the downward trends in New Zealand media, but said that because of the Green Party gaining five seats in the 2011 general election they have still received ample coverage.

Campbell: I think our coverage has increased ... and I think the main reason we've increased is that since the last election we got bigger. And I think since the last election we've been doing a good job at getting stories up that are worthwhile being covered. So, in a sense, I feel that we are bucking that trend. I don't think we've gone down. I feel for the journalists though. I know, basically they have to fill the same or more content in some regards, but with fewer people.

Boag argued that fewer resources in the media means political public relations practitioners need to provide more information to the media:

Boag: You have to give them [the media] more detail, because the pressure on resources in our media has meant that very few stories are covered in detail. And media generally are looking for very quick, superficial headlines, rather than any in-depth investigative reporting, so you got to make up for that. Because their reporting is very superficial, looking for the sound bite and looking for the sensationalist piece, then you have to supplement that with a lot more detailed information.

In contrast to Gulbrandsen, Boag seems to view the increasing commercial nature of the media as problematic for communicating politics, but she also argues that it is possible to ‘work around those issues’. The difference between Boag and Gulbrandsen may be owing to differences between Norway and New Zealand and the nature of the two country’s media landscapes.

The New Zealand participants all, in various ways, expressed that the media in their country is less than ideal for effectively operating as political public relations practitioners. The Norwegian participants, on the other hand, were satisfied with the media landscape in Norway, although Ihle Steinstad pointed to a lack of resources among local media. As displayed, Robins acknowledged that the resource situation has impacted political public relations negatively. Campbell expressed a similar opinion:

Campbell: I found it very surprising when I first started working here how few media outlets there are. I was kind of like ‘oh gosh, there’s lots of media in New Zealand’, and I guess there are lots of radio stations and lots of newspapers, but at the end of the day there are only two newspapers really. There’s either Fairfax, so the *Dominion Post*, or APN, the [*New Zealand*] *Herald*. There are only three radio stations really, so Newstalk, the ZB Network, the Radio Live Network, and Radio New Zealand. And there are two TV channels plus Sky. And you do the wander around the press gallery, and it’s kind of like ‘that’s it’. ... I certainly feel that it would be great to have at least one other newspaper, or some more independence in the newspapers. Because it feels, it’s not a lot kind of there. ... It’s not a criticism of what they do, but it’s just, it’s not many. There is not a broad range of types, and also I guess, unlike overseas where you maybe have got a certain number of types, they also tend to take on some kind of degree of political affiliation. It does feel, and there are pros and cons of that, but because there aren’t that many, it feels that overwhelmingly it’s reasonably conservative.

Boag also claimed the media is not completely objective, but stressed that is due to individual journalists’ political points of view:

Boag: I think the media in *New Zealand* on an individual basis, not on an institutional basis, but on an individual basis, a lot of the media is very left-leaning, and they allow that attitude to permeate what they write.

Researcher: Would you like *to* see journalists more sympathetic to the National Party?

Boag: No, what I'd like to see is more intelligent journalists. And I'd like to see more resources in the media, so that the intelligent journalists have more time to write about things. Because our media in New Zealand is generally very superficial, they are under-resourced, so they can't, you don't get the sort of quality writing that you do in overseas media. And I think that's a function of resource, a function of time. I mean, I love reading certain overseas publications because of the quality of the writing. There are very few journalists in New Zealand who are capable of writing really good quality.

Importantly, the interviewees view a greater diversity of media outlets in New Zealand positively, arguing that it would be beneficial for how they may practice political public relations. Thus, greater media diversity can facilitate two-way symmetrical communication, but, as mentioned, greater media diversity is not by itself sufficient for two-way symmetrical communication to take place. In comparison, the Norwegian participants expressed gratitude for operating in what they considered a comparatively diverse media environment.

Haugsvær: I think we're very lucky in Norway with the plurality of media that we have. ... There is a selection of both radio stations, TV channels, newspapers and online news websites, which I'm sure many would envy us. Some are very tabloid, others are less tabloid, but the Norwegian media landscape in general is such that they want to convey politics and not just nonsense, so we're very lucky in that sense in Norway.

Ihle Steinstad: We have a good media landscape in Norway. There has been a decline in newspapers lately though, or in the last few years, due to many reasons. However, where I miss a bit of plurality is on a local level, where you see a development many places where you've gone from having multiple competing newspapers in a city for instance to only having one left. ... We have quite a good plurality in the media, a good press, lots of great journalists that are concerned about their integrity, so in that sense there is nothing I really miss—but plurality, I mean, the more the merrier, that's what will do it.

Gulbrandsen simply stated "I think we have one of the most pluralistic media landscapes in the world, so I'm happy with that." The participants' interview segments underline the differences in the media landscapes between the two countries and show that the Norwegian media landscape may give the political public relations practitioner more channels in which to reach their party's publics compared to the New Zealand media landscape.

5.4 Digital and social media

As digital and social media have become more pervasive in society, it is also affecting how political public relations is practiced. Andrew Campbell of the Green Party said that social media was useful for involving people in political issues:

Campbell: We'll often use it to reinforce any media or campaign work we know we're doing that day. We use it as a mechanism to get that message out directly to our followers, whatever we're doing. We do try to use it more positively, so our posts on social media do tend to be much more active, so getting involved in a campaign or something, or reporting on something that has been done well or giving people a bit of an insight into what the Greens are doing in Parliament. So if we've got MPs who are doing a particular event that day, we'll often take photos and share those so people kind of get a sense of what their MPs in the Greens are up to. So we try to give them almost a bit of a 'behind-the-scenes' kind of feel. We have weekly email communications that go out that often link people into activity or action with our database. So that whole digital web, social media kind of thing, where we really try to use it as integrated into our political work as much [as possible]. A good example is this week the Sky City legislation came up, we only had 24 hours to get feedback to MPs from it so we immediately jumped onto social media to use that platform, sent an email out to everyone on our database, linked them through to our website where they could send emails to their National [Party] MPs encouraging them to vote against the bill, and you know, reinforce that with our Facebook messages. So we use it [social media] particularly, and all of our main political work was on the Sky City, our questions in the House, our media. So we really go all channels on it.

Researcher: What do you find are the advantages and disadvantages of social media as opposed to traditional non-digital media?

Campbell: I think you get to a different audience, and you use them for different things. So for mainstream media we got lots of coverage on Sky City [legislation], so people could go to mainstream media and get in-depth analysis of what we were doing and what we were saying. On social media, they could send a message, they could take an action; they could do that. So reading the paper, you can't click a button and take an action, on Facebook you can. That's the thing. The main purpose of our social media was more to drive people towards action, whereas mainstream media was more people seeing the Greens were leading the opposition to it, so you have to identify what is the purpose of each one of those things, and I think they have different purposes.

Campbell explains that the objective of the Green Party's social media presence is different to their mainstream media presence. He argues that by using social media, the party is able to reach publics they otherwise would have difficulties reaching and

engaging. Haugsvær argues that social media has an equalising effect by allowing smaller parties, such as the Liberal Party with only nine MPs and 5.2 per cent of the national vote, to more easily reach their publics:

Haugsvær: The great advantage with digital communication channels [is that] this has changed mass communication totally, both to our publics, our own organisation and the voters. It's much easier to be a small political party now than it was 10 years ago, simply because the circulation of newspapers are falling, [and] online traffic is increasing, but the online information, meaning the parties' websites, blogs, Twitter accounts, Facebook, is also significant. ... That means that the possibility for political parties themselves to tell what they stand for without being dependent on others to tell them what they should stand for is completely different in 2013 than it was in 2003, completely different.

Researcher: How important is dialogue and interactivity in your digital communication?

Haugsvær: While you earlier perhaps went on house visits and met politicians on stands—you still do that and it's still as important—but then you now also have the digital street where you meet people, meaning both your own members, but also potential voters. And it is a fantastic landscape and it's much easier to conduct political communication.

Researcher: Digital [and] social media in PR and communications is still a relatively new phenomenon. What would you say are the most important features of social media in a successful communications strategy?

Haugsvær: Contact with people.

Both Campbell and Haugsvær are enthusiastic about the use of social media today, and its potential use in the future, in relation to political public relations practice. Julian Robins, however, stresses that mainstream news outlets are still able to reach far more publics than social media:

Robins: I think the advantages are that through digital communications you can do the direct stuff, so you cut out the middle man, you cut out the media interpreting it, commenting on it; you get to communicate your messages directly; you can interact with your audience more through comments and through Twitter. ... Fundamentally, still, most people get their news about politics on the television, in the newspapers and on the radio. For the foreseeable future, that is still going to be the major focus for communications strategies for political parties.

Although acknowledging the usefulness of social media, Robins does not see it as coming close to the importance of mainstream media.

Robins: I fundamentally still see the television news as the best. ... Twitter, which strikes me as a very elite medium actually; political journalists and journalists cross-pollinating each other and debating amongst themselves in a little bubble. But it is an important bubble because of the people that are there, because you're engaging and influencing people who are opinion leaders and shape the media narratives. But yeah, I think increasingly digital and online is the way that the messages are getting out to younger voters, and it's a hard demographic to get out to vote in New Zealand and worldwide, and you've got to do everything you can. But still, you look at the numbers, if 600-700,000 are watching TVNZ's One News at six o'clock, and 8000 people like a Facebook page, it's pretty clear where you're still getting the most bang for your buck.

Pia Gulbrandsen of the Norwegian Labour Party places a higher emphasis on social media than Robins, because "dialogue is very important, [and] social media is the place you can have that if you can't meet people face-to-face". Similar to Campbell, she argues for a communication strategy where social media and mainstream media work in concert to produce the desired result:

Gulbrandsen: The advantages [with social media] are that you have a direct channel to your voters and that way we can get out our message unfiltered, and I also think that social media amplify in interaction with traditional media and vice versa, so it's not either/or. You need to do both to communicate and reach everybody. And I also think possibly that [social media has] an extra advantage with younger voters because they watch the debates on TV and *Dagsnytt 18* [political radio programme] and so on to a lesser extent.

Researcher: We touched upon it earlier, but how important is dialogue and interactivity in your digital communication?

Gulbrandsen: It's very important—alpha and omega I'd say. My view is that social media is important both to listen to feedback and answer questions, but obviously also to spread our message. And on that level I think we have room to improve, and we still have a lot to learn. There are still a lot of people who get in touch with us on Facebook for instance. It feels unmanageable at times, but I also think it's important to give priority to it.

Gulbrandsen thus argues social media is a channel that can be used in various ways, both symmetrically and asymmetrically.

Researcher: Can you say something about how you view the difference between the Labour Party and other parties in the Storting regarding their commitment to social media?

Gulbrandsen: I think that we are the party who has pioneered the use of social media, not just when it comes to dialogue, but we've actually learned from the Obama campaign regarding organising outdoor activities. Because it's not necessarily a goal for us that people sit in front of their PCs the whole election campaign and answer questions, but that we manage to organise people to go out on the streets and go on house visits, on stands, meet the voters face to face, because I think the only thing that might trump social media now is to meet voters one on one.

Gulbrandsen ties the use of social media in particular to the successful execution of an election campaign, and argues that social media has a wider use than just being a facilitator of dialogue and that it in fact can engage publics to join activities, which in turn arguably can lead to publics voting for the Labour Party.

Researcher: Are you saying that social media is more important than traditional non-digital?

Gulbrandsen: I'm saying that if I were to rank a voter meeting vis-à-vis a Facebook meeting, the face-to-face meeting would be more important. That is the only thing that can trump it, and that was incredibly important for Obama to convey in the 2008 campaign. Therefore we've made house visit tools, volunteering tools, we've made lots of infrastructure and we also use Facebook as a channel of mobilising [people] so that something can happen outdoors in an election campaign.

Researcher: But just to be clear Pia, is a successful strategy on digital, social media more important than getting positive stories published in newspapers and TV?

Gulbrandsen: Well, I don't know exactly. I think they live side by side really. I think you reach different target audiences, but if you want to reach young people social media is probably more important.

Both Robins and Gulbrandsen, as well as the four other participants, expressed that social media is an apt platform to communicate with young voters, thus displaying a strategic management approach for the use of social media. Robins clearly viewed positive stories in mainstream media as key. Gulbrandsen, however, said mainstream media and social media lived 'side by side'. Hence, Gulbrandsen's emphasis on social

media as part of a successful communication strategy is more pronounced than Robins'. As mentioned earlier, a difference between the Norwegian parties and the NZ Labour Party and the National Party is that the two New Zealand parties do not have a unified communications strategy in non-election years. Therefore, there are others in the Labour Party organisation that are more involved in digital and social media than Robins. Boag confirmed the dispersed nature of the National Party's digital communication.

