

Political advertising as a resource for citizenship

The reception of audiovisual rhetoric

Magnus Hoem Iversen

Thesis for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
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Abstract

This thesis explores the reception of audiovisual rhetoric in the form of political advertising. I argue that political ads can function as a resource for citizens. The ads allow people to enact a receptive rhetorical citizenship. They do so by providing substance for everyday practical judgement on issues and political leaders, and through sparking more general discussions on political matters.

The thesis contributes empirically by examining receptive dimensions of rhetorical citizenship, which scholars have called for at numerous occasions but not yet fully explored. The thesis contributes theoretically through proposing a way researchers can go about this, including the formulation of four virtues of receptive rhetorical citizenship: inclusiveness, openness, connection and literacy. The thesis combines the traditions of rhetoric and audience studies in a manner that has only rarely been put into play before.

The empirical data material revolves around political ads produced for two separate elections in 2013 and 2015. Directing the main thrust of analysis towards reception, the data material consists of 16 focus groups conducted with a range of voters. Taking a holistic approach to the study of audiences, the study also draws on supplementary interviews with 23 ad producers, strategists and politicians, as well as a rhetorical textual analysis of the eight films that were discussed in the groups.

Thematically, the eight films produced talk and discussion around three key themes: 1) the balance between informative aspects and entertaining aspects in political ads; 2) negativity in political ads; and 3) personalization in political ads. Lastly, 4), I examine informants' discussions from the vantage point of reception research in order to further tease out nuances of how citizens use ideals such as authenticity and aptum as evaluative concepts, as well as discuss informant reflexivity and various modes of reception they engaged in.

I find that citizens are deeply ambivalent to political ads as a genre, in particular towards the trade-off between informing and entertaining in a communicative text. I

find that informants for the most part accepted negativity in political ads, while at the same time attempted to discern between useful and non-useful negativity.

Furthermore, I provide nuance and detail to how people use personality as a route to judgement on candidates and other political matters when watching advertisements. Importantly, elements of personalization - ordinariness, authenticity and sociability - are highly at work. Lastly, I provide further detail on what kind of receptive rhetorical citizenship people enact in the interview situation. I propose the concept of *breaching moments* through authenticity and aptum as a novel way to understand the nuts and bolts of how form and content interacts when people are to evaluate their political leaders on screen.

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1.0 Introduction

I went to a cinema screening to see how people reacted to the ad. It was interesting. Behind me were two young girls. Suddenly they started talking about the election: 'Are you gonna vote?' Then they started talking about politics. That makes me think we've achieved some of what we wanted. They were talking about politics. They were going to vote, and they knew some issues. Then you've started the conversation you wanted.

(Marte Scharning Lund, Labour Party Campaign Manager, 2013)

In this thesis, I argue that political advertising in film form¹ has the potential to function as a resource for what I call 'receptive rhetorical citizenship'. Through a reception study with supplementary production interviews and textual analysis of 8 political advertisements around 16 focus groups, I will demonstrate how the ads function as a resource for citizens' talking about political matters and their orientations towards matter of political concern.

The ads do so by providing substance for everyday practical judgement on issues and political leaders, and through sparking more general discussion on themes of political matters and democracy. I treat the genre of political advertisement as something more than persuasive marketing – the selling of politics as commodity or Schiller's (1986) soap, and more as a media product that is used by an audience, at times regardless of producer intentions. I am interested in how political ads can be conducive of political talk and civic discussion, and I am in particular interested in the type of talk generated – both at a thematic level and at the level of deep orientations people show when talking about the ads.

¹ When using the term «political advertising» or «political ads» in this dissertation, I am in the following (unless I specify otherwise) referring to «political moving image advertisements», whether they are broadcast on television or found in social media.

This way of exploring the reception of political ads is not the most common. The term 'political ads' is traditionally thought of as the purchase of advertising space by political parties (McNair, 1999, p. 94), and typically defined as “any controlled message communicated through any channel designed to promote the political interests of individuals, parties, groups, governments, or other organizations” (Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2006, p. 4). Because audiovisual and televised political advertising at large is the dominant mode of political communication between politicians and voters in the US, research on political advertising is abundant (Kaid, 2004, p. 155), as several reviews of the field (Barnard & Kreiss, 2013; Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2006; Kaid, 2004, 2012; Van Steenburg, 2015) are testament to.

Thematically, scholars have pursued historical approaches, detailing the birth and evolution of presidential campaign ads (Diamond & Bates, 1992; Jamieson, 1996) or attack ads specifically (Jamieson, 1992). Others have pursued questions of content concerning the balance of image and issue appeals (See Johnston & Kaid, 2002; Kern, 1989; Patterson & McClure, 1976; Rudd, 1986; Scullion & Dermody, 2005 for some examples); negativity, attack ads and comparative ads (See Airne & Benoit, 2005; Benoit, 2001; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989, 1991; Kaid & Johnston, 1991 for some examples); emotional appeals (Brader, 2005, 2006), as well as elements of presentation and style² (See in particular Brader, 2005; 2006 on fear ads and ; Kaid & Davidson, 1986; Kaid & Johnston, 2001 on videostyle). In terms of method, many of these studies employ a form of content analysis, most of them a quantitative approach (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006: 17ff).

Studies interested in effects are audience-centered, employing the methods of surveys and questionnaires as well as experimental methods. Recurring questions are the kind of effects ads may have on knowledge (I.e. Craig, Kane, & Gainous, 2005; Franz & Ridout, 2007; Garramone, 1983; Groenendyk & Valentino, 2002; Patterson & McClure, 1976), candidate evaluations (I. e. Pattie & Johnston, 2002; West, 1994) or behavior such as voting (I. e. Franz, Freedman, Goldstein, & Ridout, 2008; Gerber,

² The field of argumentation theory has also frequently used political ads and films as cases and examples (see for instance Barbatsis (1996), Strachan & Kendall (2004); Hatfield, Hinck & Birkholt (2007); Van den Hoven (2012); Dahl (2015); Kjeldsen (2015).

Gimpel, Green, & Shaw, 2011; Krasno & Green, 2008) or information seeking (Cho, 2008). The effects of negative/attack advertising has been given extra attention (Garramone, 1984; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989, 1991; Mattes & Redlawsk, 2014; Richardson Jr, 2008), much of which stems from worries that such ads have detrimental effects on democracy (See in particular Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995). In particular, scholars have attempted to find out if negative ads mobilize or demobilize the electorate (See for instance Brooks, 2006; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Phillips, Urbany, & Reynolds, 2007; Stevens, Sullivan, Allen, & Alger, 2008), or through meta-studies assess if the accumulated amount of research can give any indication of whether negative ads are more effective than positive ads (Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, & Babbitt, 1999; Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007).

Several studies indicate the potential for ads-as-resources, such as Richardson Jr, claiming that “(...) audiovisual campaign communication performs a critical role in linking citizens and government (...)” (Richardson Jr, 2008, p. 8), or Franz, Freedman & Goldstein who state that “(...) political advertising has the potential to bring about a more attentive, more informed, and more participatory citizenry” (Freedman, Franz, & Goldstein, 2004, p. 723). However, the bulk of literature on political advertising lacks a perspective on media use and meaning making. There are very few studies examining how people’s reception of political ads play out at a qualitative level. In this thesis, I aim to alleviate this through providing a rich, in-depth look at qualitative aspects of how citizens use political advertising in their orientations towards the political realm, as rhetorical citizens. The study is purely qualitative and not interested in effects as conceptualized in a behaviourist tradition (McQuail, 1997, p. 17), but rather media use, interpretation and meaning making in the tradition of reception analysis (McQuail, 1997, p. 18f). The Norwegian case also deserves attention because it can offer us a look at a context in which an ‘informed electorate’ is exposed to a relatively novel form of communication for them, because political ads have not been dominant in previous election campaigns. Due to the Norwegian ban on televised political ads, the genre is “digitally born” in Norway (Iversen, 2016). By examining reception, other facets come to the foreground. These facets can supplement and enrich

our understanding of political ads and political rhetoric. By moving away from the voluminous amounts of studies on content and media effects of ads, it is also my aim to heed a call for more qualitative approaches to political communication research. Thus, I follow interventions claiming that an overuse of quantitative methods has led to a “methodological consensus” (Karpf, Kreiss, Nielsen, & Powers, 2015, p. 1889) which warrants novel explorations using methods such as interviews and focus groups (Karpf et al., 2015, p. 1890) to mention some.

