

Colonising the academy? Organisational mediatisation and public research institutions in Norway

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Abstract

Public research institutions increasingly find themselves operating in a media environment. At the same time, there is a growing body of research finding that public institutions and organisations are undergoing processes of mediatisation that potentially threaten their autonomy. Based on interviews with communication staff at six major Norwegian universities and research centres, this study explores the extent to which these institutions have adapted to and internalised media logic. Focusing on the impact of journalistic news media, this study finds that the public research institutions are adapting to their media environments in terms of both organisational structure and communication practise. However, this study finds little evidence suggesting that the institutions internalise news media logic to such an extent that it critically impinges on the processes and prioritisations in key operational areas such as research dissemination, the execution of research projects and managerial decision-making.

Keywords

Research institutions, science communication, mediatization, news media, organizational mediatization

Background

The key social function of universities and research centres is to do research, educate students and, increasingly, to ensure innovation. It is also an integral responsibility of research institutions to disseminate research to the public at large as well as the commercial sector and public administration. In Norway, these are core tasks that are mandated by the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges (§ 1). In order to perform their core tasks, public research institutions must maintain a sufficient degree of autonomy vis-à-vis external forces. They need to operate in accordance with their own priorities and logic in which the ideals of scholarly independence and impartiality are fundamental. Thus, although research and education are subject to democratic control, the governing principle for the tasks to be performed should be to remain independent from the fluctuating demands and pressures from politicians and the market. In the Norwegian context (the Norwegian government's official reports 2000:14; Slagstad, 2003) and also internationally (Henkel, 2005; 2007), external pressure on academic autonomy has been a recurring concern for the past decades. Adaptation to the market and political demands and the internalisation of more market-oriented approaches to institutional governance (most significantly, New Public Management) have been identified by scholars, commentators and politicians alike as serious threats to the autonomy of public research institutions.

At the same time, research institutions increasingly find themselves operating in a media environment. Communication through the media is important to disseminate research, attract students, funding and future employees, and develop and maintain a favourable public reputation. Various studies have found that the increasing attribution of significance to public reputation by other types of public institutions, including public bureaucracies (Torbjørnsrud et al., 2014), public administration (Schillemanns, 2012) and public health services (Sataøen, 2012), engenders organisational adaptation to media logic. Although Sataøen (2014) does not discuss the role of the media *per se*, this study shows that the marketization of research and education also causes (Scandinavian) universities to allocate resources to branding and the development of distinct profiles.

Therefore, public research institutions can also be understood as *expressive* organisations (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012), which requires a considerable interface with the news media. Henceforth, in addition to pressure from the political sphere and the market, media logic and pressure may potentially involve a challenge to the autonomy of public research institutions. Given the democratic, political and cultural importance of public research institutions, combined with their interface with the media, there is a lack of research on organisational mediatisation in public research institutions. Consequently, there is a need for studies that systematically investigate how the increasing interaction with the media may affect the priorities and processes of public research institutions. This study explores the degree to which organisational make-up, research dissemination, research projects and managerial decision-making at major Norwegian universities and research centres are modified to cope with their media environments.

Various media may, however, affect the inner workings of research institutions in a multitude of potentially significant ways. By charting the existing body of research, Schäfer (2014) usefully identifies and distinguishes between three different categories that capture the main ways in which science may become mediatised. The first one Schäfer labels 'communication within science' – for example, when social network media for specialised research purposes, such as *Researchgate* and *Academia.edu*, are used by researchers and increasingly integrated into their daily lives – as a tool for research dissemination, keeping abreast of their field and networking. Similarly, social network platforms, online in-house magazines and blogs – often supported by communication departments – are used strategically as internal communicative management tools in institutions. The second category is 'interactive communication' – for instance, when scientists (particularly, in the natural sciences) increasingly need to master and spend time on interactive digital technology to access, interpret and visualise scientific data.

This study attends to Schäfer's third category of mediatisation in science; what he labels 'mass communication and research'. This category encompasses the ways in which research institutions interact with *external* media. More specifically, this study attends to the question of how *journalistic news media* and *news media logic* affect the *modus operandi* of research institutions.

Mediatisation theory and public institutions

In the context of public institutions, mediatisation works as a descriptive concept through which the interplay between media logic and institutional logics can be illuminated but also as a critical concept in that it stipulates how processes of media logic and pressure may eventually significantly alter processes and prioritisation of the organisations and, thus, threaten their autonomy. More generally and as conceptualised by Hjarvard (2008), mediatisation can be studied on three levels: on a meta-, mezzo-, and micro-level. At the meta-level, mediatisation is a broad sociological concept that, similar to concepts such as individualisation or globalisation, refers to a set of processes and changes in society at large (Krotz, 2007; Hepp, 2012). Thus, at this level and as critically discussed by Livingstone & Lunt (2014), mediatisation may also have the potential to evolve into a theory capable of grasping and reinterpreting large-scale transformations in modernity. At the mezzo-level at which this study finds itself, mediatisation is studied in terms of how the media interact in and among institutions. Significantly, from this institutional perspective of mediatisation (Hjarvard, 2013), the media are seen as autonomous institutions with their own logics and as integrated into the workings of other social institutions. Moreover, mediatisation is a concept that has been applied to track changes in more specific domains of society such as, for instance, religion (Hjarvard, 2008) and politics (Strömbäck, 2008; Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Masoleni & Schulz, 1999) and specific practises at the micro-level – including, for instance, the mediatisation of children's play (Livingstone, 1998; Hjarvard, 2004). Recent