Boag: A lot of it is done through the candidates in a campaigning sense. The candidates all have their own websites; they have their own Facebook pages; they tweet; they're very active at digital media, some more than others, but it tends to be based around the individual rather than the party saying you will do this. Because unlike parties of the left, the National Party, being a party on the right, is quite individualistic, and we tend to devolve those things more in terms of our communications, whereas in the Labour Party it's very centralised. They say 'okay, we're printing this brochure, you can have the last page'. In the National Party, it'll be the candidate saying 'I'm printing the brochure, but on the inside pages I'm going to have all this information about John Key', so it's much more individualistic in nature.

Boag explains the National Party communications strategy by political ideology, arguing that the less unified strategy of the party is owing to it emphasising individualism. Although the Green Party, situated on the left of the political spectrum, has a more unified strategy than the National Party, the NZ Labour Party also seems to be lacking a coordinated communications strategy—particularly in the digital domain. The less coordinated approach of the National and NZ Labour parties may therefore be better explained by other factors, which will be further discussed in the next chapter. Concerning dialogue, Boag describes it as being “quite important” and “encouraged”, but she views social media primarily as a tool for disseminating messages.

Researcher: What do you see as the most important features of social media in a successful communications strategy?

Boag: Frequency. If you don't keep things updated. If you're not doing it frequently, things get tired and people move away. So, it's being constantly out there that makes digital media most effective.

Researcher: So you would rate that above having dialogue with your publics?

Boag: Yes, I would. Because a lot of people are just passive readers, but the frequency of the communication is what's going to grab your attention. Only a very small percentage of people are ever going to engage in dialogue with you. You can reach at least 10 times more than that, probably 20 times more, just by having good, frequent communication with a whole lot of people, who you've identified. That's another thing. You got to do the research to identify who are the people you're going to bother to talk to, and who are the ones that you don't want to talk to, because they're committed to the other side, so it's a waste of your time and effort to engage and talk to them.

In emphasising identifying "people you're going to bother to talk to", Boag is also underlining the importance of environmental scanning. She is, however, downplaying dialogue and thus two-way communication, because she does not regard it as worthwhile compared to the potential benefits of frequently updating social media. In the Conservative Party, ensuring the communications strategy was unified was an important goal for Ihle Steinstad:

Ihle Steinstad: Everyday use of digital media is increasingly important for us, and our use of social media in particular alters with changes happening in social media, and things are happening very quickly there, and of course we are constantly working to make sure there is a correlation between the Conservative Party in social media and the Conservative Party in all other channels. ... It's important that you use the channels you have to amplify each other. Then you need to have the same message, but maybe in slightly different ways to get it right.

Ihle Steinstad argues that political public relations practice must constantly change as social media is changing. She is also recommending a strategic management approach by adapting messages in different channels to the publics using those channels.

Researcher: Do you have any examples of how you use digital media to amplify each other?

Ihle Steinstad: The easiest is of course just to share online stories, but for us it is important to use for instance Facebook to get people to access our own websites, in the election campaign recently for instance, where they can read about things they are concerned about and things they are not concerned about, different stories, which in turn can get them to access the Conservative Party's websites to learn more about the Conservative Party's policies and stories they are concerned with, and in a way get them with us—or if they're interested they can of course join our party, receive newsletters from Erna [Solberg, Prime

Minister of Norway, Conservative Party leader] or other things. That is in a way more action perhaps, but it is also important to use that as the independent platform it is as well. You see particularly that Twitter has become a channel where, which maybe not, it is not where the masses are, but some significant debates can be started on Twitter. You see that other places in the world as well, right, that they launch news on Twitter or other things. Norway has not come very far in that respect. The election campaign showed that too, but it is an important channel.

Similar to Robins, Ihle Steinstad views Twitter as a channel that is used by a relatively small proportion of publics, which makes communication on Twitter ill suited for reaching a large quantity of publics. However, it can be a channel where important debates start, and therefore a channel that is important to pay attention to. An objective with the Conservative Party's digital communications strategy, according to Ihle Steinstad, is to influence voter publics' behaviour in to accessing the party's website, learning more about the party, and ideally voting and joining the party.

5.5 Culture

The essential question in relation to culture is in what way Norwegian and New Zealand culture is conducive with Excellence Theory principles and two-way symmetrical communication. The interviewees in both countries viewed their countries as accessible and dominated by an orderly political discourse avoiding so-called 'negative campaigning' because it is culturally inappropriate. The participants argued that practicing political public relations was made easier because of cultural characteristics of their countries. One difference between the countries may be the emphasis on multicultural issues, with two of the New Zealand participants stressing the 'Māori dimension' in New Zealand politics.

Boag: The accessibility ..., the informality, the fact that we're a multicultural society and increasingly so. I think those things all impact political communications.

Researcher: How do they impact?

Boag: They make it more complicated. The accessibility and the informality mean that you're a lot more accountable compared to other countries. For example, a journalist who I saw recently had been working in Washington for CNN and she'd come back to New Zealand, and I said 'why would you do that? You must have had a really exciting time working for CNN in Washington'. And she said 'no, I was stuck behind a rope with 50 other journalists watching the president walk past. In New Zealand I can sit down and have a direct conversation with a cabinet minister or with the Prime Minister. You can't do that overseas.' You have to work for 50 years and be at the very top, you have to be a Barbara Walters to get that sort of access, so it does affect the way that journalists can do their work, that accessibility.

Boag views journalists' accessibility and the informal nature of New Zealand politics as challenges for political public relations practitioners. This situation, however, is arguably favourable to symmetrical communication, as rigid structures and a high power distance might inhibit dialogue and cooperation. Haugsvær voices a similar opinion on cultural characteristics influencing political public relations in Norway:

Haugsvær: One, people's Internet access, both in terms of handheld units and PCs. Those exist in every single home and there is good Internet coverage nearly everywhere. Two, access to politicians. Today, Trine [Skei Grande, Liberal Party leader] is visiting Telemark [county], and she's meeting people in several towns in Telemark. There are no security personnel with her, but everyone who wants to can go over to her on the street and talk to her. Trine takes the tram to work every day and meets people on her way every single day—that's very unique to Norway I believe.

Haugsvær argues that the informal nature and access to politicians are important cultural features of Norway. Campbell considers New Zealanders to be rational:

Campbell: I think on most issues New Zealanders are kind of pragmatic, and I think that comes through a lot on how politics is approached and how the reporting of it is approached. I think the other obvious thing, which is different to any other country, is also Māori, so the Māori dimension to politics as well. It doesn't come through in every news story, but obviously it's a difference between us and any other country.

Campbell argues New Zealanders' pragmatic, non-emotional personalities influence political public relations practice. He also underlines a unique Māori dimension to New Zealand.

Researcher: Are there political public relations methods you know are common in other countries that you would not use in New Zealand because of cultural values?

Campbell: Yes, I mean certain political tactics that are used overseas haven't really been used here, so the really overt negative ... that you see particularly in Australian and American politics. Those attack ads that are common overseas. Also the spending of really big money, like I think whilst I think National and others, or National in particular, there's a pretty big war chest, there's nothing to date that's really seen mass kind of people just kind of spending millions and millions of dollars to get elected.

Researcher: Can you briefly touch upon how this affects political public relations?

Campbell: I think it means you can have more honest conversations. ... We appeal more to peoples' sense of fairness and justice and common sense or whatever, as opposed to 'you're a Christian, so your view on this is X', or really kind of this is base kind of black and white almost, yeah, in my view an ill-thought or ill-considered approach. ... I hope and I think we can still aspire to better, but there's a degree of sensibleness I think in our kind of discourse. I think that real kind of just black and white approach that I see in other countries is less here.

Campbell argues negative political communication is rarely used in New Zealand.

Campbell also views the amount of money spent on politics in the country as limited.

He thinks this situation is positive, because one can have more 'honest' conversations as a result. Haugsvær also believed the use of 'negative campaigning' was limited in Norway, but did assert that the election campaign leading up to the September 2013 election had elements of it.

Haugsvær: The red green parties, the Centre Party, the Socialist Left Party and possibly in particular the Labour Party, are mainly using their time to describe how dangerous the policies of the non-socialist parties are. I mean, that's kind of dirty politics, and there's not too much of that in Norway, whereas the American election campaign is full of it.

Robins pointed out the same cultural characteristics, namely access and lack of 'dirty politics'.

Robins: Sustained aggressive nasty, doesn't have a great track record in New Zealand, certainly not in recent decades. So I guess that is one thing that's reflective of the culture. We don't much like people being that nasty, or getting, to up themselves, to over-the-top and full of themselves.

Gulbrandsen presented a similar view of Norway, with important characteristics being a high degree of trust and an open society.

Gulbrandsen: Norway is still a fairly small society, which I think is permeated with trust to one another. Generally, I believe people in Norway have a high degree of trust in one another and trust for the government, if you compare it to other countries. And that contributes in making it an open society. ... We have a tradition of trust in politicians, short distances between voters and politicians, and that is now amplified by social media.

Gulbrandsen argues there is a high degree of trust in Norway and explains it in part as a result of Norway being a small country. According to J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1998, as cited in Tilson, 2006) trust in public relations can be defined as “the extent to which both management and publics express willingness to make themselves vulnerable to the behavior of the other - confidence that the other party will take its interests into account in making decisions” (p. 4). As the only interviewee, she makes a connection between the accessibility of politicians and the emergence of social media, asserting that social media has further decreased the distance between ‘common people’ and high-ranking politicians. Ihle Steinstad echoed the view that the Norwegian political discourse is advantageous compared to other countries when practicing political public relations:

Gulbrandsen: We are quite polite to each other in Norway. We have a fundamental respect for each other’s political opinions, and that can be noticed, that even though one can say something a bit edgy every now and then, we generally behave very well when interacting with one another. In other countries you can see a much tougher climate of discourse maybe, so I think that’s positive in Norway, that we in a way have a good tone, and the acceptance among people is not very high if people break out of that norm. So I think that’s something everybody perhaps reflexively takes into consideration, that’s the way we’ve been brought up.

Ihle Steinstad believes that the orderly nature of the Norwegian political discourse is a consequence of Norwegian culture, arguing that is a function of Norwegians upbringing. She also asserted that negative campaigning would be inappropriate in the Norwegian context.

Ihle Steinstad: Our point of view is to not do that, because I believe voters, for us as a political party, we are focused on conveying what the Conservative Party believes and the policies of the Conservative Party, and then negative campaigning isn't the way to do it.

5.6 Overall approaches

Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011) suggest that a contingency theory approach is more fitting to political public relations practice than the Excellence Theory. As discussed in the literature review, the Excellence Theory is a normative best practice approach of public relations, whereas the contingency theory rather advocates public relations practice on a continuum from total accommodation to total advocacy. This research project finds that political public relations practitioners in Norway and New Zealand display traits of both. Most interviewees expressed that they follow an overarching strategy that advocates openness, but that it can be adapted to certain situations, or that it can be adapted within the overarching strategy.

Researcher: Would you say that your party has one overarching communications strategy, or would you rather say that the communications strategy depends on what situation you are in?

Gulbrandsen: I would say we have one overarching communications strategy that again builds on an election campaign strategy, which again builds on analyses, so we definitely have one overarching communications strategy. But then people [PR practitioners in the Labour Party] would possibly choose not to adhere strictly to that line every single day in every single matter, but that is because we're handling more cases than only health, work and education. So we are of course talking about other things than the issues we have given priority to.

The Norwegian Labour Party's communications strategy is thus only adapted within an already established framework. Gulbrandsen explains that the framework could be applied differently depending on the individuals within the Norwegian Labour Party.

Researcher: Could you briefly explain what your communications strategy is?

Gulbrandsen: It says something about our target audience, who are our core voters, the 'sofa voters', and those who are flowing between the Conservative Party and

us. Added up those account for roughly one million voters, which is what we need to win an election. And it's also about having advocacy groups on our team, so groups within cultures, volunteer organisations, sports organisations, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions for instance, the unions. And then it's our website about our main issues, which not surprisingly is the overall state of the economy, safe and sound economic policies, it is work, education and health care. So everything is founded on a select few issues, which you can elaborate on.