1.1. Aims and scope

The thesis aims to contribute *empirically* with the first study of receptive dimensions of rhetorical citizenship. Moreover, through exploring a Norwegian context, I contribute to the field of political advertising research, which for the most part has not concerned itself with Scandinavia in general and Norway in particular³. In the literature, the Norwegian case has typically been treated in a general manner under the category of “the Nordic Countries” (Moring, 2006).

The thesis aims to contribute *theoretically* through proposing a way researchers can go about exploring receptive dimensions of rhetorical citizenship, including formulating four virtues of receptive rhetorical citizenship: inclusiveness, openness, connection and literacy (see chapter 2.2)

Conceptually, the thesis contributes by combining a rhetorical perspective with reception analysis in a way that has rarely been put into play before. From the perspective of rhetoric, textual analysis and rhetorical criticism as methods are dominant (Kjeldsen, 2016, 2018; Rønlev, 2014). Audiences have mostly been treated theoretically or speculatively (Kjeldsen, 2016, 2018; Stromer-Galley & Schiappa, 1998).

Thus, the thesis pursues new avenues of knowledge to better our understanding of how citizens engage with political rhetoric. Specifically, it does so by exploring

³ A notable exception from Norway is Karlsen and Waage (2012). Notable exceptions from Scandinavia include Moring (2006), Grusell and Nord (2010). The literature on print ads is more substantial, with Aalberg and Saur (2007) as a highlight from Norway; Johansson (2014) and Håkansson, Johansson and Vigsø (2017) from Sweden; Kjeldsen (2007, 2008) and Hansen and Pedersen (2008) in Denmark.

how political ads can function as a resource for rhetorical citizenship. Furthermore, such an explanation grants us a more fine grained understanding of how citizens relate to a range of themes. These include the trade-off between the communicative need to entertain and inform (part 1 of reception), how citizens discern between useful and non-useful negativity (part 2 of reception), how citizens negotiate ethos and image in political ads (part 3 of reception), and how citizens' practical judgement of ads are intimately tied in with film form (part 4 of reception).

1.2. Research questions and research design: production, content, reception

The overarching research question for the thesis is:

- How may Norwegian political advertising function as a resource for receptive rhetorical citizenship?

I have explored this question through a reception study of how audiences interpreted and made use of a range of ads. Following the tradition of reception research's holistic perspective on communication (Schrøder, 2007, p. 84f), I have included supplementary examinations of producer intentions and textual analyses of the ads. These supplementary analyses help explain and contextualize the citizens' reception. They also provide some insights that help answer the overarching research question, as they allow us to explore what ideals and norms the ad producers navigate, and how aspects of the ads themselves argue.

The overarching research question of the thesis relates to how political ads potentially can function as a resource for (rhetorical) citizenship. More specifically, I am interested in exploring and explaining how citizens use political ads as a resource in their arguing about and orientation towards political matters.

Turning to my research design, I want to emphasize that even though I insist on examining production, texts and reception, the main bulk of both data collection and analysis resides in the latter. This is to be viewed as a study of media use and audience

reception, with supplementary studies of production and media texts. These supplements will be drawn upon to explain and elucidate the findings in the reception.

Following my overarching research interest, I formulate the two main research questions: (choice of method is indicated in parenthesis):

- RQ1: Production (qualitative interviews) and message (textual analysis)
 - A: How do political parties and advertising agencies intend for their ads to work, and what kind of rhetoric do they attempt to structure into the ads?
 - B: What salient aspects of argumentation and film style are present in the films?

In order to explore these questions, I have chosen to interview key informants involved in the production of the ads. Additionally, I examined the finished ads as texts. This was done to articulate aspects that were not brought up or discussed during interviews, but that I still identified as important due to my own observations, or observations from the reception in the focus groups. I provide details in chapter 4, which concerns method and methodology.

- RQ2: Reception (focus group interviews)
 - A: How do citizens make meaning of, and use the ads in their own arguing about politics?
 - B: In what ways do citizens enact a receptive rhetorical citizenship when faced with the ads?

In order to answer these questions, I turned to the practices and methods of the cultural tradition and reception analysis (McQuail, 1997, p. 18), which originally in part answered a perceived lack of focus on meaning construction in traditional audience studies (Hagen, 1992, p. 42). Shifting the perspective from effects to media use, I treat media in general and political ads in particular as a resource which citizens can use for

various purposes, depending on motivation, interest and background. My chosen method to explore these research questions, which I elaborate in chapter 4, is focus group interviews.

1.2.1 Research design

My approach to communication, which takes both production, media texts and the reception of audiences into account, is inspired by studies from audience research (Gripsrud, 1995; Radway, 1984; Schröder, 2007) as well as studies of political communication (Beyer, 2012; De Vreese, 2003) and rhetoric (Houck & Nocasian, 2002; Rønlev, 2014). These studies, although different, all insist on *looking in more than one place* in order to grasp communicative interactions, be it through arguing forcefully for the importance of production aspects (Gripsrud, 1995), showing the importance of media texts vis-à-vis reception (Radway, 1984), the interplay of text, context and audience (Houck & Nocasian, 2002), explicitly examining production, text and reception in audience studies to examine people's meaning construction (Schröder, 2007), or to trace 'frames' in processes of communication in search of media effects (Beyer, 2012; De Vreese, 2003). Concerning the two traditions that this thesis mainly draws on, reception research can be said to champion such an approach (Schröder, 2007), at least on a normative plane, although much actual research has focused for the most part on audiences or an interplay between audiences and texts. Rhetorical studies have had a strong emphasis on text, context and to some degree production, as well as sound theoretical conceptions of audience, but a severe neglect of the empirical audience (Kjeldsen, 2016, 2018). As such, although actual practices vary, there are strong calls in both traditions for taking production, text and in particular the reception of audiences into account simultaneously.

I focus my analysis around how people read and "decode" political ads – and I draw upon supplementary studies of production and text both to better grasp what it is people are engaging with and how it has been shaped by production, as well as to provide a fuller analysis of the ads' use among informants. The examination of the different parts of the communicative process should be seen as a form of triangulation – the different parts supplementing each other in order to provide a more complete description. I do not attempt to fully trace the process. There are themes that do not

come up in the informant interviews explicitly, that still can be said to be highly present and at work through a rhetorical textual analysis – or through a production interview. Furthermore, there can be themes and topics that do not come up in production interviews at all, that are very salient in the focus groups, et cetera. In other words, examinations of production and media texts are used to elaborate and explain audience reception.

1.2.2 Approach

In thinking about the relation between political communication and the rhetorical reception at the audience end, I am employing the concept of “rhetorical citizenship” (Kock & Villadsen, 2012a, 2014, 2017). A rhetorical approach to citizenship takes into account additional dimensions to citizenship beyond the traditional perspective of rights and duties (Marshall, 1950), and enforces a view that citizenship also has performative dimensions, that it is a mode people can be in, or something people can do (Dahlgren, 2006). While acknowledging that traditional acts typically associated with citizenship still matter (such as voting, protesting, membership in organizations, et cetera), this perspective treats citizenship as a mode of engagement, “(...) a process that may encompass a number of different activities” (Asen, 2004, p. 191). Crucially, this perspective acknowledges that citizenship is also a question about “learning by doing” (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 273). Citizenship is also a skill that has to be learned, and a skill that has to be practiced. This shifts the focus to a wide range of behaviors that citizens engage in besides voting, or the other traditional activities associated with citizenship. Rhetorical citizenship has a particularly keen eye for how citizens employ and consume rhetoric and argumentation in the public. Thus, rhetorical citizenship as a field of inquiry is interested in how people act as citizens through language use. Centrally, it places various aspects of participation and debate at the center of what it means to be a citizen (Kock & Villadsen, 2012b). However, because the receptive dimensions of rhetorical citizenship have hitherto been left mostly unexamined, an important part of this thesis is to contribute in this direction. In this project, I draw upon audience studies to gain a solid understanding of reception, and I draw upon theories of democracy and citizenship in order to formulate four virtues of receptive

rhetorical citizenship that are relevant for the study of political rhetoric, and that I apply in this thesis. I will further describe and qualify these virtues in chapter 2.2.