contributions to mediatisation theory (Hjarvard, 2014; Finneman, 2011) have also discussed the distinctive role of digital and new media at all three levels.

As Schillemans (2012, p. 12) notes, mediatisation can be thought of as a label carrying a general theory about how media exerts power over and in other social spheres. He also argues (*ibid.*, p. 49) that mediatisation is primarily a descriptive concept in that it traces institutional adaptation to the media. However, it also entails an important normative and critical dimension in that, as shown by Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) in the context of politics, it also makes evident how the internalisation of media logic and pressure may challenge the democratically vital functions of political institutions. In the context of organisational mediatisation, a key question, as Strömbäck (2008, pp. 236-240) argues, is whether the organisation's internal understanding of what constitutes an important issue or problem gives way to the media's external perspective – where organisational logic is 'colonised' (Meyer, 2002) by media logic. Esser & Strömbäck (2014, p. 250) argues that, in instances of a high degree of mediatisation, political logic may be *guided rather than governed* by media logic. Media logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Altheide, 2004, Altheide, 2014¹) or, more specifically, news media logic can be generally defined as the rules and norms of news. The central characteristics of news media logic are format and genre conventions, temporal aspects such as rhythm and timing, and relevance and importance – the ways in which the news genre inherently claims to set the agenda and to engender consequences.

However, Schillemans (2012, p. 15) notes that mediatisation sometimes works more as a 'catch phrase' than an academic concept and argues that its meaning and relevance have been somewhat imprecise; it has functioned as what he terms a 'fly paper' concept to which everything sticks. Similar critiques are voiced by other scholars, including Hjarvard (2014, p. 13), who argues that mediatisation runs the risk of becoming all-encompassing and, therefore, analytically unproductive, Livingstone (2008) and Lunt & Livingstone (2015), who address the enduring linguistic and conceptual fuzziness of mediatisation, and Strömbäck (2011), who addresses the need for researchers to attune the concept of mediatisation to their focus of research – in Strömbäck's case, politics. Hence, to assess the degree to which universities and research centres are mediatised, a conceptual framework attuned to these kinds of institutions is necessary.

Conceptual framework

In the following, a conceptual framework that combines descriptive and normative elements from Schulz's (2004) conceptualisation of mediatisation with Strömbäck's (2008) multidimensional four-phase model of mediatisation is presented. In the context of public research institutions, this conceptual framework allows for an exploration of, first, the level of adaptation to media logic and, second, the level to which the institutions internalise media logic at the expense of their own institutional logic.

Schulz's (*ibid.*) conceptualisation consists of four elements. The first is *extension* by which media allow persons to transcend the natural limits of communication – basically,

the use of media technology to communicate. The next is *substitution* – when mediated communication is substituted for face-to-face communication. The third element is *amalgamation*, which involves the mingling of media-related activities with essentially non-media activities.

The fourth element is *accommodation*, which involves changes in organisational rules, structures and processes that are made especially for or changed in order to enable the organisation to operate effectively in its media environment. This element may involve hiring communications experts, repositioning and centralising the media team within the organisation, and training or selecting CEOs on their ability to handle the media. This element is basically congruent with the third phase of Strömbäck's (2008) four-phase model in which organisations *adapt* in order to be able to interact successfully with the media.

The first two elements – extension and substitution – are self-evident and integrated in the way most institutions, including universities and research centres, operate today (see also Schäfer, 2014). For a long time, various media technologies have enabled employees and students to communicate with each other even beyond the institution itself; and, although face-to-face communication remains an important mode of communication at universities, it has increasingly been substituted with different forms of mediated communication including e-mail, telephone, Internet sites, social media, and courses taught on the Internet. Moreover, most research institutions are also characterised by the third element – amalgamation – major economic or organisational decisions, for instance, are prepared for external communication and then handled by communications people.

It is, however, the degree to which research institutions can be characterised by the last element in Schultz's conceptualisation that makes up the focus of this study: i.e., the degree to which organisational rules, structures and processes at research institutions are established or changed in order to accommodate or adapt to logic and pressure from the media environment. Moreover, this study investigates research institutions in light of Strömbäck's fourth and critical phase of mediatisation: the degree to which these institutions have *internalised* external media rules and logic, and, the extent to which such internalisation may have substantially changed the priorities and focus of the institutions.