Researcher: Except for election years, how does your communication strategy look?

Gulbrandsen: It's pretty similar. There are elections every second year.

Gulbrandsen explains that the communications strategy of the Norwegian Labour Party is focused on the overall objective of winning the next election. It concentrates on a few issues, and is engineered so that it will engage the maximum voter potential of the party.

The NZ Labour Party applies a similar strategy, according to Robins, whereby an overarching strategy may be adapted within the party's framework:

Robins: There are always overarching strategies and narratives that you're building to and messages that you are pushing out, but on any given day or any given topic you also have to be nimble and fleet of foot and able to think on your feet and react. You want to tie it back to the values and messages that work and relate to the issues that you believe are important to the party and to the public. You do want to try and tie things back to your narratives, your strategies and your messages, and you need to be disciplined about that. But there are always going to be situations that require you to think outside that and you do that on any given day.

Robins argues that the communications strategy should try not to deviate from the party's communications strategy. However, in instances where it is necessary to go outside the strategy, Robins suggests to make sure the communicative efforts are tied to the values and messages normally associated with the Labour Party, so that publics will relate to them. Haugsvær of the Liberal Party had a similar view.

Haugsvær: We have one communication strategy; openness is very highly regarded, very highly regarded. It's also very highly regarded in crisis communications.

Researcher: So kind of adapting to different situations, is that something you do to a small extent?

Haugsvær: You do adapt all the time, but you asked if there are any overarching strategies, and then I think openness and direct and honest communication is key—also if a journalist had asked me to comment on a story, and if it wasn't very interesting or I don't have people to give comments to that specific story, I'm instead honest about it rather than trying to find excuses that aren't real.

Again, the emphasis is on adapting within a pre-determined framework. Haugsvær holds openness as the overarching communications strategy.

Campbell: We do have overarching goals, which are ensuring that our co-leaders get good coverage, ensuring that we are breaking as many stories as possible rather than responding, ensuring that the known negatives about us are dispelled through the issues that we work on and how we approach them, so we do have some overarching principles that we apply to anything that we're doing, yeah. And attempt to be as positive as possible and offer solutions are also there.

Campbell emphasises achieving positive media coverage for the Green Party and its leaders as the overarching communications strategy. Boag, on the other hand, expressed that an overarching communications strategy was ideal, but that the National Party probably did not have one: "I would like to think we do, but I suspect we don't." She again argued that was because of the National Party's individualistic ideology, and claimed the previous Labour-government employed a more "hands-on management style".

The Conservative Party, according to Ihle Steinstad, does have an overarching strategy. Similar to the other interviewees, Ihle Steinstad argued for a degree of flexibility within a pre-determined framework: "We have one overarching communications strategy, and then you could say that the communication is dependent on the situation, but the strategy is the same."

5.7 Relationship management

Maintaining and building beneficial relationships is an important part of modern-day definitions of public relations. This section will investigate the participants' relationship

with journalists, as they remain an important public for practitioners. Robins at the NZ Labour Party argues for a close relationship between the two:

Robins: I think having a strong working relationship with the journalists you deal with more often is the key. ... I don't believe I have much of an ability to influence how the media reports things. As a political reporter for 10 years, I would listen to press secretaries and I would quiz them and try and get background and detail and the behind the scenes stuff that wouldn't be in your printed press release or fact sheet. But I don't think they influenced my coverage so much that you could say a press secretary made me give someone positive coverage. I respect journalists too much to think that it's easy to just string them along and get them to dance to your tune. But I do think there's value of having strong relationships of trust, so that when a journalist rings me up, they know my reputation and we have a track record, and so if I say to him 'I wouldn't go down that line if I were you and here are some reasons', they would listen to me.

Robins focuses on building relationships with members of the media in order to attain beneficial coverage for the NZ Labour Party. He argues journalists will not "dance to his tune", but by building trust between him and members of the media, they will be more open to listening to him. Consequently, Robins values establishing a dialogue between him and the media. The nature of that dialogue may not be of a symmetrical nature; Robins, however, distances himself from the notion of a political public relations practitioner as an 'enforcer'.

Robins: There is an image of the press secretary that can be of sort of the enforcer—that you try and bang heads with journalists and tell them they're wrong and pull them into line and you're kind of the enforcer of the leader. That's not an approach I take. If I disagree with someone I'll tell them, but I don't get aggressive. It's not in my personal style. I don't believe it would work particularly well. I've had it done to me as a journalist, and all it did was get my back up and make me more determined to hold my line and stick to my guns. I guess I don't go down that route. But I will certainly call a journalist and tell them when I think they're wrong on a fact. I'll certainly pull them up on facts. On opinion, everybody is entitled to an opinion, but I've got an opinion too, and it might be you're going to have to listen to mine. If there's a column for example that I've taken, that gets under my skin or gets my back up, I will normally breathe through my nose for a little while, call up the journalist, arrange to meet them and say 'you said this, it's your opinion. I respect that this is your opinion, but here's another way to look at it'. And I do that on a pretty regular basis. And what impact that has? Well, any political journalist worth its salt is going to listen, because they know that politics is about judgement calls a lot of the times and as much as the media pretends its black and white, it is far

more shades of grey than that. And so that work I think is very important. It's hard to draw a line from it that says I will influence a journalist because of that, but if you don't do it, then you're not putting the context around issues and policies and you're just not doing your job.

Robins argues his job entails contextualising stories that journalists may have misunderstood. Although he resents the notion of the political public relations practitioner as an 'enforcer', he does argue that it is important to provide contrary viewpoints to journalists who have published unfavourable opinions to him and the Labour Party. He also underlines that it is important to not become angry and behave unprofessionally when interacting with journalists. Robins' approach is certainly dialogic in nature, but a two-way symmetrical approach does not seem fitting as the interaction is more dominated by two sides trying to win an unconditional victory rather than reach a consensus.

Robins: I try and influence them; they try and draw information from me. It is the classic symbiotic relationship. We need each other; we use each other. We kind of like each other; we kind of don't like each other some days. But it has to be two-way. They won't give me indications of where their stories are going or, you know, I won't be able to get anything from them if they don't get anything from me. So it's a give and take. It has to be if you want to have a useful and deep relationship.

The relationship Robins is detailing is a contentious one that may be characterised by competition and where one side is trying to get an advantage over the other.

Gulbrandsen at the Norwegian Labour Party was less focused on journalist relationships, saying she only had built a relationship with five journalists covering the Labour Party on a regular basis. She did, however, echo Robins' view on journalists and political public relations practitioners' inherently different objectives.

Gulbrandsen: My agenda is to re-elect the Labour Party. That is obviously not the press's agenda. Their agenda is to shed light on what's important and good for the society as such and so on. So I think we just work all the time to put focus on our most important issues, and what direction we want to continue to take Norway in, and then journalists do their job by looking at other viewpoints. And those viewpoints generally come from the opposition, so in my view we

are not supposed to be neutral, they are. Hence we have different agendas at the outset.

Gulbrandsen points out that journalists and political public relations practitioners have different roles and argues that is how it is supposed to be. As previously mentioned, the interview with Gulbrandsen was conducted prior to the Labour Party leaving office. Thus, Gulbrandsen's mentioning of 'the opposition' refers to two parties that currently are in government (Conservative and Progress parties) and two parties that are support parties for the government (Liberal and Christian Democratic parties). Gulbrandsen also said she thought journalists viewed political public relations practitioners as "standing in their way", but posited a different view of the usefulness of her profession: "We contribute in providing better answers to the journalists, that the politicians know what they're asked and are able to answer it."

Haugsvær at the Liberal Party characterised his relationship with journalists covering his party as "orderly and dominated by good communication". He emphasised conducting dialogue with members of the media:

Haugsvær: I can say one thing at least, and that is that when it comes to media handling I do not believe in giving directions. It is dialogue. You do not, we at least do not do a lot of persuasion. We try to offer good stories and make the communication as easy as possible, and have positive and honest communication.

Researcher: How can long-term relations with the media be established when they have a different agenda than what you have? They are often critical to what you present.

Haugsvær: Yes, but journalists and the media have their mission in society. They are going to control and check on us if we're following up on our promises, so it's just that you need an understanding of their mission in society. We have one mission in society, which is to try to deliver better solutions to people based on our viewpoints. Journalists have another mission in society, both to inform, but also to uncover abuse of power. It is primarily about understanding—understanding what mission you have in society.

Similar to the two Labour party interviewees, as well as all other participants, Haugsvær explains there is a fundamental difference between the roles of political public relations practitioners and members of the media, whereby journalists are responsibly for critically covering political parties – especially those in power – and practitioners are responsible for interpreting their party’s policies to journalists in a manner that will produce favourable or neutral coverage. Haugsvær argues that this understanding of each other’s roles is fundamental in understanding the journalist-practitioner relationship. Haugsvær expresses that long-term relationships may be built between the two professions if both parties are aware of this understanding. Campbell provides a similar description of the relationship between the two:

Campbell: You just have to have an understanding that everyone’s doing their job. And some people in roles similar to me will kind of ring and argue and berate the journalist, and try and use that kind of approach to try and get them over the line. I generally find that having a discussion, finding out their perception on it, if it’s not the same as mine, then kind of getting into a conversation or a discussion where we give alternatives, yeah, I generally find works best. Sometimes it does turn into, not an argument, but a kind of a, you know, trying to really just get out, you know, ‘here’s our position, you should believe in this position’. Sometimes you have to do that. If you have the time to actually talk through an issue, I find that generally as helpful.

Campbell uses the words “discussion” and “conversation” rather than dialogue. He argues that as long as practitioners understand the role of a journalist and vice versa, the relationship between will largely benefit both. He also expresses that it is important to convey the viewpoints of the Green Party in his interaction with journalists.

Campbell: You just have to have an understanding that everyone’s doing their job. That at the end of the day they will write the stories that they need to write, or want to write, because that’s their job. And I will position the Greens as best as I can, and in a positive way, because that’s my job. I think as long as you do that with a degree of honesty and, you know, humour–good humour I think helps–then, that’s just about respecting. I don’t expect anyone to write the story that I would like them to write. I get frustrated when they don’t; I yell at the TV from time to time, but in my relationships or dealings with the journalists I try to, I recognize that at the end of the day you can push a story to a certain degree, but that they will present it the way they choose, and that’s life.

Similar to Robins, Campbell explains that he sometimes fails to make journalists understand the Green Party's viewpoints. Conservative Party Communications Manager, Sunniva Ihle Steinstad also sees it as feasible to build relationships with journalists when one is aware of the roles and expectations of one another. She advocates openness and transparency in the interaction with journalists.

Ihle Steinstad: I'm not saying for any cost, but that you have a good relation with everyone you're cooperating with, in a way both positive and negative cooperation is good. That you can be honest with one another and let them know if there are any problems and have a fundamental respect, I think that is key to building long-term relationships ... When building long-term relationships with the media it's important to know the agenda of one another and be open about that, and then you will have a fruitful cooperation.

The opinions of Ihle Steinstad are similar to the ones expressed by the other interviewees, that is journalists and practitioners depend on each other. Boag also viewed the relationships with journalists as a symbiotic arrangement: "[T]hey need each other. They need content; politicians need the media. That's a mutually necessary arrangement."

Chapter 6 Discussion

The participants' political public relations practice bear traits of both symmetrical and asymmetrical communication. Based on the results, the interviewees' practice seems to be closer to the two-way asymmetrical than the two-way symmetrical model. However, the emergence of digital media in recent years, with social media in particular, has led to a surge in the practice of two-way symmetrical communication.

Central to this thesis is how political public relations practitioners in New Zealand and Norway view the practice of two-way symmetrical communication, in particular in relation to the interaction between practitioners and members of the media. In order to answer this research question, the thesis has investigated infrastructural variables in both countries to help explain in what environment the participants of the thesis are operating. Both countries share many traits, but are also sufficiently separate to warrant a comparison. The chapter will suggest that the Norwegian environment is more conducive to a practitioner wanting to practice symmetrical communication, but that digital and social media may to some extent have an equalising effect.

This chapter will synthesise the results with the first three chapters of this thesis. It will firstly analyse how the interviewees' practice fits into the framework of Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations. As media relations are essential to understanding the interviewees' practice, the models will be discussed in light of how the participants view interaction with members of the media. The second section discusses digital and social media's influence on the political public relations practice of the interviewees, and debates whether it represents a truly transformative change facilitating symmetrical communication for the interviewees, or if it is merely another channel to communicate asymmetrically. The third section discusses how the culture in each country potentially can influence the practice of symmetrical communication.