This project is mainly rooted in a republican tradition of political theory, emphasizing the importance of citizens' public spirited participation (beyond voting) for the good of both individual citizens and society at large (Dagger, 1997, 2002). However, because I am dealing with receptive dimensions of citizenship, my expectations towards citizens' output in terms of political action are more modest than what is traditionally associated with republicanism. I will elaborate in chapter 2.2. That said, the reader will note that I draw upon thinkers, theorists and scholars adhering at times to both the "participatory liberal" (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002), or "republican" (Habermas, 1994) strand, and the "discursive" (Ferree et al., 2002), or "proceduralist/deliberative" (Habermas, 1994) strand of political theory. I believe I am in the position to do so because I follow Ferree et al's (2002, p. 289f) argument that the traditions overlap, and that writers within traditions shift positions over time. Moreover, various traditions of democratic theory contain similar normative criteria, and it is mainly criteria of this type that I operationalize in chapter 2.2. For instance, both the republican and the deliberative tradition share a goal of maximum participation, or maximum popular inclusion (Ferree et al., 2002, p. 316). However, because I am examining basic orientations of citizens towards some democratic virtues and values, I do not probe to investigate why my informants hold these views. For instance, I am not asking whether an informant who has just celebrated the ideal of popular inclusion has done so because she believes participation to be educative and good in itself, or because she believes this will contribute to a better deliberative system.

Placing emphasis on receptive dimensions entail more minimalist versions of citizen participation than what has traditionally been argued from for instance the republican strand of political theory, often praising participation in public (Dagger, 1997, 2002), and deliberative theory often placing a strict burden of strict deliberation on various practices (Chambers, 2003). I will further qualify my approach in chapter 2.2.

In this thesis, I treat the production and reception of political ads as a discursive interaction between mass and elite. It is one of many points of connection between those in power and the citizens they govern (Richardson Jr, 2008, p. 8). I will show how the form of political marketing itself is conducive of reflections around the dual role of citizen and consumer, and in particular the twin communicative needs of information and entertainment. I will show that negativity, often considered detrimental to society, in the Norwegian context works as a cognitive provocation that sets about reflections on the role and legitimacy of conflict and critique. I will demonstrate how the films' focus on persona, and people's propensity to look for the political persona, interact to form a way of thinking about politics through personalities. I will show how film form, content and style interact with people's mode of interpretation to show how people draw on content to judge form and form to judge content in their everyday practical judgement of credibility, authenticity and what is right, proper and fitting political communication. I will demonstrate how, both in production and reception of the ads, a form of conversation is facilitated. This interaction frequently differs from the types of conversations that politicians and ad producers would like to establish and attempt to structure in their ads. Even though people are hailed as 'voters', they at times answer and act as citizens.

1.3 Background and context of thesis

Norwegian society and the Norwegian public sphere is the empirical context of this thesis. As a political system, Norway is characterized by being a longstanding, stable democracy, which Østerud (2007) describes as "a society with striking egalitarianism, a strong public sector, and a culture of cooperative institutions which merge private with public interests" (Østerud 2007, p. 2). Although formally a monarchy, Norway has a multi-party parliamentary system in which minority governments are the norm. National elections and municipal elections are held every four years. Local and national elections alternate with two years in between. There are 169 seats in the Norwegian parliament, the *Storting*, and an election threshold of 4 percent. In the 2017 election, 24 parties sought power. However, at the time of writing, only nine political

parties are currently represented in the *Storting*. For details on each political party, please see appendix C.

In terms of voter behavior, the electorate of Norway can be considered ‘informed’ based on the country’s particularly high newspaper readership both in terms of print and online news (Moe & Sakariassen, 2018; Syvertsen, Enli, Mjøs, & Moe, 2014, p. 33), as well as the overall level of education⁴. In addition to egalitarianism as a “strong force in the normative fabric of Norwegian society” (Østerud 2007, p. 3), a high level of political activity and participation is emphasized. A relatively high voter turnout, a high amount of voluntary organizations and a high political activity in between elections contribute to this impression: “In general, voters in the Nordic countries have traditionally been considered as stable in terms of voting behavior, politically active, willing to trust their fellow citizens as well as their political representatives, and to stand up for collective interests” (Bengtsson, Hansen, Harðarson, Narud, & Oscarsson, 2014, p. 5). Thus Norway, much as the rest of the Nordic countries, is characterized as a ‘consensus democracy’. It is an egalitarian country in terms of social and economic factors, reporting high levels of trust in institutions both private and governmental (Syvertsen et al., 2014, pp. 4-8). Partly, this trust extends to ‘the media’ as an institution (Aalberg & Curran, 2012, p. 196). This manifests itself through for instance Norwegians’ relatively high trust in news in general (Moe & Sakariassen, 2018, p. 35).

Norway as a media system has been classified, along with other parts of Northern Europe, as belonging to a “democratic corporatist model” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 11). Typical in such a system is a strong public broadcaster, and a media market that is regulated through various means – such as subsidies for the press. Thus, Norway belongs to what Karppinen (2016) calls a tradition of public interest-oriented media policy. This ‘media welfare state’ model emphasizes an extensive cultural policy for the media, meant to influence through positive freedom – mainly aimed at countering the effects of market forces (Syvertsen et al., 2014, p. 18). This thinking has extended to how Norway has treated political advertising through law: The country

⁴ See <https://www.ssb.no/en/utdanning/statistikker/utniv> for details.

is distinct because it has enforced the strictest regulation of such messages in Scandinavia.

Despite the ban on televised political ads, films as a tool for political communication is not a new phenomenon in the Norwegian context. As Bang (2013) has shown, the similarities between the early propaganda of the labour movement and the style and form of advertising were discussed as early as in 1934 (Bang, 2013, p. 256). This is reflected in the educational literature of the time, in which slogans are named "the political brand" – and where reflections are made upon the similarities between political propaganda and advertising. The importance of images is discussed already at this time. Referring to political posters and prints, it is stated that "The propaganda must be able to be put into pictures (...) which has often proved to work better than a lot of words" (Bang, 2013, p. 257). Despite the interest in advertising, the concept of moving images was not met with a great deal of enthusiasm. Rather, fictional cinema was considered a form of harmful escapism (Bang, 2013, p. 260). Nonetheless, it was recognized as the preferred recreational medium of the working class.

Concerning political films more specifically, both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party frequently produced and presented different types of films in the period 1928-1936. The Labour Party gradually moved from a style inspired by Russian montage to more conventional feature film, whilst the Conservative Party were making films inspired by *variété* and comedy. The Labour Party also produced around 40 so called "social democratic worker films" in the period 1928-1940. Most of these were documentaries, with the exception of a few feature films (Brinch & Iversen, 2001). During the Second World War and the German occupation of Norway, the cinema broadcast "Film newspaper" (Inspired by Pathé and Gaumont) was extended and made nationwide. *Filmavisen* did not contain any political advertising as we know and define the genre today, and did not carry films presenting only the views of one party. Rather, it is more precise to treat the entire venture as a form of politicized news, which had an important function in nation building and opinion formation after the

world war. *Filmavisen* was produced sporadically from 1945 to 1963 (Brinch & Iversen, 2001).

The history of party-political advertising in Norway begins after the Second World War. As far as cinema is concerned, political films and ads have been screened. Although there does not exist a complete record of the various films and ads, records from the archives of the Norwegian Labour Movement indicate their usage. For instance, the Labour Party produced and screened the ads “Never again” for the Parliamentary election of 1949, “The great shift” for the election in 1961, and “New growth for Norway” for the election of 1985⁵.