In doing so, this study first explores and considers the extent to which media logic is internalised in *research dissemination* – which constitutes the primary interface of public research institutions with the media. Second, this study explores the extent to which media logic and concerns are integrated into and accommodated in actual *research processes and projects*. Third, it explores the extent to which communication staff find that media logic is taken into account and internalised in central *managerial decision-making processes* and whether they perceive media logic to threaten the autonomy of the institution. Fourth, this study considers the interchange between the research institutions and the media as part of attaining media visibility and building public reputation. In conclusion, this study discusses the findings in light of empirical and theoretical research on different but comparatively relevant public institutions and sectors.

Methodology

Six different institutions representing the primary institutional types within the Norwegian research sector were selected. These include two established universities (University of Bergen (UiB) and University of Oslo (UiO)), two new universities (University of Stavanger (UiS) and University of Agder (UiA)), and two specialised research-centres (The Bjerknes Centre for Climate Research (BCCR) and the Center for International Climate and Environmental Research – Oslo (CICERO)). Interviews were conducted with two members of the communication staff at each of the institutions – including the director of communications and a senior communication advisor (See appendix for list of informants). The total number of informants is 11.² For exploring the organisational mediatisation of research institutions, communications staff are a valuable source of data since they make up the primary human interface between their institutions and the media. Whereas interviews with directors of communication enable insight into the strategic motivations behind communication efforts and how communication-related issues are integrated into the priorities and processes at the top level of university management, interviews with senior communications advisors provide insight into how universities deal with their media environment on a more hands-on and day-to-day basis.

Given their centrality in institutional processes involving communication and media contact, the informants were primarily treated as experts. In addition, the interviews also focused on how the informants perceive the media to affect core activities and processes of their institutions. As argued by Strömbäck (2011, p. 427) in the context of politics, investigating perceptions of media influence is relevant for two reasons: 1) it may provide valid evidence related to the media's actual influence, and 2) even if these perceptions may not be correct, they provide evidence related to the media's influence since these perceptions are highly likely to shape an actor's actual behaviour.

However, interviewing communication staff involves some methodological limitations. They are only partially involved in the core activities of the university (they are not directly involved in either research or education but are the key facilitators of research dissemination). Thus, they may not have in-depth knowledge about how these activities are subjected to media impact. Moreover, as communication staff whose job is also to secure a favourable reputation for their institution, they might also be inclined to give a favourable impression in research interviews. However, since communication staff are broadly involved in and responsible for media communication at many levels and areas of their institutions, interviewing them provides valuable insight into how communication practises and concerns are integrated into the practises and processes of the institutions at large.

All eleven interviews were conducted face-to-face at the informants' respective research institutions and took place in the period between 23 June – 21 August 2014. All interviews were subsequently transcribed. Interviews were carried out using a semi-structured interview guide containing questions that focus on key aspects of organisational mediatisation. Whereas practical and day-to-day issues were emphasised in the interviews with commu-

nication advisers, issues relating to the role of communication-related questions in central management processes were emphasised in the interviews with the directors.

Findings

The communication departments of the different universities and research centres in this study vary in terms of their scale, the tasks they are assigned to do and their place within the overall organisation of their respective institutions. The scale of communication operations at the different institutions is generally hard to measure since communication-related activities may often be integrated as part of positions held in the various faculties, departments and administrative bodies that are dispersed throughout the institutions. Moreover, it also depends on how communication is defined. For instance, in some of the institutions, the maintenance and distribution of university profiles is defined as a communication task and occupies communication staff; whereas, in other institutions, this is a task allocated to other departments.

In terms of the place of communication departments in the overall organisation, three general models appear. The Universities of Bergen, Stavanger and Agder are characterised by a centralised model in which, relatively speaking, large communication departments cater to academic faculties and departments out in the periphery of the organisation as well as central management. Due to their relatively small size, the organisational make-up of both CICERO and Bjerknessenteret is different in that they both have communication departments that cater directly to central management and individual researchers and research groups. The University of Oslo employs a somewhat different model in which smaller communication units have branches with the various faculties and departments, while a central communication team (including the director of communications) facilitates 'corporate communications' at the level of central management. Common to all of the institutions is the fact that the director of communication is integrated into the central management: they have the right to appear and a saying in central decision-making processes; and, in most cases, their offices are located wherever the central management is. The tasks and activities of the communication departments also vary, but core tasks are the dissemination and popularisation of research, media contact, media advice, and strategic communication. Some of the institutions also handle profiles and materials as well as the editorial maintenance of internal and external webpages.

Research dissemination and media logic

When asked, both directors and advisers of all the institutions emphasise dissemination and popularisation of research as the foremost important task. Several of the informants legitimise this emphasis by reference to the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges (§ 1.1). The act states that, in addition to providing education and conducting research, the purpose of universities – their core tasks – is also to disseminate knowledge about the

institution's activities and to promote research to benefit the general public, public administration and the commercial sector. Thus, as external media are a prerequisite for research dissemination, operating in a media environment is also a natural and integrated part of a research institution's activity.