6.1 Models, media and practice

As Grunig (2001) clarifies, two-way symmetrical communication should not be likened to pure accommodation of publics' interests. As the practitioners in this study communicate with publics of opposing views, it would not be feasible to accommodate everyone. Instead, as explained in section 1.2.4, two-way symmetrical communication involves the communicative parties locating the 'win-win zone' in which the outcome is satisfactory for both. Also, Grunig (2001) argues that Excellent public relations—meaning communications departments largely based on the generic principles of the Excellence Theory—does not exclusively need to adhere to the two-way symmetrical model, but can combine two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical communication—a mixed-motive approach.

However, if merely 'winning' and getting their messages across are the overriding concerns of practitioners' communication, it is questionable if it is possible to view it as symmetrical or a mixed-motive approach. Robins acknowledged that he is trying to "influence them [journalists]". Campbell expressed that he is trying to make journalists believe in the Green Party's positions, but that he did not expect journalists to write the story exactly the way he wanted. Contrary to journalists, Gulbrandsen said that practitioners are not supposed to be neutral. Central findings were that all participants argued for having a strong relationship with journalists, and expressed that as long as one understands each other's roles, building such relationships are unproblematic. Participants also distanced themselves from the practitioner being an 'enforcer' when interacting with journalists, arguing that would be a counter-productive approach.

From the results, it may seem that both New Zealand and Norwegian practitioners view their roles as helping their parties to win the coming election, and thus contribute in executing their respective party's policy ideas. However, Norwegian practitioners seem

to have a broader remit in their positions. The three Norwegian interviewees emphasised building the party organisation and having a broader approach to the communications function within their parties', rather than just securing positive media coverage. Ihle Steinstad, for instance, said that media coverage is not a goal in itself, and not what they "work for primarily", while Campbell said it is one of the Green Party's "key objectives", and Boag characterised positive media coverage as a "critical factor".

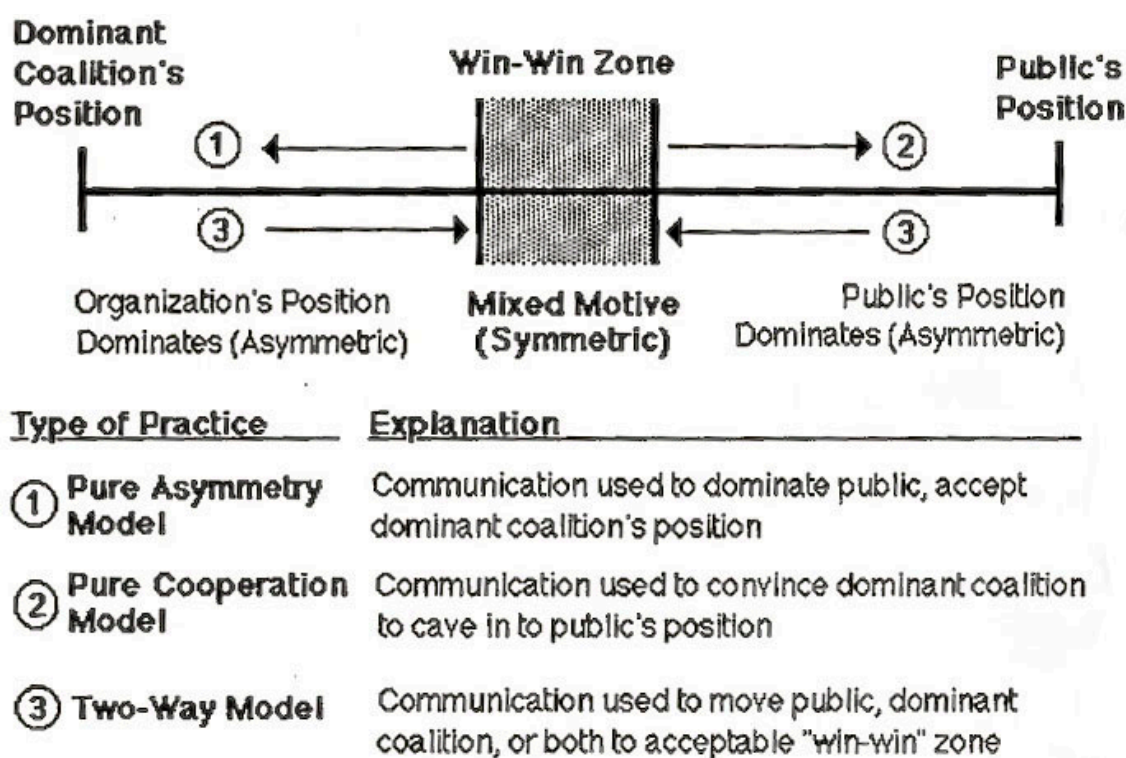


Figure 6: Two-way symmetrical communication (Dozier et al., 1992)

Placing the interviewees' practice on the above continuum based on the interview data, the New Zealand participants seem to be placed further left (ie. closer to the dominant coalition's position) than the Norwegian participants, because they place a higher emphasis on influencing journalists than the Norwegian participants. Two connected reasons are helpful in explaining the difference, namely Norway's economic strength compared to New Zealand and its media diversity. Because the New Zealand media environment is smaller, practitioners have more difficulty attaining media coverage, and

the situation is arguably closer to a struggle or a fight than in Norway. In fact, the Norwegian Labour Party participant Pia Gulbrandsen, expressed that achieving coverage was not a big problem; the challenge, however, was managing the coverage: “I believe it is a big difference for a party that’s in the media’s spotlight absolutely all the time to control if it [the media coverage] is positive or negative in the same way as you can many other places.” The other two Norwegian participants expressed similar sentiments—that the management of the coverage was more important than the coverage itself. As there are more mainstream media outlets in Norway, the threshold for achieving media coverage is consequently lower than in New Zealand.

Furthermore, the relative economic strength of Norway may allow a more coordinated approach to the political parties’ communications function. Neither New Zealand’s Labour Party nor the National Party has an integrated communications department, which according to Grunig’s et al. (2006) generic principles in the Excellence Theory facilitates communication. The communications function was distributed within the NZ Labour and National parties, but with no overarching department outlining the directions of the parties’ communication. Boag argued this was owing to ideological differences, with National being more individualistic and hence less interested in a coordinated approach. This seems to be only a secondary explanation, however, as this study uncovered that the NZ Labour Party, National’s main political rival, has a similar structure in non-election years. Moreover, the Green Party, by far the smallest of the New Zealand parties in the study, did have a coordinated communications department. This suggests that the New Zealand parties value the communications function differently from the Norwegian parties, with the exception of the Green Party.

Of the parties in this study, the Green Party arguably has the greatest challenge in attaining media coverage. The New Zealand Labour Party and the National Party as the

traditional parties will inevitably receive coverage, as one is the governing party and the other the main opposition party. Therefore, it is more likely that the Green Party would benefit from an integrated communications function in order to attain media coverage. However, the other two parties would arguably also benefit from coordinating their communications departments. Grunig et al. (2006) contend that a splintering of the communications function reduces an organisation's ability to be managed strategically. In addition, Grunig et al. (2006) argue that two-way symmetrical communication produces better long-term relationships with publics than other models of public relations. The Excellence Theory predicates that publics should be included in decision-making processes by engaging in a dialogue with various publics. Conducting dialogue may result in unwanted concessions, but it could also conceivably result in more voters for the practitioner's party.

In New Zealand it is the Green Party that has applied the most generic principles of the Excellence Theory according to this study. It is the only New Zealand party in this study that has employed a full-time communications manager, integrated its public relations programmes into one department, and has placed a great emphasis on social media as a way of communicating both asymmetrically and symmetrically. Grunig et al. (2006) argue that only in "an integrated system is it possible for public relations to develop new communication programs for changing strategic publics and to move resources from outdated programs designed for formerly strategic publics to the new programs" (p. 44). This organisational strength may have contributed to the Green Party becoming the third biggest party, having increased its share of the vote from 6.7 to more than 11 per cent from the 2008 to the 2011 election. It also gained five MPs, from nine to 14, a bigger gain than any other party. However, owing to its size, it is naturally easier for the Green Party to change its party's organisation than the bigger New Zealand parties.

The media environment in which the Green Party operates is arguably more challenging than that of the Liberal Party in Norway. As detailed in section 3.5, the New Zealand media environment is one where the public sphere is being depleted, with increasingly fewer media outlets, and also a more commercialised media environment where public debate is becoming rare, and different forms of entertainment designed to maximise profit are more common. A higher number and a larger diversity of media outlets to communicate in presents more opportunities for practitioners to communicate, both asymmetrically and symmetrically.

The Norwegian participants have more commonalities than the New Zealand participants. All of them hold the position of Head of Communications (*kommunikasjonssjef*) within their parties. The organisation of the communications departments are also similar, with an integrated communications department separate from other functions, and a practitioner who holds a managerial role and has the knowledge to manage this role. Similar to New Zealand, the smallest party among the interviewees, the Liberal Party, seemed to place a high emphasis on the communications function. The party only had two seats in the Storting at the time of the interview with Head of Communications Steinar Haugsvær. Nevertheless, the party shared the same Excellence traits of the two other Norwegian parties, as well as the Green Party.

Thus, the organisation of the communications functions in the parties in this study should not be explained by the size of the parties. Instead, it might be a result of tradition and political landscape—the National and Labour parties have been the dominating parties in New Zealand for a long time, with each party usually staying nine years in power (three consecutive periods) before the other one assumes power. Norway, in contrast, although a stable democratic system, has been dominated by

changing governments and a variety of coalitions. Hence, the political system in Norway has been characterised by a plurality of voices, and possibly a greater need for Excellent communications departments than in New Zealand, which until the MMP system was introduced in 1996 effectively had a two-party system. As mentioned in chapter 3, the two major political parties in New Zealand are still dominant, with three quarters of the House of Representatives currently consisting of MPs from the NZ Labour Party and the National Party. A political landscape dominated by fewer voices is arguably one where a coordinated communications approach is less important, and so the lack of Excellent communications departments may be owing to the differences in infrastructural variables and media environment.

The Norwegian participants also displayed asymmetrical features. However, it was a tendency throughout the data that the New Zealand participants were more results focused and tilted more towards the pure asymmetry model than the Norwegians. Robins, for instance, acknowledged he was trying to “influence” journalists, whereas Haugsvær said he did not believe in giving directions, arguing instead that dialogue was a more appropriate approach. Both Boag and Robins described the journalist-practitioner relationship as a “symbiotic” relationship, characterised by a give-and-take mentality, both emphasising strong working relationships with journalists. This approach might be conducive with the two-way symmetrical or mixed-motive approach, but because both political parties are lacking integrated communications departments, publics not representing the media may be undervalued. The New Zealand participants’ very high emphasis on obtaining media coverage, as opposed to the Norwegian participants’ fairly high emphasis, coupled with fewer financial resources in New Zealand, may be indicative of this situation.

In Norway, taking particularly the media environment and the political landscape into account, the focus of the practitioners seems to be less characteristic of a 'struggle' to attain media coverage, and more characteristic of strategically managing the coverage the practitioner knows he or she will receive. The 'struggle' seems to be more characteristic of New Zealand, although importantly all interviewees displayed symmetrical and asymmetrical features in communicating. The 'struggle' is arguably less conducive with two-way symmetrical communication, because an outcome-focused concern over achieving media coverage will be closer to the pure asymmetry model in table 5.1 whereby the focus is imparting one's organisation's viewpoints to publics by simply disseminating information. In the latter, by managing the coverage the party receives the practitioner will be able to use a wider array of public relations methods, where it may be easier to combine symmetrical and asymmetrical approaches. This may be a somewhat crude divide between the two countries, but given the discussed environmental variables and the interview segments, it is a logical inference.

6.2 Digital media's influence on practice

The 'game changer' in political public relations in recent years has been the increasing use of digital media channels, and in particular social media (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011). All the interviewees acknowledged that this development is important in present-day political public relations; however, there were differences in how the practitioners stressed the use of social media. Importantly for this thesis, the successful use of social media can have an equalising effect in the 'struggle' of attaining media coverage and also strengthen the use of two-way symmetrical communication within political parties.

The two small parties in the research, the Green Party and the Liberal Party, both argued that social media, if used appropriately, would benefit smaller parties.