Norway’s treatment of political ads is unique to the Nordic region(See Iversen, 2016, p. 194for an overview). The Nordic Countries have approached regulation of televised political advertising in different ways. Finland has one of the most liberal approaches to political campaigning in Europe, and opened up commercial TV channels for unrestricted political advertising in 1991 (Maier, Strömbäck, & Kaid, 2013, p. 84; Moring, 2006, p. 187). Iceland allows political advertising on TV (Moring, 2006), and makes no mention of regulating political advertising in its Broadcasting Act. Denmark has long held a position similar to the Norwegian, traditionally not allowing political advertising on TV, but at the same time the Danish legal position has been unclear (Moring, 2006, p. 189). More recent revisions to the Danish Broadcasting Act as well as regulation on advertising indicate that Denmark is affirming its position, and embracing the ban – in less ambiguous terms (Iversen, 2016, p. 195). Since the 1950s, however, Denmark has allowed political parties to air self-produced videos in prime time on the public service broadcaster prior to elections (Hansen & Pedersen, 2008, p. 410). Sweden has moved in the opposite direction, moving from a “strictly regulated state” (Moring, 2006, p. 188) to relaxing the regulation of televised political advertising on commercial channels. This occurred as a side effect from switching from analogue to digital transmission, making demands of political neutrality void for some niche channels (Grusell & Nord, 2010, p. 96). In effect, the only broadcasters currently airing political advertisements are TV4 and its

⁵ Personal communication with archivar Jonas Nilsson of the Labour Movement Archives and Library.

related sister channels. Swedish channels TV3 and Kanal 5 broadcast from Britain, and have to follow UK legislation, which prohibits such advertisements. So far, political advertising on TV in the country has been deemed “very insignificant” by some scholars (Strömbäck, 2007, p. 84), and termed as having a “minor role” by others, with the assumption that it might become more important in time (Grusell & Nord, 2010, p. 96).

Because of the particular situation that the Norwegian legislation has created, political ads have been used in a different way than what is typically seen in the US context, where political spots are a natural and important ingredient in any election campaign. Advertising is here, as we recall, used to shift voter behavior, evaluations or attitudes – but also to inform voters about policies and politicians (Kaid, 2006, p. 46ff). The broadcasters, on the other hand, want the advertising revenue. The use of advertisements in Norway does not mirror the American situation, because it has mainly been used as a provocation in order to get attention or PR for both political parties and TV broadcasters (Iversen, 2016).

The emergence of political moving image advertising, then, is mainly a result of technological development and trends of convergence and digitalization. Most studies of political advertising are quantitative, performed in a US context, and are mostly analysis of content or effect studies – through surveys or experiments. What the present study aims to do is to combine the qualitative aspects of reception research and rhetorical scholarship in order to generate new knowledge about how citizens engage with political advertising.

As we recall, what a study of political advertising situated in Norway can offer, is a study of the genre in a multiparty system with an ‘informed electorate’ in a population for which political moving image advertising has not been particularly salient in previous election campaigns. Because the genre has been banned from television, it is “digitally born” in the Norwegian context. Examining such ads can provide new and different insights into the study of political campaigns produced for instance in the US context. Moreover, a qualitative study of political communication that has so far mostly been treated quantitatively could grant new insights that are

valuable to the field, such as what citizens think that political rhetoric is supposed to provide, their thoughts and articulations of communicative norms, and their thoughts on ideals for political leadership. As Karpf et al argue, qualitative methods should be used to a greater degree in a field in which a “particular methodological consensus has underpinned the study of political communication” (2015, p. 1889).

1.4. The structure of the thesis

The thesis has four parts:

- Part 1: Theory, context and method
- Part 2: Production and texts
- Part 3: Reception
- Part 4: Sum-up, discussion and conclusion

Part 1 contains two chapters, covering the theoretical framework and overarching theories that guide this thesis, before presenting the method and methodology employed.

Part 2 reports and discusses on the empirical findings gathered from the production interviews and supplementary textual analysis. This section treats each of the eight films examined consecutively.

Part 3 reports and discusses on the empirical findings of the reception analysis. It is split into four chapters: 1) Informants’ experiences of political marketing and the trade-off between informative and entertaining content; 2) informants’ experiences of political negativity and critique; 3) informants’ experiences of image-appeals in a landscape of personalized politics and ideals of authenticity and intimacy; and lastly 4), an analysis at the level of reception, exploring the concept of breaching moments, informant reflexivity and various receptive modes. The reader will note that the theme of personalization is given extra emphasis and theoretical scaffolding. This is because it by far was the most dominant theme in my data material.

Part 4 contains a single chapter in which I initially sum up the findings of the thesis, retelling how the films fared from production to reception. I then move to the major discussion of my thesis, in which I examine my research questions in light of my empirical findings. Lastly, I end this thesis with some words on implications of my findings, suggestions for future research, and finally a conclusion.

I now turn to the second chapter of this part, which presents my theoretical perspectives.

Part I: Theory and method

2.0 Theory

2.1 Rhetoric and reception

This thesis examines the reception of political communication with a rhetorical lens. It draws inspiration both from communication sciences and rhetorical studies. In the following, I briefly describe my rhetorical approach. This includes a glance at four key perspectives that have been present in the rhetorical tradition since antiquity, and that are particularly relevant for the analyses in the thesis. These are 1) the inseparability of reason and emotion, and consequent considerations on the tradeoff between entertaining and informing, which is relevant for part 1 of the reception analysis. 2) A recognition of the value of dissensus, relevant for part 2 of the reception analysis. 3) A broad understanding of the credibility of the speaker, or ethos, which is relevant for part 3 of the reception analysis. 4) A notion of contingency and context sensitivity, leading to concepts such as ‘aptum’, which is relevant for part 4 of the reception analysis. Additionally, I would like to foreground rhetoric’s view of persuasion and language use as neutral. After presenting these perspectives, I turn to the common ground between rhetoric and reception research, and discuss the lack of empirical ventures into rhetorical audiences. Lastly, I revisit Stuart Hall’s encoding-decoding model in order to qualify it for the present project.

2.1.1 The rhetorical perspective

The word ‘rhetoric’ has a double meaning, as it can refer to the accumulated rhetorical theories of persuasive communication (*rhetorica docens*) and empirical examinations of persuasive communication (*rhetorica studens*), or rhetoric in practice (*rhetorica utens*), that is the persuasive communication at work out in the world (Andersen, 1995, p. 12; Kjeldsen, 2006, pp. 15-16). As both Bruce Gronbeck and Jørgen Fafner have pointed out, “rhetoric” has become a word with somewhat negative connotations in the public sphere (Fafner, 1977; Gronbeck, 2004).

Importantly, when referring to political parties' use of 'rhetoric', I do not use the term pejoratively, as an antonym to action, nor do I mean solely the embellishment of language (Kuypers, 2009, p. 1). I use it neutrally. When employing "rhetoric" in this thesis, I am referring to *the intentional use of symbols for persuasive means*. The rhetorical perspective treats language use as "acting with communication" (Kjeldsen, 2014, p. 12), as "(...) language-based communication consciously shaped to achieve a specific intent in the receiver" (Kock, 2012, p. 9, my translation), or as "strategic, goal-oriented communication" (Kuypers, 2009, p. 6). A persuasive intent is central to these definitions. Language is treated as something presented with a point and a purpose. Rhetorical scholars are interested in various actors' attempts at achieving certain goals in relation to certain audiences. A rhetorical perspective entails a systematic focus on the interaction between arguer and audience, and acknowledges the legitimacy of arguing with ethos, pathos and logos (Kjeldsen, 2015a, p. 198) under conditions of uncertainty (Zarefsky, 2014, p. 3), oriented towards future choice (Kock, 2009), such as an election. Key here is the fact that rhetoric operates in the realm of the *contingent*.

Within rhetoric, such a focus is called taking a narrow persuasio⁶ position (Kjeldsen, 2006, pp. 18-20). In the narrow persuasio, one is studying and dealing with intentional communication that seeks to persuade. I find this position to be particularly fitting for the present thesis, because I am interested in the communication and language use of political elites. Common examples are the work of spin doctors, press releases, politicians' speeches, language used in election debates, the visual and verbal language of a political party's web page, and the focus for this thesis: political advertising.