Research dissemination as it is facilitated and carried out by communication departments may be said to be mediated at heart. Not only is adapting to media logic part of the institutional practice, it is also a professional ideal. All informants contend that adapting to media logic is paramount for successful dissemination. This adaptation takes a multitude of forms. These include the personalisation of research findings (such as promoting the researcher behind the finding or human interest stories), a certain degree of tabloidization of research (emphasising the potentially more spectacular aspects of research), the application of journalistic narratives (such as the individual against the system), and the exploitation of newsroom seasons and cycles (such as promoting climate research during the season for winter storms or research on family dynamics during holidays). In addition, research communicators exploit the current news (for example, if there has been a murder, communication staff may promote psychological research on violence) and are aware of newsroom routines and conditions in terms of when and whom they should approach. The following quote is illustrative of the shared approach to media logics and journalistic standards:

Yes, we do relate to media logic, and we use it. It is natural for us. [...] If you want to help someone with getting their research out, you need to know the game: this is our competency. And we provide that for our researchers and managers. We have to know something about how journalists work and what they need. Our knowledge about this needs to be as good as possible

Maragreth Barndon/ UiB

Similarly, most of the informants emphasised the importance of journalistic devices for selling research findings to newsrooms and attracting publicity.

Yes, we do think journalistically. We are old players of the game. We tabloidize and we personify, but we don't cheat. Reliability is important.

Tor Martin Lien / UiA

The latter informant's emphasis on being "old players of the game" is telling; a good proportion of the staff in communication departments are themselves old journalists or have some journalistic background. Four out of the six directors interviewed were either recruited from newsrooms or had previous journalistic experience, the remaining two having a background in strategic communication. All except one of the communication advisors interviewed report having considerable journalistic experience.

Mediatisation eclipsed?

A related and significant characteristic of the relationship between the universities and the press is that basic journalistic work is increasingly done by the communication departments rather than newsrooms or external journalists. As a consequence of downscaling and increasingly scarce resources in newsrooms, the informants report that they themselves are doing basic journalistic research, including the identification and interpretation of research findings and projects that satisfy the criteria of newsworthiness. This apparent relocation of journalistic groundwork also includes the preparation of briefs or ready-made editorial content adapted to journalistic format requirements. In addition, communication staff do considerable journalistic groundwork to facilitate contact with researchers and provide relevant supplementary material (visual or statistical material, for instance).

We do a lot of basic work for journalists. They could have called around in our organisation and found people and data – dug around and found the facts they're after. But, instead, they call us because they haven't got time, and then we find what they're looking for. So, altogether really, we spend a good amount of time doing basic journalistic work in order to get the journalists what they need.

Leiv Gunnar Lie / UiS

A few of the informants contend that it has now become harder to get editorial coverage of research- and university-related issues, but note that the possibilities offered by the Web and social media have made them less dependent on mainstream media. However, the majority of the informants contend the opposite: the increasing lack of time and resource has made it easier to get coverage in the press.

It is expensive to produce content. I register that they (the press) have become more open-handed in the interchange between the research institutions. To an extended degree, universities get away with, perhaps, more than what, journalistically speaking, is thought to be OK. I don't believe, for instance, that *Bergens Tidene* [regional newspaper in Norway, based in Bergen] have their own journalist covering the university. They lack systematic coverage of us – it is, therefore, quite easy to go under their radar.

Ingar Myking / UiB

Consequently, it can be argued that it is the autonomy of journalism as an institution rather than that of the universities that is under pressure. Thus, if the concept of organisational mediatisation is to mean that the media exert power over institutions either actively by submitting them to pressure or indirectly when institutions internalise media logic in order to cope with their media environment, this study highlights what appears to be the opposite and, indeed, paradoxical direction of the exertion of power. Put more precisely: as a consequence of organisational mediatisation, institutions acquire media competency and adapt to media logic, which, in turn, is used to exert influence over the media. Yet, if we regard mediatisation as a more totalising concept that denotes the adaptation of media

logic across several, dispersed sectors of society, then the findings from this study might be more supportive since they are indicative of a logic in which both journalism and research institutions, respectively, manage or adapt to media logic.

Research logic vs. media logic

A significant issue in the context of this study is the extent to which research projects – in their scope, execution and focus – are adapted in any substantial way to fit media requirements. The informants report that funding bodies increasingly expect research projects to include a dissemination plan – particularly, in larger projects funded by The Norwegian Research Council (NFR) or funding bodies in the EU. Although with significant exceptions, the informants report that dissemination and public communication of research ambitions or findings are not prioritised in research projects. Whereas all the advisors among the informants contend that, ideally, they think they should be included at all stages of the research process, including project development, application, execution and presentation of findings; they also report that communication issues have a subordinate status. As one of the informants tellingly states:

But, you know, the issue of dissemination is most often, at best, secondary, something that might be considered somewhere down the line, and something that is sketched up in research outlines. [...] We do sometimes have conversations with project managers about this, but this often amounts to little because of lack of time. We don't force ourselves upon them in the early phases of the research projects.