As section 3.5 demonstrated, digital media is widely used in both countries, and is clearly a field where New Zealand and Norway are more evenly matched than in the field of traditional media. All six participants view digital and social media as a positive development and as a method of increasing their parties' contact with publics. As discussed in section 1.7, whether social media has a democratising effect is debated. While Grunig (2009) views social media as having "properties that one would think would force public relations practitioners to abandon their traditional one-way, message-oriented, asymmetrical and ethnocentric paradigm of practice" (p. 6), Kent (2013) argues that social media has diluted the notion of shared knowledge and placed the "burden of learning about important information and weighing sources of information, squarely on the shoulders of the average citizen" (p. 338). Regardless of social media's societal effect, it arguably remains a tool that political public relations practitioners can use to facilitate communication between them and their publics—be it symmetrical, asymmetrical or a combination of the two.

Andrew Campbell argued for using social media to engage publics, while using mainstream media to allow publics to go in depth. He gave the example of the Sky City legislation, where the Green Party actively sought feedback from publics on social media platforms:

We only had 24 hours to get feedback to MPs from it so we immediately jumped onto social media to use that platform, sent an email out to everyone on our database, linked them through to our website where they could send emails to their National [Party] MPs encouraging them to vote against the bill, and you know, reinforce that with our Facebook messages.

Mainstream media, on the other hand, was used to provide “in-depth analysis of what we [the Green Party] were doing and what we were saying”. The main objective of the Green Party’s digital strategy was to “use it as integrated into our political work as much [as possible]”, so that digital and social media would reinforce the Green Party’s presence in mainstream media.

The Green Party-Sky City case is an example of effective political public relations use of two-way symmetrical communication by using social media, as the party engages in a dialogue with publics to reach a political standpoint. The party did not have a predetermined standpoint, but reached it only when engaging in dialogue with its publics. It is also an example of strategically managing media outlets by using them for different purposes, as well as environmental scanning “to identify publics affected by the consequences of decisions or who might affect the outcome of decisions” (Grunig et al., 2006, p. 38).

Both Campbell and Liberal Party interviewee Steinar Haugsvær argued that social media is, and increasingly will be, a powerful and effective tool in the practice of their professions that will benefit smaller parties. Haugsvær argued that social media has a democratising effect:

The great advantage with digital communication channels [is that] this has changed mass communication totally, both to our publics, our own organisation and the voters. It's much easier to be a small political party now than it was 10 years ago, simply because the circulation of newspapers are falling, [and] online traffic is increasing.

Arguably, it has become a necessity for political parties to be present on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Social media, at the very least, represents media channels practitioners can use to reach voters and publics. Because of this opportunity, social media also represents ways in which the communicative goals of the political parties can be reached. In essence, it is a way of connecting with publics, many of whom may be potential voters, and through this connection help the party achieve a satisfactory election result, and consequently policy making influence. As the above Haugsvær quote signifies, recent trends in media have involved a strong decrease of newspaper circulation, making this media outlet less important for the political public relations practitioner, and an increasingly strong presence of digital and social media, making this media outlet more important for practitioners. Haugsvær understandably argues this is a development favouring small parties, saying “the possibility for political parties themselves to tell what they stand for without being dependent on others to tell them what they should stand for is completely different in 2013 than it was in 2003, completely different.”

There are two other factors that also are important in explaining why current media developments favour small parties; namely space and costs. There is a finite amount of space in mainstream media; newspapers are restricted by column-inches, and television and radio by the length of their news programmes. In such a situation, it is natural for mainstream media to give more airtime and column-inches to the major political parties. This is understandable as they are the parties with the most influence, and because media traditionally has a fourth estate role in which it seeks to uncover abuse of power. However, by emphasising the big parties, smaller parties may struggle with attaining

media coverage, and thus have more difficulties reaching out to publics. By the emergence of digital and social media this situation has been greatly alleviated. There is no space issue in social media. While a practitioner in a small political party possibly only can expect a couple of news items a day in mainstream media, the practitioner himself can publish as many news items he wants by using social media. Obviously, as Robins points out, there is probably still more to gain by positive coverage in mainstream media as it reaches more publics. However, as mentioned in section 3.5, both New Zealand's and Norway's digital infrastructures are advanced, with large portions of both country's populations using digital and social media on a regular basis. This makes digital and social media a factor in political public relations in New Zealand and Norway—one that all practitioners expressed is likely to become increasingly important in the coming years.

Furthermore, as social media is free to access, it eliminates the cost issue faced by practitioners in other forms of communication. Financially stronger political parties will still have an advantage in terms of advertising, employing more practitioners, and thus reaching out to more publics, but social media is a factor that reduces those costs. It is also a factor that is arguably far more symmetrical in nature than mainstream media. Consequently, social media may have both a democratising and symmetrising effect on political public relations.

However, the effects of social media should not be overstated. Mainstream media still attracts a much larger number of publics than digital and social media. Robins argued “if 600-700,000 are watching TVNZ's One News at six o'clock, and 8000 people like a Facebook page, it's pretty clear where you're still getting the most bang for your buck.” He did argue though that social media is a useful conduit for reaching younger publics, as they to a lesser degree consume mainstream news than older publics. This argument

is echoed among all interviewees. As the 'digital natives' born in the 1980s and onwards gradually make up a larger share of the populace, it is likely that the importance of digital and social media will grow.

Similar to most interviewees, Robins also maintained that social media provides a direct channel to voters, where the practitioner does not have to worry about the media angle of the story not being representative of the political party's views. Gulbrandsen echoed this sentiment. She also argued for social media to be used both symmetrically and asymmetrically, and in coordination with the other external communications of the party:

My view is that social media is important both to listen to feedback and answer questions, but obviously also to spread our message. The advantages [with social media] are that you have a direct channel to your voters and that we that way can get out our message unfiltered, and I also think that social media amplify in interaction with traditional media and vice versa, so it's not either or. You need to do both to communicate and reach everybody.

This understanding of social media provides an example of a mixed-motive approach. It may be unrealistic for a political public relations practitioner to rely on two-way symmetrical communications simply because some degree of persuasion and attempting to win voters are inherent features of political public relations (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011). Political public relations is also considered more contentious than corporate public relations (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011). Lieber and Golan (2011) argued that a communications strategy based on Excellence Theory principles was not the best way to understand political public relations in the United States. Instead, they recommended a contingency theory approach, as coined by Cancel et al. (1997). As discussed in the literature review, Cancel et al. (1997) asserted that public relations is better understood placing it on a continuum ranging from total advocacy to total accommodation. Lieber and Golan (2011) argued that a contingency theory approach was a better way of understanding a political public relations practitioner's interaction with members of the

media, because the interaction could not be placed into normative ‘boxes’ (models) as it is characterised by fluidity, ranging from pure accommodation to pure advocacy. What Cancel et al. (1997), Lieber and Golan (2011), and Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011) fail to see, however, is that communication based on Excellence Theory principles can in fact also be fluid. The models are normative, but the practice of public relations based on the Excellence Theory can, and should, include both asymmetrical and symmetrical approaches. Grunig (2001) explained that the mixed-motive approach coined by Murphy (1991) was in fact what he originally had envisaged. The above explanation is important to understand the validity of the Excellence Theory also in a political public relations context.

Michelle Boag of the National Party asserts that a symmetrical approach where political public relations practitioners engage in dialogue with publics is an inefficient approach:

A lot of people are just passive readers, but the frequency of the communication is what’s going to grab your notice. Only a very small percentage of people are ever going to engage in dialogue with you. You can reach at least ten times more than that, probably 20 times more, just by having good, frequent communication with a whole lot of people, who you’ve identified.

Boag argues for an asymmetrical approach because engaging in dialogue would not support the goal of contributing to winning the next election. The views expressed by Boag are clearly the ones that are the least conducive for two-way symmetrical communication, and it seems the approach she advocates does not include a combination of symmetrical and asymmetrical approaches, but rather advocates pure asymmetry. Logically, the consequence of this is less dialogue with the National Party’s publics. As previously noted, Boag is not currently a communications manager in the National Party, and the exact communications strategy may therefore be slightly different than what she proposes.

Nevertheless, two independent, but connected and coinciding factors suggest that adopting a more symmetrical approach will likely become increasingly important in New Zealand, namely the emergent multi-party system in New Zealand, as well as the spread of social media. The multi-party system in New Zealand, which was introduced in 1996 and upheld as recently as 2011 with the MMP referendum, means that the country now has a system that encourages a plurality of political actors. As previously discussed, this makes political communication more diverse and increases the number of political competitors. In addition, the spread of social media opens up for a whole range of new actors, who are able to voice their opinions due to technological advancements that are dialogical in nature. In this situation, political public relations practitioners would benefit from combining symmetrical and asymmetrical approaches. This would maintain the political public relations practitioner's role of being a strong advocate of his or her party, but would also entail environmental scanning and engaging in a dialogue with publics.

One could question, however, if a symmetrical or mixed-motive approach is necessary for achieving satisfactory election results in New Zealand. The National Party is the biggest party among the six political parties represented in this research. The party received 47.3 per cent of the votes (1.05 million) in the 2011 general election, whereas the second biggest party in this thesis, the Norwegian Labour Party, received 30.8 per cent of the votes (0.87 million) in the 2013 general election. In New Zealand, 2.25 million votes were cast in the last election, while 2.84 million votes were cast in Norway (Election results, 2011; Valgresultater, 2013). Essential to this thesis, however, is that political public relations based on Excellence Theory principles will have the chance of communicating more widely than purely asymmetrical communication strategies, and also be able to meet the challenges of a new media and political environment in New Zealand.

Sunniva Ihle Steinstad of the Conservative Party had a similar view to the two other Norwegian practitioners, as well as Andrew Campbell. She advocated for using social media as an ingredient to enhance the overall communications approach of her party. She argued that the different media channels have the potential of reinforcing each other. With rapid changes in the arena of social media, Ihle Steinstad also argued that a political public relations practitioner needs to be pragmatic and able to adapt to new technology quickly:

Everyday use of digital media is increasingly important for us, and our use of social media in particular alters with changes happening in social media, and things are happening very quickly there, and of course we are constantly working to make sure there is a correlation between the Conservative Party in social media and the Conservative Party in all other channels.

Ihle Steinstad also advocated a domino effect approach to publics, where an initial contact would lead to preferred voter behaviour, and ultimately publics joining the party. A political party is different from other organisations in that almost anybody can join, whereas joining a corporate organisation is usually only possible by applying for an open position and being offered that position. In that sense, there is a more direct avenue for publics to influence a political party compared to a corporate organisation. Consequently, the act of influencing publics to join a party may also be viewed as an invitation for them to influence the party, and thereby facilitate dialogue.

6.3 Contingency or Excellence

This section suggests that both the contingency theory and the Excellence Theory are helpful in describing the practice of the interviewees' political public relations practice. The research interviews asked all participants whether they have an overarching approach or if their approach depends on what situations they are facing. As previously discussed, contingency theory advocates the latter. Two-way symmetrical communication, on the other hand, is a normative model. However, as explained,

communication based on Excellence Theory may use a combination of two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical methods: the mixed-motive approach.

Most interviewees expressed that their parties both have an overarching communications strategy but that the strategies are able to be adapted to unique situations. As the previous section showed, most interviewees apply a mixed-motive approach to their communicative efforts, with a combination of accommodation and advocacy. This was also reflected in the answers to this question, for instance in Conservative Party interviewee Sunniva Ihle Steinstad's reply: "We have one overarching communications strategy, and then you could say that the communication is dependent on the situation, but the strategy is the same." Julian Robins of the NZ Labour Party expressed a similar view, but possibly placed a higher emphasis on being able to react and adapt to situations: "There are always overarching strategies and narratives ..., but on any given day or any given topic you also have to be nimble and fleet of foot and able to think on your feet and react." The Norwegian Labour Party's overarching communications strategy seemed more elaborate, detailing what voters to target and how to win the election. Andrew Campbell of the Green Party also provided an elaborate explanation of the communication strategy in the Green Party:

We do have overarching goals, which are ensuring that our co-leaders get good coverage, ensuring that we are breaking as many stories as possible rather than responding, ensuring that the known negatives about us are dispelled through the issues that we work on and how we approach them, so we do have some overarching principles that we apply to anything that we're doing.

The only participant who doubted there was any kind of overarching strategy in her party was Michelle Boag of the National Party. She did however express that having an overarching strategy would be beneficial.