In this thesis, I am interested in deliberative rhetoric. Traditionally, rhetoric has operated with three genres of speech. The forensic speech has its origins in the courts, and is oriented towards the past and the question of "what has happened". The

⁶ The narrow persuasio is opposed from the broad persuasio, in which one is dealing with any form of communication that posits a subject in a way that an audience can experience or understand it (Kjeldsen, 2006: 18). Such a perspective is more applicable for analyzing works of literature, musical compositions, or the skill of a teacher in a classroom, to give some examples. See also Schiappa (2001) on "Big rhetoric".

epideictic has its origins in important ritual occasions: burials, weddings and other speech events that are oriented toward the present, and the question of “who are we”. Deliberative speech has its origins in the discussions of the citizens of the polity prior to votes. It is oriented towards the future, and attempts to answer the question “what should we do about this”. This three part split is conceptual, and the genres are increasingly blurred outside of antiquity. For instance, a lot of modern political debate concerns identity. As such, the epideictic dimension of political talk can concern the “who are we, and what is this” in “what should we do about this” (For elaborations, see Vatnøy, 2017). However, the present thesis is grounded firmly in the deliberative. I am concerned with political discussion and talk, which is produced by the pre-election messages of political parties wishing to gain influence.

2.1.2. Some key rhetorical concepts

On an overarching level, a rhetorical perspective is a good fit for this research project because it treats language use, genres and persuasion as neutral phenomena, not categories that are inherently normatively positive or negative. This view is perhaps most famously found in the writings of Aristotle:

And if it be objected that one who uses such power of speech unjustly might do great harm, that is a charge which may be made in common against all good things except virtue, and above all against the things that are most useful, as strength, health, wealth, generalship. A man can confer the greatest of benefits by a right use of these, and inflict the greatest of injuries by using them wrongly (AR. I 1.13)

For Aristotle, rhetoric is a tool, a hammer. One can use a hammer to build a house, or to beat someone down, or for a host of other actions. The sophist Isocrates too held a neutral view of persuasion (Marsh, 2012, pp. 38-40). Isocrates held that while one should accept critique of those who misuse rhetoric and eloquence, one should be wary of thinking that there is something inherently negative in rhetoric itself. To paraphrase Andersen’s interpretation of the Isocratic view (Andersen, 1995, p. 201), one cannot put muscle power on trial just because some people choose to beat up their fellow citizens.

Such a neutral outlook is necessary when researching political ads, a genre often viewed with suspicion both in the public sphere and in parts of democratic theory. This project borrows ideas from both what Ferree et al (2002) call the “participatory liberal” and “discursive” models of the public sphere. Both of these traditions have at times treated political ads with suspicion. For instance, Habermas is explicitly worried about degenerated forms of political communication as a result of market categories colonizing the political realm (Habermas, 2006). Schiller (1986, p. 117) criticizes what he considers to be a sale of politicians akin to the sale of consumer goods such as soap and cars. McNair writes about the ‘sale’ of politics – stating that it is potentially problematic if voters decide who to vote for in the same way that they choose toothpaste – as consumers, not citizens (McNair, 1999).

As it is my explicit aim to give the genre of political ads a fresh empirical look, the rhetorical perspective is fitting because it allows us to avoid normative preconceptions and overly categorical thinking when exploring a type of political communication that has traces of marketing as well as a high degree of intentionality that can be said to be highly ‘strategic’. I am seeking here to avoid the automatic judgement of empirical matters, based on preexisting theory. Moreover, as the research design of this thesis is testament to, simply examining the advertisements might be too simple of an approach in order to explore what kind of resource they offer. Undoubtedly, it is possible to label much of political communication as “strategic” in the Habermasian sense, if one examines only the text: the manipulative ad, the press release full of spin, and so on. Following both the thinking of Hauser on publics as discursive processes (1999) spread out over many different arenas (Hauser & Benoit-Barne, 2002: 264), as well as for instance the thinking of “deliberative systems” (Dryzek, 2016; Mansbridge, 1999; Mansbridge et al., 2012), the need arises to look beyond single forums and single rhetorical utterances (such as the individual ad) in order to understand the full communicative phenomena.

In this project, I introduce relevant theories and concepts close to the empirical analysis, such as theories of personalization or negativity. However, I would like to mention four aspects of rhetorical theory that are particularly relevant for the empirical

analyses that I present in this thesis. These are the tradition of rhetoric's acknowledgement of the inseparability of reason and emotion leading to a particular outlook on the trade-off between informing and entertaining an audience, rhetoric's emphasis on the importance of conflict and dissensus, rhetoric's key concern with trustworthiness and credibility or ethos, and how rhetoric revolves around contingency, making a concept such as *aptum*, "what is fitting", central.

Rhetoric acknowledges the legitimacy of arguing with ethos, pathos and logos (Kjeldsen, 2015a, p. 198) as well as the inseparability of the three concepts. All three dimensions will be present in each utterance to varying degrees (Andersen, 2004, p. 246; Jørgensen, 2011, p. 14). This sensibility aids our thinking about the balance between informing and entertaining that often manifests in political ads (Freedman et al., 2004, p. 725), most prominently through so-called issue ads and image ads (Kaid, 2004). The former is often heavy in political argumentation and issue information, the logos dimension is dominant, whilst the latter is most concerned with presenting a candidate – either through track record, or to showcase aspects of his personality that are beneficial. Here, the ethos dimension is dominant. As we shall later see in the reception interviews, striking a balance between informing and entertaining is not particularly easy, and this is a balance the informants are fundamentally ambivalent to. A recognition of the need to both inform and entertain runs throughout the texts of the rhetorical tradition.

For instance, according to Cicero, an attempt at persuasion contains several elements (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 35), namely the dimensions of *movere* (moving or engaging), *docere* (informing) and *delectare* (pleasing). Cicero connects these concepts to the rhetorical proofs of logos, ethos and pathos, first described by Aristotle. Logos is concerned with intellectual stimuli, the logic of a message – ethos and pathos with emotional stimuli (Fafner, 1977; Jørgensen, 2011, p. 14). When informing, the speaker should employ logos, the persuasion that is created through the presented arguments. When pleasing, the speaker should employ ethos appeals. When attempting to move or engage an audience, the speaker should employ pathos appeals. Pathos appeals attempt to put the audience in a certain frame of mind, for instance of anger, compassion or joy

(Jørgensen, 2011, p. 15). Similarly, Quintilian's description of a good disposition states for instance that a good introduction (exordium) should get people's attention. Moreover, the concept of *elocutio* contains knowledge about the various styles that were suited for the different rhetorical purposes of ancient Athens. These could vary between the "dry and meagre" low style (*genus subtile*) that is suitable for informing (*docere*), the middle style (*genus medium*) suited for entertaining (*delectare*), or the high style (*genus grande*) suitable for the truly moving moments (*movere*) (Andersen, 1995).

This type of sensibility of the trade-off between informative and entertaining aspects is inherent in the rhetorical tradition, and as we shall later see, is a point of contest in a range of scholarly fields. This is highly relevant for the first reception chapter of this thesis, in which people talk about their experiences of both ads that are dominant in issue-information, and dominant in entertaining aspects, be it through humor or a type of celebrity-ethos appeal. In this project, I employ Andersen's (2004) understanding of entertaining elements within ads (the use of humor, special effects, dramatization, and a whole other range of devices that are employed to make a message more entertaining) as part of an image (or ethos) appeal. In this understanding, entertainment is a gift from sender to audience. The sender brings the receiver a kind of entertainment-gift or pleasure: a sign of good will, or an attempt to come across as likeable.

A further benefit of the rhetorical approach is precisely the concept of *ethos*, which becomes highly relevant in part 3 of the reception interviews, in which people talk about their experiences of personalized content. *Ethos* is concerned with the persuasion that is created through the character of the speaker, judged through categories of trustworthiness. For instance, to what degree the audience feels they can trust the source, sender or producer of a message (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 14f). In Aristotle's original formulation, three categories were discussed as particularly important for *ethos*: *phronesis* (competence), *arête* (character) and *eunoia* (good will) (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 120). The ads I examine showcase a particular shift towards character and good will, as they at times attempt to argue what a politician is like, not

what they have done or achieved. Aristotle was mainly concerned with the ethos that a rhetor's speech could produce. Cicero also accounted for factors of context prior to a speech situation, such as a person's reputation or status (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 117f). McCroskey, one of the main proponents of an empirical revival in ethos-research, operates with concepts such as initial ethos, what an audience member knows or thinks about a speaker beforehand (McCroskey, 2001, pp. 83-85) or elements of habitus, status or formal title. Derived ethos is the ethos created by and through a rhetor's speech, and the combination of these two elements are called terminal ethos (McCroskey, 2001, p. 95). As we shall see, my reception study provides a way to examine how people negotiate between initial and derived ethos, and what types of arguments, both internal and external to the ads, they draw upon to do so.