Margareth Barndon / UiB

Similarly, many of the informants report that communicating research beyond the academic community is an issue that arises when the research projects are concluded.

The informants, however, report varying degrees of attentiveness to communication issues among researchers. This appears, in part, to be a consequence of individual differences but also the location of the respective communication departments within their institutions as well as their research profile. These are findings that are largely congruent with a cross-national study of popular science publishing by academic staff (Bentley & Kyvig, 2011), which shows that a minority of the staff is behind the majority of popular scientific entries and that the level of publishing also varies by academic field. The director of communication at Bjerknæssenteret – a relatively small research centre specialised in climate research in which the communication staff is not centralised but integrated throughout the various research fields – contends that communication-related issues are increasingly taken into account in research projects.

Today, more and more researchers approach me before they apply for research grants – particularly, if the research is potentially interesting for media, schools, etc. Now, I feel that

communication is being thought of from the start. Other times, I am being connected to projects at the very end – because they have written it in the application for funding.

Gudrun Sylte / Bjerknessenteret

This relative attentiveness may be explained by the proximity of the communication staff to the researchers but also by the research profile. Both Bjerknessenteret and CICERO specialise in climate research, which is a research area of high political and public interest, and both stand out since the two institutions in this study have the most assertive communication practices. At CICERO, communication staff are engaged in research projects that are already in the initial phase of project development, and they also have the most resources, relative to size, allocated to communication. Significantly, and as testimony to their assertive communication practice, Kristin Halvorsen – a former politician and finance minister – was appointed the director of CICERO in 2014. One of the informants from CICERO contends that the appointment of Halvorsen was partly motivated by the prospect of media visibility and heightened possibilities for breaking through in the media. Similarly, the University of Stavanger has a joint communication and strategy department, led by the same director, which suggests that communication concerns may also be of high importance in the overall strategy of the university.

However, in CICERO, the informants also report that communication concerns are not to any significant degree taken into account in the development and execution of research projects.

We don't meddle in the research itself. But we offer advice to our researchers throughout. Generally, strategic research decisions are not taken on the grounds of what seems communicatively smart.

Christian Bjørkelo /CICERO

Hence, the data suggest that media concerns are secondary in the development and execution of specific research projects. Attention is not usually paid to dissemination and popularisation until the very end of a research project, and then often because dissemination is stipulated in research project applications. Although, with notable exceptions, communication staff only have a supportive function in the research process and engage only when called upon. Giving further evidence of the generally non-intrusive role of communication staff, both Rödder & Schäfer (2010) and Peters et al. (2008c) found that PR professionals prioritise scientific criteria over media standards when dealing with news media and that they also generally respect the authority of science.

Moreover, researchers are reported to be generally sceptical of media logic. The following account from the communication staff for the law faculty at UiO is illustrative of what appears to be a general attitude towards conforming to media requirements among the researchers:

I can't say that I have ever heard 'let's sell our research to the media'. When I have fronted such arguments, researchers aren't interested. Often, they directly reject the idea. Many researchers think that adapting their research to the two major tabloids in Norway VG and *Dagbladet* involves a dumbing down of research. One is more concerned about the impression one gives to the Norwegian Research Council or the EU. [...] I experience only to a minimal degree that one thinks strategically about how to use the media

Steinar Hafso Myhre / UiO

Testifying to the uneasy relationship between news media logic and research logic, the informants report that there is a 'translation problem' between scientific language and the format requirements of the press. This is a finding that resonates with a number of studies in other national contexts (see for instance, Besley & Nisbet, 2011; Peters et al., 2008a; 2008b). Communication staff continuously and often with limited success either encourage researchers to prepare their research in accordance with journalistic standards or, through negotiation with the researchers, prepare briefs or stories themselves. Several of the informants note that some types of research are simply not suitable for the news media because of the technical lingo.

A threat to autonomy? The informants' perceptions

In the following, we will focus on the degree to which communication staff – primarily, the directors – experience or perceive communication concerns to be integral to central managerial decision-making processes at the institutions and, moreover, whether they perceive media logic and pressure to be a threat to institutional autonomy. As previously outlined, communication departments are often located centrally in the organisational structure of the research institutions; communication directors are part of the central management team and have the right to appear in central managerial processes. Moreover, one of the institutions has selected their director, in part, based on the communication benefits this yields; and, in another institution, the head of communications is also the head of strategy. These are all characteristics that may be subsumed under Schulz's (2004) fourth element of mediatisation: accommodation. However, moving on to the fourth and critical phase of Strömbäck's (2008) conceptualisation, a pertinent question is whether these characteristics threaten institutional autonomy. A significant question in this regard is the extent to which media pressure or logic causes changes in prioritisation at the central level of the institution.