Importantly for this thesis is that the Excellence Theory is not rejected among the interviewees on the basis of Lieber and Golan's (2011) assertion that the contingency theory provides a more fitting description of political public relations practitioners' interaction with members of the media. Although to varying degrees, the communications strategies among the political parties in this research do apply overarching strategies. The parties' communications strategies include both overarching elements, such as openness and transparency, but are also engineered so that practitioners can adapt to unique situations. The NZ Labour Party and the National Party distinguish themselves by being less organised and more reactive than the other parties. This feature could have been improved if the two parties had applied more Excellence Theory principles.

6.4 Cultural influence

New Zealand and Norway have similar cultural characteristics, and thus the interview segments related to national culture were remarkably similar, considering the interviewees operated in two separate countries. All interviewees marked that both countries are dominated by a high degree of accessibility, meaning that journalists expect to be able to talk to and interview politicians without incurring any difficulties. This is arguably a cultural characteristic that is conducive with two-way symmetrical communication in that it encourages interaction, be it in a symmetrical or asymmetrical fashion, between the organisation (the political party) and its publics (among them the media). The interviewees also expressed that both countries are dominated by an informal nature. Boag argued that this situation challenges political public relations practitioners: "They make it more complicated. The accessibility and the informality mean that you're a lot more accountable compared to other countries."

Another finding was that so-called ‘negative campaigning’ was recognised as not culturally appropriate, because publics in both countries would react negatively to it. Robins asserted that “sustained aggressive nasty, doesn’t have a great track record in New Zealand, certainly not in recent decades”, while Ihle Steinstad explained that “for us as a political party, we are focused on conveying what the Conservative Party believes and the policies of the Conservative Party, and then negative campaigning isn’t the way to do it”.

Lack of ‘negative campaigning’ is compatible with the practice two-way symmetrical communication and Excellence Theory principles more generally. One of the generic principles is to conduct public relations ethically, and it is obviously more ethical to avoid ‘negative campaigning’ and rather focus on the matter at hand in political public relations. Conducting public relations ethically and truthfully would lead to a higher degree of trust, and thereby facilitate political public relations based on Excellence Theory principles. Gulbrandsen recognised that trust was another defining feature of Norway: “Norway is still a fairly small society, which I think is permeated with trust in one another. Generally, I believe people in Norway have a high degree of trust in one another.” Campbell voiced a similar sentiment: “I think it [the cultural characteristics of New Zealand] means you can have more honest conversations. ... We appeal more to peoples’ sense of fairness and justice and common sense or whatever.”

The only noticeable difference between New Zealand and Norway in how the participants view the impact of culture on their practice of political public relations was the New Zealand participants’ emphasis on Māori and multicultural issues more generally. The New Zealand interviewees argued taking this dimension into account was important in their practice.

Overall, New Zealand and Norway are strikingly similar considering that the two countries have had limited interaction in history. The cultural characteristics of the two countries are largely conducive with the Excellence Theory. The reason why Norwegian practitioners seem to follow more Excellence Theory principles in their practice than the New Zealand practitioners should therefore not be attributed to cultural characteristics. A more likely explanation is instead the lack of space in New Zealand mainstream media, Norway's economic strength compared to New Zealand, and the fact that a multi-party system is still very new to New Zealand. As mentioned, when the multi-party system becomes more established and social media continue to spread, it is feasible that the two dominant parties will see the benefit of basing their communication strategies on Excellence Theory principles.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This research has aimed to investigate how political public relations practitioners in Norway and New Zealand view the Excellence Theory and its primary component, the two way-symmetrical communication model, with particular emphasis on the application in practitioners' interactions with members of the media, as that is a central aspect of political public relations. The research compared New Zealand and Norway, because the two countries share several similar traits but are sufficiently separate to warrant a comparison. Importantly, the countries share a similar historical trajectory and development with regards to democracy. They are also similarly sized, and share several cultural characteristics as well.

The thesis applied a qualitative, interpretivist and comparative methodology using interviews as the main method of data collection in order to highlight the views of central political public relations practitioners in the two countries. The data was analysed by following the interpretivist paradigm, and assigning the interview data with first and second order interpretation. The results chapter gave room for a comprehensive first-order interpretation, which involved a researcher understanding the meaning of the collected data as seen from the perspective of the interviewee. The discussion chapter, however, centred on second-order interpretation, whereby the researcher came from the outside to discover what had occurred and assigned meaning to the data.

The research found that four of the six participants expressed views that largely were commensurate with the mixed-methods approach, as coined by Murphy (1991), and that Grunig (2001) stated was a correct interpretation of public relations practice based on the Excellence Theory. The two other participants, representing the New Zealand Labour Party and the National Party, focused mostly on asymmetrical measures and although they seemed to be aware of the use of symmetrical methods, they expressed

that they were ineffective in helping to achieve the objective of their parties, which were to win the forthcoming election.

This final chapter of the thesis will begin with a summary of the findings of the study. It will suggest that the political and media environment in New Zealand are key in understanding why the views of the Norwegian participants are more closely related to communication based on Excellence Theory principles. Secondly, the chapter suggests areas of further research on the field of political public relations in Norway and New Zealand. As this research was exclusively qualitative in nature, it would be of great value to investigate political public relations practice quantitatively, for instance by collecting Facebook statuses, tweets or other social media activities, and interpreting those in an Excellence Theory framework. By including a quantitative element, the interview data could be triangulated and thus give a fuller picture of how political public relations are conducted in New Zealand and Norway. Lastly, this chapter will detail the significance of the findings and suggest that the New Zealand Labour Party and National Party would benefit by introducing more aspects of the Excellence Theory in their communications strategies.

7.1 Summary of findings

Central to the findings of the thesis is that four of the six participants seemed to argue for a mixed-motive approach, where both symmetrical and asymmetrical methods were used, while two of the participants argued for an approach closer to pure asymmetry.

Julian Robins of the New Zealand Labour Party and Michelle Boag of the National Party both argued for asymmetrical methods, because they are more efficient in recruiting voters and thus supporting the overall goal of the two parties—to win the next election and secure policy influence. The four other parties also shared this overall objective, but emphasised a broader approach. Gulbrandsen of the Norwegian Labour

Party for instance emphasised being recognisable in all channels, and ensuring that the external communications of her party were coordinated and unified. It would likely be confusing for publics if theoretically two MPs in the Norwegian Labour Party voiced diametrically different opinions on the same matter. Gulbrandsen saw it as her job to avoid such situations and ensure that the manner in which the Norwegian Labour Party is represented is unified and familiar to voting publics. This represents a wider remit than Boag and Robins.

Connected to this is another finding, namely how the increasing pervasiveness of social media in both New Zealand and Norway facilitates two-way communication. Most of the practitioners viewed this development as crucial in successfully conducting political public relations in the present-day environment. Campbell, Gulbrandsen, Haugsvær and Ihle Steinstad expressed that dialogue with publics had become more important because of social media. They stated that social media should be used both symmetrically and asymmetrically in a successful communications strategy. This view fits the mixed-motive approach.

Another consequence of the spread of social media is that small parties have a platform to convey their political messages and to communicate with publics. Both the Green Party and the Liberal Party, the two smallest parties in New Zealand and Norway respectively in this study, explained that social media was beneficial for smaller parties. Mainstream media arguably favour the bigger parties, and attaining coverage for smaller parties has therefore been made easier by social media. In New Zealand, which has a smaller and less accessible public sphere than Norway, it is conceivable that the emergence of digital and social media can have a significant influence for political public relations practitioners.

The results also established the high importance of media relations in political public relations practices in both countries. The three New Zealand participants expressed an even stronger emphasis on a successful interaction with the media and attaining positive media coverage than the Norwegian participants. This is understandable as the New Zealand public sphere is smaller. The resulting 'struggle' of attaining media coverage may favour asymmetrical methods of communication, simply because the practitioner is left with fewer options in which to reach her publics. As displayed in section 3.5, the New Zealand mainstream media is more commercialised than the Norwegian. It is less interested in in-depth content and more interested in entertainment and other types of easily consumed media that results in higher viewer and readerships. These tendencies are present in Norway too, but are stymied by a government with an expressed desire to facilitate a vibrant environment for free speech. In this situation, it is likely that conducting a dialogue with publics through the media will be more difficult than in an environment more focused on protecting the public sphere.

Although the two countries' histories of democracy are similar, Norway has a much longer tradition of a multi-party system. New Zealand had a two-party system until the 1996 general election, and the political landscape is still dominated by the two main parties, Labour and National. The Norwegian political landscape, on the other hand, is characterised by a plurality of voices, with several strong parties. This clearly leads to a different environment for a political public relations practitioner, and one where the act of environmental scanning—mapping publics' opinions—requires more effort.

Essentially, the more diverse a country is, the more likely it is that symmetrical communication is useful.

The study also found that the two participants that seemed to favour asymmetrical communication also lacked an integrated communications function. Both in New

Zealand's Labour Party and the National Party, the communications function was splintered within the parties, with no overarching communications manager. It seems highly plausible that the lack of an integrated communications function reduces the two parties' abilities to strategically communicate. It is hard to argue against the dominance of the Labour and National parties in New Zealand, and based on this one may think that communication based on Excellence Theory principles is unnecessary. However, strategically managing a communications department is not about fitting it in to a normative and rigid model; rather, it is about having an organisational structure allowing the objective of the parties to be extended to cover more platforms and to reach more publics. This may be worth consideration by the New Zealand Labour and National parties as the New Zealand media landscape is likely to become more fragmented owing to the spread of digital and social media coupled with the demise of mainstream media, as well as a potential for the multi-party system to become more entrenched.

Finally, even though the impact of national culture on political public relations was found to be similar between the two countries, it is still a valid variable. It confirms Hofstede's (2013c; 2013d) dimensions that New Zealand and Norway are largely similar culturally. It also suggests that despite cultural similarities, political public relations practice may differ.

7.2 Limitations and further research

The viewpoints of the interviewees and how those viewpoints fit into the two-way symmetrical communication model are the focus of the study. However, it is not the researcher's intention to validate the statements the interviewees' voice. Even though the participants experience their statements as being truthful, others may view them as skewed or even incorrect. For example, the interviewees in both New Zealand and

Norway claimed that ‘negative campaigning’ is not considered appropriate and is therefore hardly used in their political parties’ communication strategies. External publics may experience this differently, as what constitutes ‘negative campaigning’ can be subjective. Consequently, the interviewees’ viewpoints are unquestionably valuable, but they represent only one side.

The data in this study has therefore not been triangulated. Triangulation of the data would increase the validity of it, but because of a lack of research in this field prior to this research, as well as this thesis’s limitations in length and resources, this research can only provide a first, but valuable step in mapping political public relations practice in New Zealand and Norway.

Further political public relations research building on this thesis may include both qualitative and quantitative elements. Quantitative research into political parties’ use of digital and social media would be able to map to what extent these new channels are facilitating symmetrical communication. This research found that practitioners value the dialogic elements of social media, but that it is also used to communicate asymmetrically. Researching Facebook updates, tweets, YouTube posts and other social media activities by political parties may validate this usage pattern.

Further qualitative research may include journalists’ viewpoints of how they view the interaction with political public relations practitioners, and if applying Excellence Theory principles in political parties’ communication departments would be regarded as valuable for members of the media. Interviewing other stakeholders that interact with political parties, such as actors in organisations and corporations, would also be valuable in determining the nature of political public relations practitioners practice.

7.3 Significance of research

This research was undertaken because there is a scarcity of literature in political public relations, especially in a New Zealand and Norwegian context. As the available literature is mostly US centric, there is a significant void to fill in researching how political parties communicate elsewhere in the world. This thesis is an attempt that begins to address this.

This thesis has demonstrated that a mixed-motive approach can successfully be applied to political public relations in New Zealand and Norway. It recognises that a correct application of the Excellence Theory does not strictly need to adhere to the notion of two-way symmetrical communication, but should include elements of both two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical communication. Nevertheless, several scholars (Cancel et al., 1997; Holtzhausen, 2000; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011) have asserted that the political public relations should follow just one of the models.. However, Grunig (2001) explained that a mixed-motive approach was in fact a correct understanding of the theory. This study is thus a contribution in validating the Excellence Theory's suitability and expanding the theory to a New Zealand and Norwegian context.