A concept that I will elaborate further in part 3 of reception is *authenticity* (Guignon, 2004, 2008; Johansen, 2002). Some scholars have suggested authenticity as a possible fourth dimension of ethos (Johansen, 2002; Kjeldsen, 2006). It is fundamentally concerned with a sender's ability to come across as genuine, and 'as himself', acting in a mode that is true to one's inner convictions. As I will later discuss, this concept flies in the face of all of sociology, and is inherently paradoxical and constructed – but is still something that is highly at work when my informants are to evaluate what they are watching.

The rhetorical perspective entails a strong belief in the importance of legitimate dissensus (Kock, 2007). Precisely because rhetoric's domain is that of choice under conditions of uncertainty – a domain of the probable, not of the true (Kock, 2009) – there may be a perfectly acceptable and enduring dissensus between people or groups of people. Thus, the ability to deal with conflict in a productive manner lies at the very core of the rhetorical perspective (Kock & Villadsen, 2017, p. 573f). Barthes has described how the practice of rhetoric was born out of the need for a tool to solve conflicts over property by trial, instead of turning to tyranny or armed conflict (1970). The art of rhetoric was originally conflict through language rather than arms. In the rhetorical view, dissensus, disagreement and conflict are not necessarily obstacles to be overcome, but rather aspects that need to be handled and managed and lived with as

part of co-existing as citizens of the polis. This view posits that the differences and disagreements between people and groups of people are inescapable, and thus something society must navigate and manage as a form of legitimate dissensus (Kock, 2007) in pursuit of the good life. Johansen and Kjeldsen's (2005, p. 41) account of several groups' rhetorical fight for rights in Norwegian society, such as the fight of the peasantry versus the state, the worker's fight against the bourgeoisie, the indigenous Sami people's fight against Norwegian society and the fight for women's suffrage are good examples of how conflict, negativity and critique can be important. There was little consensus or deliberation at the time, rather rhetorical struggle, agitation, confrontation and flaming speeches (Johansen & Kjeldsen, 2005, p. 42). The rhetorical take on conflict is relevant for part 2 of the reception analysis, because it deals with informant experiences to negativity. As we shall see, some informants discern between useful and non-useful negativity. Following a rhetorical perspective, negative political ads, often treated as a problem for democracy, should be viewed neutrally, simultaneously as potentially useful and potentially detrimental. As I shall later show, this resonates well with thoughts conceptualizing negativity as a potential resource (Soroka, 2014) and views conceptualizing negativity in political ads as inherently neutral, or even beneficial (Richardson Jr, 2008). As I will be dealing with both advocacy ads (arguing only for an issue or a candidate), attack ads (only attacking another candidate or issue) and contrast ad (both attacking the opponents position as well as advocating), I will refer to the terms of *probatio* (arguments advocating evidence for own claims) and *refutatio* (arguments refuting or attacking claims made by others, or imagined claims) (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 396) to characterize different types of argumentation in the ads.

A strong sense of dealing with contingency runs throughout the rhetorical tradition. Rhetoric showcases an insistence on keeping in mind the contingencies that arise from having to address actual, empirical audiences in varying situations (Gaonkar, 2007). Following rhetoric's clear focus on the audience (as I will further detail below), there is a strong sense of subjectivity when it comes to argument appraisal (Kock, 2007). What is a valid or strong argument is dependent on the situation, the context and the audience. Because rhetoric is the domain of future choice

under conditions of uncertainty, there can be no hard and fast rules for persuasion – it will depend on audience, issue, situation, et cetera. This sensibility is particularly clear in concepts such as *aptum* and *decorum*. The concept of *aptum* (meaning “appropriate”, “fitting”) is originally part of *elocutio*, which is one of the five phases of invention the speaker must consider when preparing a speech. *Elocutio* concerns the use of language, and *aptum* is a sub-concept or norm that states that the language used should be fitting to the speaker and speech, the situation, the audience and the subject – known as external *aptum* (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 71). Furthermore, the different elements of an utterance, such as the issue, the presentation, the language, content and disposition must fit together accordingly – known as internal *aptum* (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 75). As Andersen points out, Cicero treats this as a highly normative term that has close connections to moral philosophy (Andersen, 1995, p. 62). The norm is that rhetoric must appear to be decent and respectable in the eyes of the audience, it concerns dimensions of vice and morality (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 71). Thus, *aptum* concerns a speaker’s respect for and acceptance of societal norms, conventions and ideals (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 78). Following Leff’s (1999) re-actualization of the twin concept of *decorum*, Vatnøy (2017, p. 104) notes that the concept “depicts the limits of appropriate social behavior in a given situation”. Consequently, questions of contingency, situation and quality come to the foreground, as the ideal rhetor must employ their knowledge of social norms in order to deem what is appropriate and fitting at any given time (Vatnøy, 2017, p. 105). This insight is reversed in my study, as I shift the emphasis towards how audiences employ social norms in their evaluation of utterances. In doing so, I pay special interest to moments of failure. After all, these are the moments that informants notice and pay attention to, in line with Kjeldsen’s remark that “(...) when all is fitting, we normally do not notice it” (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 73). Consequently, the meaning of *aptum* is best illustrated where some sort of relations are indeed unfitting. Since *aptum/decorum* are so intimately connected with social norms, the rhetor breaks the ideal of *aptum* at her peril. She risks a loss of ethos and credibility in the eyes of the audience (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 78) – and importantly: a breach of *aptum* will probably draw attention away from the message presented (Vatnøy, 2017, p. 106). These concepts are highly salient in part 4 of the reception

analysis, where I discuss, amongst other things, informants' talk about perceived norm violations.

I now turn to describe how employing a rhetorical perspective in audience and reception studies is beneficial⁷. Mainly, I argue that this is so because audience studies and the rhetorical perspective share much common ground, and furthermore because rhetorical research has partly neglected the empirical audience.

2.1.3. The common ground between reception research and rhetoric

The idea of employing rhetorical perspectives in the analysis of audience response is not novel. The tradition of cultural studies, which later evolved into "reception research" (Jensen & Rosengren, 1990) – labeled by McQuail as part of a sociocultural approach to the study of media, "the cultural tradition and reception analysis" (McQuail, 1997, p. 18) – has drawn inspiration from rhetoric on numerous occasions (Gentikow, 1998, p. 153; Merton et al., 1946; Morley, 1980). Reception analysis was originally sparked in part by a reaction to traditional audience studies' (Such as the behaviorist tradition of media effects and media uses, see McQuail, 1997, p. 17) lack of emphasis on meaning construction, as well as concerns about the limits of methods used for conducting the research (Hagen, 1992, p. 42). One pioneering study for cultural studies was Merton's *Mass Persuasion* (Merton et al., 1946). David Morley explicitly comments upon this study as a work of high sophistication and ambition in his cultural studies classic *The Nationwide Audience* (Morley, 1980, p. 3f). In *Mass Persuasion*, Merton draws upon the rhetorical tradition in an attempt to understand the changing media landscape of the 1940s, the new medium of radio, and what seemed like a singular case of mass persuasion at the time. This mixture of old and new is typical for Merton's approach in general (Simonson, 2006, p. 276). However, it is also a testament to the fact that, even in times of change, there are still some things that are fixed in aspects of communication: "In every age, the artifices of

⁷ Parts of the following text is a revised and expanded version of an argument first presented in Iversen (2015).

rhetoric have moved men to act – or to refrain from acting” (Merton et al., 1946, p. 1). Another asset of Mass Persuasion is that it takes several chains of the communicative process into account. It combines a rigorous, qualitative analysis of persuasive communication with interpretations and analysis of both socio-cultural context and actual audience response (Gentikow, 1998, p. 159; Morley, 1980, p. 3f). While the study is now somewhat outdated, there is still potential in the approach of Mass Persuasion. I am referring specifically to combining rhetoric and reception research.