In general, communication directors concur that news media – in a direct or immediate sense – have little impact on managerial decisions.

This is an old and persistent system. It is rather the politicians who attempt to tamper with our autonomy. There is a lot of talk about autonomy here – and that is great – we shouldn't let ourselves be impacted by day-to-day public concerns. In the larger picture, however, I think that we could be more adaptive.

Marina Tofting / UiO

Tofting is here in agreement with the majority of the communication directors, which is indicative of their professional perspective, in that she argues that communication concerns should be taken into account to a more extensive degree in decision-making processes.

When the directors report that they have experienced severe media pressure, it is largely connected to staff conflicts related to specific persons, but they also contend that these conflicts are being handled separate from the pressures of external media. However, aggressive media pressure appears to be exceptional. As one of the informants noted with regard to the level of media pressure: "There is very rarely much heat in terms of the media coverage of us". By contrast, the informants contend that universities and research institutions respond and adapt to *public opinion* rather than day-to-day demands from the media. When asked whether there were any examples of decisions that were adapted to media demands, one of the informants gives the following account.

We need to take into account the 'zeitgeist' and public opinion; so, in this regard, decisions may be subject to what happens in the media sphere. But from a more direct perspective, one very rarely hears considerations such as "now, we should employ more women because it is politically correct". But there are probably several examples of decision-making processes that have changed as a result of public debate – new information may have surfaced and, thus, altered the fundament for making decisions.

Ingar Myking / UiB

As such, the accounts given by the informants suggest a certain degree of attentiveness to news media but not in a way that alters the priorities of the institutions in any significant way. The director of communications at UIA, Paal Pedersen, comes from a background as a political advisor for the Conservative parliamentary group, and he tellingly contrasts the university sector with parliamentary politics.

In politics, media logic is to a considerable degree informative of how decisions are made – this is not characteristic of universities. Of course, we discuss how to handle the media if there are difficult cases or we need to sell things to the media. But the media are not a first priority. In politics, it is fundamental to get media exposure. I have done campaigning myself, and one has to get into gear with the current news, choose suitable angles, etc. In politics, one has to adapt on a day-to-day basis; visibility is much more important – at least, in the short term.

Paal Pedersen / UiA

Pedersen here highlights what is a significant characteristic of the relationship between research institutions and the media; research institutions very rarely need to get immediate exposure or respond to immediate pressure or critique. In turn, this lessens the need to internalise the temporal aspects of media logic at the central management level, i.e., adapting to the schedules and cycles of newsrooms and the current news.

Public reputation, visibility and funding

A significant explanation for what seems to be a comparatively low level of internalisation of media logic is to be found in the funding situation for public research institutions in Norway. As noted by Pedersen and several other directors, the level of funding for universities is relatively stable and is not dependent on the news cycle in any direct or immediate sense. As several of the directors of communication remark, universities in Norway, compared to organisations in many other sectors, are privileged in the sense that the basic funding they receive through the state budget is only susceptible to cuts or political changes to a minor degree.

However, a recurring concern among the directors is the importance of a favourable public reputation for securing funding from other public funding bodies – most importantly, the Research Council of Norway. Although from a long-term perspective, media exposure in general and, more particularly, exposure of research or educational excellence are reported to be important. As one of the directors contends:

Public reputation is an important concern to both the management and the board. It is important as it affects student and employee recruitment, and it is important to the budgetary authorities. [...] The current rectorate here emphasised heightened visibility as their main concern when they were elected.³

Marina Tofting / UiB

Thus, *visibility* in the media is regarded as important and prioritised as a means of attracting and sustaining funding. Both Schillemanns (2012) and Torbjørnsrud (2014) find that this is an increasingly salient characteristic for how other public organisations operate. They argue that the news media's inherent claim to relevance and substantiality (much disputed) (Schudson & Anderson, 2009) motivates public organisations to seek exposure in the news media – visibility in news media is believed to heighten the status and relevance of the institution.

The interviews suggest that this is also the case in the public research institutions. Moreover, given the competitive situation between the research institutions, the public promotion of the strengths of the institutions is emphasised as a key strategy for attracting funding.

We are preoccupied with making visible what we're good at – it's evident that our strong research groups have an easier time attracting funding. Particularly here at the new universities, we need to be on the offensive and publicly promote the fact that we have some strong research groups and initiatives that other universities don't have. In this regard, the media is important.

Pål Pedersen /University of Agder

Thus, as several of the informants emphasise and as highlighted in previous research (Engwall, 2008), the dissemination and promotion of research through the media has the dual function of both enlightening the public and attaining public visibility.

