

# Chapter 2

## Self–Promotion by Press Releases

### ABSTRACT

*When an organization publishes press releases, there is always an element of self-promotion implicit in the distributed messages. This chapter presents research in Norway where the national authority for the investigation and prosecution of economic and environmental crime regularly publishes press releases. In the study period of almost two years from June 2022 to May 2024, the studied authority published 96 press releases. Content analysis of the press releases enabled identification of three themes: impression management, felony convictions, and crime deterrence. Impression management can enable return to a state of regained social license by conformance after a scandal and following crisis. Felony conviction messages tell that serious crime offenders have been brought to justice. Crime deterrence messages emphasize the seriousness of offense consequences leading to discouragement of criminal acts.*

### INTRODUCTION

Press releases are texts communicating information that may impact and be of interest to people (Choi and Lee, 2017; Morton and Ramsey, 1994). Press releases are an important vehicle for organizations to disclose enterprise and agency activities to the public (Gong, 2023). A press release is a news statement initiated by an organization in possession of relevant information to produce the public message (Greene and Smith, 2021). A press release is an announcement originated by an entity and distributed directly or via news providers (Gong, 2023). Government press releases have been identified as the formal and most efficient channel of communication from the government to the public (Hong, 2016; Rossmann et al., 2018; Schnidman, 2013). While mainly informative, press releases also carry an

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implicitly self-promotion purpose “in so far as the information they contain comes from a source internal to the organization which is the object of the release itself” (Catenaccio, 2008: 9).

The Norwegian national authority for the investigation and prosecution of economic and environmental crime – Økokrim – regularly publishes press releases regarding its activities. From June 2022 to May 2024, this research was on the mailing list for press releases from Økokrim. A total of 96 press releases were received that represent more than one press release every week. This research presents thematic analysis of those Økokrim press releases by application of content analysis to answer the following research question: *What self-promotion themes can be identified in press releases from the Norwegian national authority for the investigation and prosecution of economic crime?*

This research is important as the Norwegian media tend to trust the content of Økokrim press releases without questioning potential biasing issues and self-promotion issues. This is in line with the general trust in the Norwegian police where 72 percent of Norwegians say they have reasonably high or very high confidence in the police (Grindem, 2024).

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESS RELEASES**

While press releases from business enterprises tend to be understood as “a form of cheap talk” and “reflect managerial overconfidence” (Filip et al., 2022: 65) where firms attempt “abnormal returns on press releases” (Guindy et al., 2024), government press releases are considered being specific and narrow proxy for government communication activities” and have been found to have more impact on public perceptions than any other form of communication (Hong, 2016: 886). Research literature has highlighted the role of press releases from the government and other public authorities as a critical medium of communication for various types of disasters such as Covid-19 epidemic, flooding, tsunami, earthquake, and oil spill (Tomasi et al., 2023).

Government press releases are a “specific and narrow proxy for government communication activities” and have been found to have more impact on public perceptions than any other form of communication (Hong, 2016: 886). For example, the function of press releases and communication during a health crisis is to provide information about the risk and possible treatments of the disease, help the public evaluate risks, and encourage the public to take precautions (Rossmann et al., 2018).

Press releases are texts communicating information by short pieces of writing (Catenaccio, 2008):

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