Finally, the study has displayed that political public relations is undergoing rapid changes as a result of the emergence of digital and social media. This study has been able to capture how political public relations was practiced in 2013, and how digital and social media were on the rise but still not established as equally important to mainstream media. This will serve as a useful reference point to future studies in political public relations.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval



17 May 2013e

Averill Gordon
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Averill

Re: 13/97 Achieving media coverage: A comparative study of political public relations in Norway and New Zealand.

Thank you for submitting your application for ethical review. I am pleased to confirm that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECSecretariat) has approved your ethics application for three years until 6 May 2016.

AUTECSecretariat suggests amending the Information Sheet to better describe the information that is being sought in the research.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTECSecretariat:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 6 May 2016;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 6 May 2016 or on completion of the project;

It is a condition of approval that AUTECSecretariat is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTECSecretariat approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTECSecretariat grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this. If your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within their.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Madeline Banda', is written over a horizontal line.

Madeline Banda
Acting Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee


Cc: Daniel Drageset ddrageset@gmail.com

Appendix B: Consent Forms

02 August 2013

page 1 of 1

Consent Form



AUT
UNIVERSITY
TECHNOLOGY AUCKLAND

Project title: *Achieving media coverage: A comparative study of political public relations in Norway and New Zealand*

Project Supervisor: *Averill Gordon*

Researcher: *Daniel Drageset*

☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 02/04/2013.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

☐ I agree to take part in this research.

☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☒ No ☐

Participant's signature: *Julian Robins*

Participant's name: *Julian Robins*

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):
Julian.robins@parliament.govt.nz

Date: *2/8/2013*

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 17/5/2013 AUTC Reference number 13/97.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

This version was last edited on 13 October 2010

Consent Form

Project title: *Achieving media coverage: A comparative study of political public relations in Norway and New Zealand*

Project Supervisor: *Averill Gordon*

Researcher: *Daniel Drageset*

- ☒ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 02/04/2013.
- ☒ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☒ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☒ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☒ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☒ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☒ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☒ No ☐

Participant's signature: _____

Participant's name: _____

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

Green Party Communications Director
Level 17, Bowen House
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Date: _____

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 17/5/2013 AUTEC Reference number 13/97.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Consent Form



Project title: *Achieving media coverage: A comparative study of political public relations in Norway and New Zealand*

Project Supervisor: *Averill Gordon*

Researcher: *Daniel Drageset*

- ☒ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 02/04/2013.
- ☒ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☒ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☒ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☒ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☒ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☒ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Data Is (if appropriate):

021940884

Date:

4-7-13

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 17/5/2013 AUTEK Reference number 13/97.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

Samtykkeskjema



Prosjektittel: Oppnå mediedekning: En sammenlignende studie av politisk PR i Norge og New Zealand

Veileder for prosjektet: Averill Gordon

Forsker: Daniel Drageset

- ☒ Jeg har lest og forstått informasjonen jeg har mottatt om dette forskningsprosjektet i informasjonseksemplaret datert 2.4.2013.
- ☒ Jeg har hatt muligheten til å stille spørsmål og å få de besvart.
- ☒ Jeg forstår at det vil bli tatt notater under intervjuene og at de også vil bli tatt opp og transkribert.
- ☒ Jeg forstår at jeg kan trekke meg, og all informasjon jeg har bidratt med, fra prosjektet på hvilket som helst tidspunkt før fullførelsen av datainnhenting, uten å oppleve noen ulemper medført av at jeg trekker meg.
- ☒ Hvis jeg trekker meg, er jeg klar over at all relevant informasjon inkludert opptak og transkripsjoner kommer til å bli destruert.
- ☒ Jeg tarer ja til å delta i dette forskningsprosjektet.
- ☐ Jeg ønsker å motta en kopi av masteroppgaven (vennligst velg én): ☒ Ja ☐ Nei
- ☒ Jeg forstår at mitt fulle navn og yrkestittel vil bli benyttet i masteroppgaven.

Deltakerens signatur: _____

Deltakerens navn: _____

Dato: 17-2013

Godkjent av Auckland University of Technologys etikkomité (AUTC) den 17/5/2013 AUTC referansenummer 13/97.

NR: Deltakeren bør beholde en kopi av dette skjemaet.

Samtykkeskjema



Prosjekttittel: Oppnå mediedekning: En sammenlignende studie av politisk PR i Norge og New Zealand

Veileder for prosjektet: Averill Gordon

Forsker: Daniel Drageset

- ☒ Jeg har lest og forstått informasjonen jeg har mottatt om dette forskningsprosjektet i informasjonseksemplaret datert 2.4.2013.
- ☒ Jeg har hatt muligheten til å stille spørsmål og å få de besvart.
- ☒ Jeg forstår at det vil bli tatt notater under intervjuene og at de også vil bli tatt opp og transkribert.
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- ☒ Hvis jeg trekker meg, er jeg klar over at all relevant informasjon inkludert opptak og transkripsjoner kommer til å bli destruert.
- ☒ Jeg tar ja til å delta i dette forskningsprosjektet.
- ☒ Jeg ønsker å motta en kopi av masteroppgaven (vennligst velg én): Ja ☒ Nei ☐
- ☒ Jeg forstår at mitt fulle navn og yrkestittel vil bli benyttet i masteroppgaven.

Deltakerens signatur: _____

Deltakerens navn: _____

STEINAR HAUGSVÆR

Dato: 20.9.2013

Godkjent av Auckland University of Technologys etikkomité (AUTC) den 17/5/2013 AUTC referansenummer 13/97.

NB. Deltakeren bør beholde en kopi av dette skjemaet.

Samtykkeskjema



Prosjekttittel: Oppnå mediedekning: En sammenlignende studie av politisk PR i Norge og New Zealand

Veileder for prosjektet: Averill Gordon

Forsker: Daniel Drageset

- ☒ Jeg har lest og forstått informasjonen jeg har mottatt om dette forskningsprosjektet i Informasjonseksemplaret datert 2.4.2013.
- ☒ Jeg har hatt muligheten til å stille spørsmål og å få de besvar.
- ☒ Jeg forstår at det vil bli tatt notater under intervjuene og at de også vil bli tatt opp og transkribert.
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- ☒ Jeg tarer ja til å delta i dette forskningsprosjektet.
- ☒ Jeg ønsker å motta en kopi av masteroppgaven (vennligst velg én): Ja ☒ Nei ☐
- ☒ Jeg forstår at mitt fulle navn og yrkestittel vil bli benyttet i masteroppgaven.

Deltakerens signatur:

Sunniva Håge Jensen

Deltakerens navn:

SUNNIVA HÅGE JENSEN

Dato:

27/9 - 13 - 0410

Godkjent av Auckland University of Technologys etikkomité (AUTC) den 17/5/2013 AUTC referansenummer 13/97.

NB: Deltakeren bør beholde en kopi av dette skjemaet.

Appendix C: Interview Framework (English)

These draft questions are drawn from political communications theory developed by Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011), Sriramesh (2009), Lieber and Golan (2011), and Gordon (2011). This interview will be used for my thesis on political public relations in Norway and New Zealand.

Opening questions

- How would you describe your position?
- What do you consider to be the ultimate objective in your position?
- How important would you say a successful interaction with the media is in your position?
- How often do you interact with the media?
- How central is it for your party organisation to achieve positive media coverage?
- What are your most central activities that do not involve media liaison?

Methods

- 'Information subsidies' is a term for media-ready information that helps secure positive coverage. It can be anything from a one-page press release, to an elaborate case given exclusively to one media outlet. How would you describe your party's strategy concerning information subsidies?
- What information subsidies do you find most useful for achieving media coverage?
- Are there information subsidies that you normally refrain from using, but could use in certain situations?
- In what ways do you use digital platforms in your external party communication? Such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, party websites etc.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of digital communication methods as opposed to traditional non-digital?
- How important is dialogue and interactivity in your party's digital communication?
- Digital media in public relations is still relatively new. What do you see as the most important features of digital media in a successful communications strategy?
- Another feature of digital media, such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, is the possibility of bypassing journalists as an intermediary in an organisation's external communication. What opportunities and challenges does this revolutionary development in communication present your party's external communication?
- It is difficult to predict the future, but how do you think your external party communications will develop in the next five to ten years?

Media diversity and interaction

- Sriramesh (2009) asserts that having an independent and diverse media in the country you operate provides more opportunities for the communications expert. Are you happy with the media independence and diversity in New Zealand, or are there other types of media you wish to see?
- What advantages do you find there are in targeting specific media regarding a story rather than the media in general? Is this part of your media approach?
- How would you characterise your relationship with journalists covering your party?
- How do you view the use of dialogue as opposed to persuasion when interacting with the media?
- How can long-term relationships be built with the media when they have a different agenda from your own?
- If your position did not exist how do you think the media coverage would be different?
- A feature of the news media landscape in New Zealand in recent years is that there are fewer journalists and less diversity, at least in terms of traditional non-digital media; newspaper circulation is falling or they may even be closing down, there is less content and more music/entertainment in radio, and a similar development in television. How has this development impacted your party's communications the last decade?

Cultural characteristics

- What cultural characteristics in New Zealand do you think affects how political communications is practiced?
- Are there political public relations methods you know are common in other countries that you would not use in your country because of cultural values?

Theoretical approaches

- The relational perspective in public relations holds that public relations is "professional practice that helps organizations and publics to understand each other's interests." It focuses on the relationships between an organisation and its publics. How does that description fit your party's external communications?
- Would you say that you have an over-arching media communications strategy in your party, or would you rather say that it depends on what kind of situation you are in?
- When, if at all, is personal dialogue with your constituents a preferred approach?

- To what extent are you and the communication department involved in the policy-making processes within your party?
- The media may be concerned with issues not on your agenda. How do you keep the communications strategy on track?
- Traditionally, journalists have an agenda-setting role and are responsible for asking tough questions to officials in power. However, the notion of agenda indexing suggests that journalists tend to rely on official sources, and that the sources' viewpoints are often repeated in the media. From your experience, how common is it that the news media simply regurgitates information emanating from your party's external communications?
- When you have been unsuccessful in achieving adequate or prominent media coverage; what do you believe are the key reasons that have limited this?
- Can you explain how you segment and prioritise your target audience in your communications strategy?
- The definition of political public relations is according to Strömbäck and Kioussis (2011) a "management process by which an organization or individual for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals." How does this definition fit your position?
- How important is it in your job to maintain beneficial relationships with the media and other target audiences?
- In what way does your communications practice maintain beneficial relationships with your target audience?
- Is the media your most important target audience?

Appendix D: Interview Framework (Norwegian)

Intervjuguide

Disse spørsmålene er hentet fra politisk kommunikasjonsteori utviklet av blant andre Strömbäck og Kioussis (2011), Sriramesh (2009), Lieber og Golan (2011) og Gordon (2011). Intervjuet kommer til å bli brukt til masteroppgaven min om politisk kommunikasjon i Norge og New Zealand.

Åpningsspørsmål

- Hvordan vil du beskrive det jobben din går ut på?
- Hva anser du for å være den aller viktigste målsetningen i jobben din?
- Hvor viktig vil du si at vellykket interaksjon med mediene er i jobben din?
- Hvor ofte har du med media å gjøre? Enten i form av mediehenveler, at du selv tar kontakt med media eller annen type kontakt.
- Hvor sentralt er det for partiorganisasjonen din å oppnå positiv mediedekning?
- Hva er vanligste oppgavene dine som ikke involverer mediehåndtering?

Metoder

- 'Informasjonssubsidier' er et begrep brukt om informasjon som er klar til å publiseres i media og som hjelper å sikre positiv omtale. Det kan være hva som helst fra en en-sides pressemelding til en nøye utført case gitt eksklusivt til én mediebedrift. Hvordan vil du beskrive ditt partis strategi angående informasjonssubsidier?
- Hvilke informasjonssubsidier mener du er mest nyttige for å oppnå positiv mediedekning?
- Er det noen informasjonssubsidier du vanligvis vil nøle med å bruke, men som kan vurderes i visse sammenhenger?
- På hvilke måter bruker dere digitale plattformer, slik som Twitter, Facebook og YouTube, i den eksterne kommunikasjonen?
- Slik du ser det, hva er fordelene og ulempene med digitale kommunikasjonsmetoder sammenlignet med tradisjonelle ikke-digitale metoder?
- Hvor viktig er dialog og interaktivitet i den digitale kommunikasjonen deres?
- Digitale sosiale medier i PR/kommunikasjon er fremdeles et relativt nytt fenomen. Hva vil du si er de viktigste egenskapene til sosiale medier i en vellykket kommunikasjonsstrategi?
- En annen egenskap til digitale media er muligheten til å 'sløyfe' journalister, som en mellomstasjon i en organisasjons eksterne kommunikasjon. Hvilke

muligheter og utfordringer fører denne revolusjonære utviklingen i kommunikasjon til for ditt partis eksterne kommunikasjon?