However, in no way are the news media the only means by which institutions seek public visibility. Public meetings, seminars and debates as well as exposure in trade and sector magazines more specifically directed towards their target audience (policymakers and budgetary authorities, to be specific) are also generally reported to be of high significance. Several of the directors contend that arrangements facilitating face-to-face meetings are, in fact, of a higher priority than exposure in the news media. Moreover, the interviews provide little evidence to suggest that research, education or managerial priorities are substantially changed in order to attain media visibility. Generally, it is reported that communication becomes a concern after, not prior to, the execution of research projects or major managerial decisions.

Discussion and conclusion

Seen through the lens of Schulz's conceptual model, the findings from this study indicate that public research institutions in Norway are characterised by a considerable degree of accommodation to their media environments. Communication departments are often located centrally in the organisational structure of the research institutions, and communication directors are part of the central management team. Moreover, one of the institutions has selected their director, in part, based on the communication benefits this yields; and, in another institution, the head of communications is also the head of strategy. Further, communication departments offer both media training and consultancy services to researchers and management. They also monitor the news and assist journalists by facilitating contact with researchers or management.

However, if we consider the more critical dimension of organisational mediatisation as emphasised in Strömbäck's fourth phase of mediatisation, i.e., the degree to which media logic has been internalised at the expense of institutional logic, the findings from this study are generally less supportive.

The existence and expansion of communication departments may in itself be regarded as an indication of the organisational internalisation of media logic. However, given the fact that the primary task of communication departments is to disseminate research – a task that is one of the fundamental and democratic responsibilities of research institutions, such an analysis seems somewhat contrived. Research dissemination as practiced and facilitated by communication departments is, indeed, substantially adapted to meet the demands and requirements of the news media. This study shows that the internalisation of news media logic is both a salient characteristic and a professional ideal among in-house research communicators, who overwhelmingly have a journalistic background. However, public research dissemination necessarily involves an open flank towards the media. More-

over, research that is specialised in nature must necessarily be disseminated in a language that addresses and is accessible to the broader public. The internalisation of media logic in research dissemination, therefore, cannot be understood as one type of logic 'colonising' the other – the dissemination of research is inherently and by necessity reliant on adapting to the format requirements and schedules of external media. Thus, unlike public bureaucracies and administration, adaptation to media logic is firmly rooted in the mandate of public research institutions.

Neither do the findings suggest a significant degree of internalisation of media logic in research projects. Whereas public bureaucracies (Torbjørnsrud et al., 2014) and administration (Schillemans, 2012) are characterised by a situation in which the logic of the news media is expanding from influential communication departments to the practises, routines and priorities of traditional career bureaucrats, the data suggests that this is less the case in terms of the relationship between the communication departments and the researchers. Rather, the informants report that media concerns are not an important priority in the execution of research projects and that journalistic logic is looked upon with considerable resentment and scepticism by academic staff. Moreover, although increasingly required by funding bodies, popularisation and dissemination are reported to be a subordinate concern in the planning and execution of research projects. However, these findings are grounded in a communication staff perspective and are not based on researchers' own experiences with media influence on their research activities. Consequently, the findings are primarily suggestive in terms of the degree to which media concerns are integrated into research. Nonetheless, the relatively low level of internalisation of media logic into research that is suggested by the findings is made plausible if we take into account other empirical studies of the relationship between researchers and news media.

In a survey study (Carlsen et al, 2014) carried out by academic staff at the University of Bergen, it is documented that, whereas researchers acknowledge the importance of disseminating research to the broader public and are generally positive toward popularising their research through the media, it is not a high priority. In an interview study of researchers from the same institution, Carlsen & Riese (forthcoming) found that media engagement was primarily grounded in a professional ideal of informing the public and not a result of external pressure from media actors, communication staff or management. Thus, popular dissemination appears to be adopted as part of the professional role of the researchers. However, this is not the same as to say that researchers are internalising media logic. Whereas researchers may share the belief that news media exposure is important in itself, they also harbour deep-seated scepticism towards key components of media logic such as personification, simplification and tabloidization. This scepticism is documented both in the Norwegian context (see Nyre, 2012) and in studies of the relationship between researchers and journalists elsewhere in Europe (Peters, 1995; Peters et al., 2008a, 2008b).

Furthermore, Bucchi (1998, p. 15) describes the prioritisation of media engagement in research projects as "non-routine" and largely connected to situations of crisis for a field's

legitimacy. Moreover, a media orientation among researchers seems to be more accentuated in specific and often politicised disciplines such as climate science (Ivanova et al., 2013) and stem cell research or epidemiology (Peters et al., 2008a; 2008b). Although some concern has been raised about the internalisation of media concerns in scientific decision-making (Schäfer, 2014, p. 579), Rödder & Schäfer (2010) suggest that such internalisation is exceptional and related to specific fields and highly particular contexts. In the same study, Rödder & Schäfer conclude that media-induced structural change is present in science, but it is much less pronounced than mediatisation of other parts of society such as politics and sports. Altogether, the authors conclude that mediatisation in science is rare. Similarly, in a large-scale quantitative study of dissemination practices among researchers in Germany, Marcinkowski et al. (2014) observe that researchers increasingly comply with their institution's communication strategies. Yet, they point out that researchers are primarily oriented towards their research communities in which media exposure is not seen as important and even as negative. The authors conclude (p.75) that "the extent of media efforts will probably remain moderate, at least compared with other actors such as entrepreneurs and politicians". Thus, as suggested by the accounts of the communication staff in this study, what appears to be the case is that, even though researchers need to operate in an environment in which media concerns are increasingly important, they also harbour considerable resistance towards news media logic.