A central perspective in reception analysis is the conception of the audience(s) as active, as co-creators and co-interpreters of media messages. Meaning is negotiated between producer, text and audience. This approach, often named the active audience theory, has also received its fair share of criticism. The notion of polysemy – that one text can have more than one denotational meaning, can be ‘read’ in many different ways – has been much debated. Concerns have been raised around a tendency to overestimate the freedom of audiences in reception (See for instance Budd et al., 1990, p. 169). However, as David Morley reminds us, Stuart Hall’s original encoding/decoding model did foreground the concept of the preferred reading, while “(...) acknowledging the possibility of alternative, negotiated or oppositional readings” (Morley, 1993, p. 13). Morley is critical of what he calls the “facile insistence of the polysemy of media products” and an “undocumented presumption that forms of interpretative resistance are more widespread than subordination” as well as an “unfortunate (...) tendency toward an overdrawn emphasis on the polysemous qualities of texts (...)” (Morley, 1993, p. 13). When applied to highly intentional or rhetorical communication, the term ‘polyvalence’ is more appropriate. Polyvalence is a condition in which there is a shared understanding of the literal meanings of a text, but disagreement about the evaluations of the literal meanings (Ceccarelli, 1998; Condit, 1989). Another important distinction here is that some texts are more polysemous than others. One can, for instance, expect a fiction film to be more polysemous than a political ad. Hall’s perspective on the encoding and decoding of media texts should always be specified and qualified further when used in research. That said, it still holds considerable value. In particular, Hall’s emphasis on negotiation and the relationship

between producers' intentions, manifestations of these intentions in texts, and how these intentions are interpreted by audiences is useful for this project.

This perspective is very much in line with the rhetorical perspective and the debate on *agency*. Leff (2012) has discussed the ambivalence in the rhetorical tradition with regard to agency. Who actually has power in the communicative situation? Is it the speaker and the text, or the audience? The rhetorical tradition can be said to contain a “strong, almost totalizing (...) emphasis on the agency of the rhetor” (Leff, 2012, p. 136). A review of the tradition leads Leff to state that “(...) rhetoric valorizes and centers itself on the individual agent” (Leff, 2012, p. 138). At the same time, there are indications of the very opposite, because “the power to move and persuade an audience requires accommodation and adaptation to its sentiments (...) if orators are to exert influence, they must yield to the people they seek to influence (...)” (Leff, 2012, p. 138). This perspective runs throughout the rhetorical tradition. In *The New Rhetoric* (1969) of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, part continuation and part amplification of the Aristotelian tradition, the connection between audience and adherence is central. They claim that “(...) argumentation aims at securing the adherence of those to whom it is addressed, [therefore] it is, in its entirety, relative to the audience to be influenced” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 19). In this view, persuasion is, ideally, a modest attempt at gaining adherence from an audience (Fafner, 1977; Gentikow, 1998, p. 145). Continuing this thought, large parts of rhetorical argumentation can be understood as dialogical (Gentikow, 1998, p. 145). A *rhetor* must, following this impetus, be able to respect and listen to her audience, and to put herself in their place, mentally speaking, if she is to have any success at all (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 21). The formation of arguments must build on shared beliefs and norms (*doxa*) between speaker and audience. Such a view grants a lot of power to the audience and their responses. It argues that audiences will always be co-creators of rhetorical utterances (Kjeldsen, 2008a, p. 55). This dialogical side of rhetoric confers on the audience considerable power of agency. One can talk of negotiation, rather than mere persuasion.

Despite this common ground and potential, the field of rhetoric has not seen many empirical explorations of audiences, although they have been called for at several occasions (I. e. Benoit & Smythe, 2003; Stromer-Galley & Schiappa, 1998). One notable exception is the research anthology *Rhetorical Audience Studies and Reception of Rhetoric: Exploring Audiences Empirically*. Presenting 11 empirical contributions, in order to alleviate the perceived lacuna in rhetorical research, editor Jens Kjeldsen argues that there is a severe imbalance in the field of rhetorical research when it comes to audiences. Rhetoric has “(...) always been thinking about audiences” (Kjeldsen, 2018, p. 2), but has seemingly neglected to explore empirical audiences. While Kjeldsen emphasizes that rhetoric has produced a whole host of valuable thoughts around the nature of audiences, these rich conceptualizations also point to a neglect of empirical matters (Kjeldsen, 2016, p. 140). Consequently, “speculative, theoretical constructions” of audiences are dominant⁸ in the rhetorical camp (Kjeldsen, 2018, p. 4).

Stromer-Galley and Schiappa state that most rhetorical research in the US prior to the 1960s concentrated on political oratory – “typically public speeches by political elites and public figures” (2018, p. 43) – before an expansion of both objects of research and methods for exploration expanded widely. Now, all symbol use was considered rhetorical, and rhetorical scholars started showing interest in other fields of research and their theories in order to further expand their approach. Often dubbed “the rhetorical turn” or “big rhetoric”, a situation was created in which “(...) anything could be described and analyzed as rhetorical” (Stromer-Galley & Schiappa, 2018, p. 44).

Stromer-Galley and Schiappa argue for the added benefits of including various methods of audience research (1998). Addressing what they at the time perceived as a

⁸ Kjeldsen mentions some exceptions (Ceccarelli, 2001; Condit, 1990; Kjeldsen, 2007; Middleton et al., 2015; Stromer-Galley & Schiappa, 1998). To this we could now add the anthology “Rhetorical audience studies and reception of rhetoric: Exploring audiences empirically” (2018), as well as Jørgensen, Kock & Rørbech (1998), and Jamieson’s (1992) use of focus groups in her explorations of political ads. Kor (2018) has also explored the “commenting persona” through a reception study of secondary texts gathered through social media.

“text-centered disciplinary environment” (2018, p. 45), they employed the rhetorical study of popular culture texts as a case example. Their main argument is that claims about effects and meaning can be enhanced through studies of empirical audiences. In one sense, Schiappa and Stromer-Galley raise a concern of language and precision: “wording in scholarly writing matters” (Stromer-Galley & Schiappa, 1998, p. 30). They also stress that such wording has decisive consequences for the purposes of one’s research, as they emphasize the difference between evidence requirements for texts that aim to “edify and entertain fellow scholars” when compared to texts that seek to “explain or evaluate socially significant popular culture texts” (1998, p. 55). However, they also argue for the benefits of audience research, stating that drawing upon multiple sources is a way to enhance one’s arguments (1998, p. 33), in other words a type of triangulation (Kjeldsen & Andersen, 2018). They also state that “it is not safe to make audience conjectures without audience data” (1998, p. 31). Mainly, their argument is that audience research is beneficial in order to support claims.

Kjeldsen (2016, 2018) moves further, and argues for the inherent value of audience research beyond avoiding conjecture and supporting claims, as he states that some findings are impossible to produce through other means (Kjeldsen, 2016, p. 138). Furthermore, he states that audience research is necessary in itself, lest we risk to fail to understand rhetoric at all (2018, p. 1). In this project, I sympathize with both of these positions. The blooming research paradigm of “rhetorical citizenship” has explicitly stated the importance of receptive dimensions. So far, this question has been left mostly unexamined. It is the aim of this study to alleviate part of this problem. Empirical explorations of the rhetorical audience offer us a way to gain a nuanced understanding of precisely how texts and audiences interact. Thus, the present study offers a way to gain a more fine grained understanding of how people make use of the style and content in political advertisements.

As I demonstrated in chapter 1, political ads have mainly been examined through a behaviorist paradigm interested in media effects, or through content analysis – and mainly through approaches that are quantitative and/or experimental. With some

exceptions, qualitative approaches have been few and far between. As I have now shown, rhetoric has neglected the empirical audience. Thus, with my combination of communication science and rhetoric, and my research interest in a particular form of political communication, the present thesis can help alleviate an identified need for more qualitative inquiries into political communication (Karpf et al., 2015) as well as a need for more studies of rhetorical reception (Kjeldsen, 2016, 2018).