- Det er vanskelig å spå om fremtiden, men hvordan tror du ditt partis eksterne kommunikasjon vil utvikle seg i de neste fem-ti årene?

Mediemangfold- og interaksjon

- Sriramesh (2009) hevder at det fordelaktig for kommunikasjonsarbeidere å operere i land hvor mediene er selvstendige og mangfoldige. Er du fornøyd med mediemangfoldet i Norge, eller er det andre typer medier du skulle ønske eksisterte?
- Hvilke fordeler er det ved å rette seg mot enkeltmedier i motsetning til media generelt, når dere ønsker innpass for en sak? Er denne fremgangsmåten en del av mediestrategien deres?
- Hvordan vil du beskrive forholdet ditt til journalister som dekker partiet ditt?
- Hva tenker du om bruken av dialog sett i forhold til overtalelse i samhandlingen din med media?
- Hvordan kan langvarige relasjoner med mediene bli bygd når de har en annen agenda enn det dere har?
- Dersom din jobb ikke fantes, hvordan tror du mediedekningen av partiet ditt ville vært?
- Noen av trekkene ved utviklingen av tradisjonelle ikke-digitale nyhetsmedia de siste årene, både i Norge, New Zealand og andre steder, er at det blir færre journalister, mindre mangfold, aviser har fallende opplag og enkelte går til og med inn. I tillegg blir det mindre innhold og mer musikk og underholdning i radio, og det er en lignende utvikling i fjernsyn. Hvordan har denne utviklingen påvirket ditt partis eksterne kommunikasjon det siste tiåret?

Kulturelle særegenheter

- Hvilke kulturelle særegenheter i Norge tror du påvirker hvordan politisk kommunikasjonsarbeid utøves?
- Er det politiske kommunikasjonsmetoder du vet er vanlig i andre land som du ikke vil bruke i Norge på grunn av kulturelle hensyn?

Teoretiske tilnærminger

- Det relasjonelle perspektivet i PR-forskning hevder at PR "hjelper organisasjoner og samfunnsgrupper til å forstå hverandres interesser." Det fokuserer altså som navnet antyder på å bygge relasjoner mellom organisasjoner og samfunnsgrupper, og at det vil være nyttig for begge

parter. Hvordan passer dette perspektivet inn i ditt partis eksterne kommunikasjon?

- Vil du si at partiet ditt har én overhengende kommunikasjonsstrategi, eller vil du heller si at kommunikasjonsstrategien kommer an på hva slags situasjon man er i?
- Når, om i det hele tatt, er personlig dialog med ulike samfunnsgrupper en nyttig metode?
- Til hvilken grad er du og den øvrige kommunikasjonsavdelinga involvert i politiske beslutninger i partiet ditt?
- Nyhetsmedia har gjerne andre oppfatninger fra partiorganisasjoner om hva som er verdt å fokusere på. I en slik situasjon, hvordan fastholder man på kommunikasjonsstrategien sin?
- Tradisjonelt har journalister en dagsordenfunksjon og er ansvarlig for å stille tøffe spørsmål til makthavere. På den andre side, fremholder agendaindekseringsteorien at journalister i svært stor grad er avhengig av offisielle kilder, og at disse kildenes synspunkter og måter å tolke en sak på ofte blir gjenspeilet i media. Etter dine erfaringer, hvor alminnelig er det at nyhetsmedia mer eller mindre kopierer informasjon som stammer fra ditt partis eksterne kommunikasjon?
- Når du ikke har lyktes i å oppnå den mediedekningen du håpet på, det være seg enten med hensyn til vinkling eller hvor fremhevet saken var i nyhetsmediet; hva tror du er de viktigste grunnene til det?
- Situasjonell PR-teori deler samfunnsgrupper opp i fire typer: Aktive, bevisste, latente og inaktive. Kan du forklare hvordan dere segmenterer og prioriterer ulike målgrupper i deres eksterne kommunikasjonsstrategi?
- Strömbäck og Kioussis (2011) definerer politisk PR som en "ledelsesprosess hvor en organisasjon eller enkeltperson med politiske formål, gjennom målrettet kommunikasjon og handling, ønsker å påvirke og etablere, bygge og bevare gunstige relasjoner og omdømme hos dens viktigste samfunnsgrupper for å hjelpe å støtte dens misjon og oppnå dens målsetninger." Hvordan passer dette inn i din jobb?
- Hvor viktig er det i din job å bevare gunstige relasjoner med mediene og andre målgrupper?
- På hvilken måte bevarer kommunikasjonsutøvelsen i partiet ditt gunstige forhold blant målgruppene deres?
- Er media deres viktigste målgruppe?

Appendix E: Information Sheet (English)

Participant Information Sheet



Date Information Sheet Produced:

02/04/2013

Project Title

Achieving media coverage: A comparative study of political public relations in Norway and New Zealand

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of the research is to produce a thesis, which will qualify me for the Master of Communication Studies degree. I will also attempt to publish an academic journal article resulting from the thesis.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

As you are the head public relations manager and thus in charge of forming and developing the strategies applied in your party's public relations efforts, I sincerely hope to interview you on my research regarding the methods political public relations managers use to achieve media coverage. Five other participants will take part in this research, representing two other New Zealand parties and three Norwegian parties. In order for the research to be valid, it is important that the participants have equal roles in their parties. Your contact details were obtained after calling your party headquarters.

What will happen in this research?

I would very much like to come to Wellington and interview you at a venue of your choosing. I truly hope this will not cause any inconvenience on your part, and that you will be interested in taking part in this research which hopefully will advance the public relations body of knowledge.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The comments you make can potentially be used against you by political opponents. However, as you and the other participants are regularly interviewed and quoted, and have been trained to manage your own and your party's reputation, I see that as unlikely.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Transcripts and quotes from your interview will be sent to an email address of your choice. You are able to retract, amend, change or add to the answers you have given.

What are the benefits?

The research will add to the political public relations body of knowledge by researching a field where there is a scarcity of literature. It will also add to the understanding of how public relations is practiced in the two countries that will be researched, and may thus help to advance the industry as well as the academic field of public relations. I will personally obtain a Master of Communication Studies degree by completing the thesis.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your name and contact details may only be discussed with the project supervisor Averill Gordon. Your full name and occupation is sought to be included in the thesis, but no other personal information will be disclosed.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The interviews will last approximately an hour. How much time will be spent prior to and after the interviews are up to you to decide. I would advise you to take the time to review the indicative questions before the interview as well as the transcript and quotes supplied after the interview.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

I would greatly appreciate a reply within a week.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

In order to participate in this research you are required to complete a Consent Form. This form is attached to this email. If you decide to take part in this research, I would need a completed Consent Form before the interview takes place.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, you will receive an electronic summary of the thesis. If the thesis results in an academic article you will receive this as well.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Averill Gordon, averill.gordon@aut.ac.nz (+64) (0) 9 921 9999 ext 6492

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Dr Rosemary Godbold, rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz (+64) 921 9999 ext 6902.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**Researcher Contact Details:**

Daniel Drageset

ddrageset@gmail.com, daniel.drageset@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Averill Gordon

averill.gordon@aut.ac.nz 09 921 9999 ext 6492

Appendix F: Information Sheet (Norwegian)

Informasjonsark til deltakere



Dato informasjonsarket ble laget

2.4.2013

Prosjekttittel

Oppnå mediedekning: En sammenlignende studie av politisk PR i Norge og New Zealand

Hva er hensikten med denne studien?

Hensikten er å produsere en masteroppgave som vil gjøre at jeg kan bli uteksaminert med en mastergrad i Communication Studies. Jeg vil også forsøke å publisere en akademisk journalartikkel på bakgrunn av denne studien.

Hvordan ble jeg funnet fram til og hvorfor blir jeg invitert til å delta i denne studien?

Ettersom du er informasjonssjef i ditt parti, og dermed ansvarlig for å utforme en kommunikasjonsstrategi i din partiorganisasjon, håper jeg du har anledning til å delta i denne studien. Fem andre informasjons-/kommunikasjonssjefer i politiske partier vil delta i denne studien, fra tre andre newzealandske partier og to andre norske partier. For at studien skal ha gyldighet, er det viktig at deltakerne har like roller i partiene. Kontaktdetaljene dine ble funnet på nettsiden til partiet ditt.

Hva kommer til å skje i studien?

Ettersom det er en betydelig geografisk avstand mellom Norge og New Zealand, har jeg ikke anledning til å komme til Oslo og intervju deg ansikt til ansikt. Har du anledning til å delta i et intervju over Skype eller over telefon? Jeg håper dette ikke vil være ubehagelig for deg, og at du vil være interessert i å delta i denne studien som forhåpentligvis vil videreutvikle kunnskapen om politisk PR og kommunikasjon.

Hva er ubehagelighetene og risikoene ved å delta i studien?

Svarene du gir kan potensielt bli brukt mot deg av politiske motstandere. Med tanke på at du og de andre deltakerne blir intervjuet og sitert på regelmessig basis, og at du har blitt trent opp i å håndtere ditt eget og partiet ditt sitt rykte, anser jeg det for å være usannsynlig.

Hvordan vil ubehageligheter og risikoer bli håndtert?

Transkripsjoner og sitater fra intervjuet ditt blir sendt til en ønsket epost-adresse. Du har anledning til å trekke tilbake, forandre eller utdype svar du har gitt.

Hva er fordelene?

Studien vil være et bidrag til litteraturen om politisk PR/kommunikasjon, som er et område hvor lite akademisk forskning har vært gjort så langt. Det vil også bidra til å øke forståelsen av hvordan PR blir praktisert i Norge og New Zealand, og kan dermed fremme PR både som profesjon og som en akademisk disiplin. Jeg kommer personlig til å oppnå en mastergrad i Communication Studies ved å fullføre dette forskningsprosjektet.

Hvordan vil mine personlige detaljer bli beskyttet?

Navnet ditt og kontaktdetaljene dine kommer kun til å bli diskutert med veilederen min Averill Gordon. Ditt fulle navn og stilling ønskes inkludert i studien, men ingen annen personlig informasjon er nødvendig.

Hvilke kostnader er knyttet til å delta i studien?

Intervjuene kommer til å ta cirka én time. Hvor mye tid som blir brukt før og etter intervjuene er opp til deg å bestemme. Jeg vil anbefale at du tar deg tid til å gå gjennom de tentative spørsmålene før intervjuet, i tillegg til transkripsjonen og sitatene du blir tilsendt etter intervjuet.

Hvilke muligheter har jeg til å vurdere denne invitasjonen?

Jeg vil sette stor pris på om jeg kan få en tilbakemelding innen én uke.

Hvordan takker jeg ja til å delta i studien?

For å delta er det nødvendig at du fyller ut et samtykkeskjema. Dette skjemaet er lagt ved denne e-posten. Dersom du sier ja til å delta i studien, vil jeg trenge et utfylt samtykkeskjema før intervjuet med deg finner sted. Det er ønskelig at du sender dette skjemaet tilbake til min epost-adresse.

Hvordan får jeg tilbakemelding på resultatene av studien?

Du vil bli tilsendt et elektronisk sammendrag av studien. Studien kan også resultere i en akademisk artikkel. Du kan bli tilsendt denne også dersom du ønsker det.

Hva gjør jeg hvis jeg har bekymringer vedrørende studien?

Alle bekymringer vedrørende utformingen av denne studien skal i første instans rettes til veilederen av forskningsprosjektet, Averill Gordon averill.gordon@aut.ac.nz (+64) (0) 9 921 9999 forlengelse 6492

Bekymringer angående utførelsen av studien skal rettes til sekretæren i AUTs etikkomité, Dr. Rosemary Godbold, rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz (+64) 921 9999 forlengelse 6902.

Hvem kontakter jeg for mer informasjon om studien?

Kontakt detaljer til forsker:

Daniel Drageset

ddrageset@gmail.com; daniel.drageset@aut.ac.nz

Kontakt detaljer til veileder:

Averill Gordon

averill.gordon@aut.ac.nz 09 921 9999 ext 6492