At managerial level, the informants contend that media logic or pressure has little impact on the decision-making process. They report a certain degree of attentiveness to the news media but not to an extent that it substantially alters the priorities of the institutions. Moreover, none of the informants perceive the media themselves to be threatening to the autonomy of their institutions. Rather, many of the communication directors report what they conceive as 'backwardness' in terms of thinking strategically about the media. This relatively low level of internalisation of media logic at the managerial level, which is reported by the informants, is made plausible by two main factors. First, public research institutions are only exceptionally subjected to aggressive media pressure, which lessens the need or inclination either reactively or proactively to be on the alert on a day-to-day basis. Second, the news media have little direct impact on the economic framework of public research centres since the basic funding they receive through the state budget is relative stable.

Thus, compared to both the sphere of politics (Strömbäck, 2011) in which immediate proactive and reactive attentiveness to the media is paramount and the sphere of public bureaucracy and administration, which also increasingly needs to attend to immediate critical exposure (Schillemanns, 2012; Torbjørnsrud et al., 2014), public research institutions only exceptionally need to be on the same level of alert, which, in turn, lessens the need to internalise the temporal aspects of media logic. Moreover, in terms of attendance to other aspects of media logic such as journalistic dramaturgy and framing, research institutions differ significantly from the spheres of politics and public bureaucracy and administration.

Whereas media coverage of both politics and public bureaucracy may often be characterised by recurrent and negative framing (such as ‘the voter against the political elite’ or ‘the individual against the system’) or by actor stereotypes (such as the ‘slick, lying politician’ or ‘the faceless bureaucrat’), such framing and stereotyping are considerably less prevalent and aggressive in the coverage of universities and research centres – which, therefore, do not need to internalise them to the same extent as part of their own operational practice.

However, as with public administration and bureaucracies, the informants report that the development and maintenance of a favourable public reputation is prioritised as a means of attracting and sustaining funding from external funding bodies as well as future students and employees. Media visibility is in itself reported to be important. To some extent, this appears to be an effect of a general conception that visibility in the news media grants an institution legitimacy and importance. Although this is not reported to involve a high degree of internalisation of the temporal and format aspects of media logic, it is, nonetheless, reflective of a shared belief in the significance and relevance of news media exposure. This suggests an internalisation of a third and normative aspect of media logic: that news media are inherently significant and important (Shudson & Anderson, 2009). Yet, this perceived importance of media visibility must be understood as a consequence of the need for universities and research centres to operate successfully in the marketplace for funding, students and employees. Ultimately, therefore, it could be argued to be an effect of marketization rather than the internalisation of media logic in a strict sense.

Thus, in conclusion, the evidence from this study suggests that, compared to other domains of society – be it politics, public administration or sport, research institutions are more resistant to news media logic and have less need to adapt to media requirements. This, however, is not to say that research institutions are not undergoing processes of mediation. The evidence from this study also clearly indicates that media concerns are integrated into key activities of the institutions – that is, into research dissemination, research execution, managerial strategy and, most saliently, as part of efforts to build a favourable public reputation.

However, to understand this integration as one single societal institution – the news media – colonising another – public research – is, at best, an oversimplification. Rather, the findings from this study suggest that pressure on university autonomy should be understood in the light of the more complex interrelationships among research institutions, funding bodies, the political sector, the market and the news media.

However, a course for further research might be to investigate the experiences and perceptions of other institutional actors, including academic staff, administration and management. Moreover, case-based studies of particular instances in which research institutions have been put under media pressure may prove fruitful in terms of highlighting how media logic may affect the institutional logic. In addition, although some preliminary demarcations have been made with respect to public bureaucracy and the political sphere in this study, systematic comparisons with institutions from other public sectors in Norway

and other national contexts would prove valuable in highlighting the particularities of the research institutions and how they interact with the media.

Notes

- 1 In this latter work, Altheide expands the concept of media logic and makes the case that media logic not only affects the practices of other institutions but also increasingly contributes to the shaping of social reality among audiences in general.
- 2 At Bjerknæssenteret, only one person worked exclusively with communication; hence, only one person was interviewed.
- 3 At most universities in Norway, the rectorate or presidency are elected by the researchers and staff of the institutions.

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Article: Colonising the academy?

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Appendix: List of informants

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