Because this study is a combination of the rhetorical perspective and reception research, I would like to foreground the dialogic nature of persuasion (Fafner, 1977, p. 54), a process more similar to a type of negotiation. This shift in perspective from a type of one-way communication to a more fluid and dialogical speech situation has a parallel in the significant impact of Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model of communication. At the time meant as a polemic piece addressing precisely a transmission model of communication (Hagen, 1992; Schröder, 2015), it emphasizes dimensions of meaning negotiation at the end of both producers and recipients of media texts. As such, it is a good fit for this project. I now turn to further qualify and nuance the model so that it is in line with the state of the art in reception research, and more fitting for this project. The main problem with Hall's original thesis is the model's insistence on ideological struggle to a point where audiences' active resistance at a connotative level is overemphasized on behalf of dimensions of denotation, comprehension and understanding.

2.1.4 Sensitizing encoding-decoding

Hall's model supplies a useful shift in perspective, and the model itself has become incredibly popular within communication science. In Gurevitch and Scannel's words, it is "one of the most seminal and canonical texts in the area of communication and media studies" (Gurevitch & Scannell, 2003). However, the original model contains several issues that have to be addressed for the concepts within it to be put to meaningful use in the present thesis.

Some of the sensitivity towards the model's shortcomings was present already in the original text. "No doubt misunderstandings of the literal kind do exist", Hall wrote

in Encoding-decoding (1973[1980]), touching briefly upon an observation further elaborated by Morley (1980): The process of *decoding* masks several other processes. I take this to mean that the concept of ‘decoding’ is too large of a category, in need of substantial refinement and nuance in order to better describe what informants are up to in the reception situation. Furthermore, Hall’s three suggested viewer positions – the dominant reading, the oppositional reading and the negotiated reading – are concerned with ideological struggle at the expense of other, relevant aspects of evaluation, comprehension and nuances of reception at both the denotative and the connotative level. In the following, I will present some remedies to these two problems as presented by audience studies, as well as my own adjustments in order to chart out a working conception of reception and decoding that will be put to work in the analysis below. My final conception of decoding will align with Michelle’s (2007) consolidated analytical framework for reception, albeit with a few key differences and distinctions that I will elucidate at the end of this theoretical overview. I chose to align myself closely with Michelle’s model because it has the considerable strength of drawing on a large body of work in audience studies, thus proposing an analytical language grounded in actual research practice, and that many researchers can relate to.

The issue with Hall’s original model leading to an overemphasis on ideology has been remarked by several scholars (Michelle, 2007; Ross, 2011; Schröder, 2000). The main problem is that claiming that an audience member will take any of the three typological positions presupposes a more or less perfect denotative comprehension of the media text. This is not always the case. Drawing on an example from my group interviews, there were moments of miscomprehension or struggle for meaning – not in terms of ideology, but in struggling to understand what the film was attempting to communicate. To give an example, an ad from the Centre Party prompted a reaction of this type among young voters with high political interest across both sides of the political spectrum. In the film, an elderly man and a younger man are seen arm wrestling, while various slogans float around the screen in the form of hashtags. The elderly man wins, cheers, and the screen fades to a picture of the party leader and the party logo. The intention of the film, in the producers own words, was that “the elderly

are not a uniform and weak group, but are as diverse as people in society in general, and that we because of this should have a policy that takes this into account” (Centre Party secretary Knut Olsen). Informants rarely discussed this message, though, because of issues at the denotative level. Furthermore, in a group with senior citizens, many informants expressed frustration over poor sound quality in the ads, both in terms of loud, unpleasant noises as well as ‘mumbly dialogue’. Participants in this group also explicitly voiced complaints about a film they found to be ‘too quick’ (the relative time between cuts was quite short), and in one informant’s words: “Impossible to understand, impossible to follow”.

These examples tell us that the dimension of comprehension can be understood on both a denotative and a connotative level. The first refers to literally not understanding the codes one are presented with, finding them difficult, or experiencing a film form that is too quick and confusing, as the example with the senior citizens indicates. On the denotative level, confusion and miscomprehension arises when faced with a situation in which the decoder is missing some sort of needed cultural reference, situational knowledge, or argumentative common ground to 'get' the message. In other words, you know what you see – but you do not know what producers 'are getting at' with their communicative act. One performs a reading, but the missing cultural reference or knowledge leads to unexpected outcomes.

Schröder (2000) explicitly raises the issue of comprehension in his attempts at formulating a reworked model for decoding. He posits that the encoding-decoding approach found in the work of Hall and Morley is problematic because it treats polysemy, the potential for multiple meanings, solely as a feature at the connotative level. In Schröder’s view, this takes denotative understanding and comprehension for granted, which cannot always be said to be the case when audiences meet media texts. Michelle (2007) also mentions this missing distinction in her wide-ranging synthesis of field of audience studies in order to formulate an analytical framework to guide future research. She critiques Hall’s typology (dominant, negotiated, oppositional) for conflating form with content, and states that it focuses too heavily on connotative

meanings, and forgets denotative comprehension. Ross (2011) shares the above mentioned concerns, and calls attention to the importance of differentiating between what he labels ideological positions and text-relative positions.

Moving further, as Morley (2006) remarks, there is also a need to distinguish between comprehension and evaluation. A lot of the audience research that was initially inspired by the encoding-decoding model placed considerable emphasis on polysemy, which to some degree underprivileged the equally important concept of polyvalence. Polysemy is the notion that one media text can be 'read' from different positions, and in many different ways. Here, one should recall Morley's reminder that Hall's original formulation of the encoding-decoding model put strong emphasis on the actual dominance of the preferred reading, while "(...) acknowledging the possibility of alternative, negotiated or oppositional readings" (Morley, 1993, p. 13).

Polyvalence is a condition where there is a shared understanding of the 'literal' meaning of the text, but disagreement about the evaluations of the literal meanings (Ceccarelli, 1998; Condit, 1989). As the relevance of the term 'polysemy' decreases, the relevance of the term 'polyvalence' increases. First and foremost, polyvalence is an indicator of what 'tone' (positive or negative) informants' evaluations take. However, it also encompasses what reasons informants provide in order to account for their explicit negativity or positivity, as well as other explications that are evaluating the message in some way. I argue that polyvalence is particularly relevant to the genre of political ads, because they in my material tend to lead to a relative stability in audience interpretations, but divergence in evaluation. People might perfectly understand what they are being presented with, but simply dislike it. This is qualitatively something very different from 'reading against the grain', or performing some sort of opposition or negotiation to the text on an ideological level. It is also something different from comprehension.

Fundamentally, there is a need to de-couple the 'preferred reading' from any notions of straight acceptance. The fact that many informants possibly have preferred readings does not mean that their evaluations are in accordance, or very similar to each

other. The conversations that particular ‘preferred readings’ spark can also vary considerably. In explaining these variations, Schröder’s concept of *motivation* could be of use. He urges reception researchers to take into account what could possibly motivate different readings from informants (Schröder, 2000, p. 237).

To sum up, there is a strict need to introduce the dimension of comprehension, and one should keep in mind that it is a dimension that can be at work on both a denotative and a connotative level. I would like to insist on separating the polysemy of comprehension (how do people understand the media text – what do they literally see on a denotative level?) from polysemy of meaning (how do people interpret what they see?) and position (how do people argue with the ideology that they see in the text?). This allows for a more fine-grained and nuanced understanding of the reception situation and the analysis of the interview data. De-coupling hegemonic resistance and ideology from comprehension also makes sense in this project, because I am dealing with media texts in which polyvalence (relative stability in audience interpretations, but divergence in audience evaluation) will be a more relevant concept than polysemy.

2.1.4.1 Moving between modes: commuting

While not an error in Hall’s original framework, several researchers have problematized how the encoding-decoding model and the typology of positions implicitly suggest that an audience member will engage with a media text, and ‘land’ in one fixed position. Schröder (2000) stresses that viewers often move between positions, as well as up and down in a thought continuum of comprehension. Michelle (2007) is sympathetic to this notion, mentioning Schröder as well as Wilson’s (1996) “playful consciousness” as inspiration. A viewer may, within Schröder’s framework, be motivated by some parts of a program, and less so by others. Michelle (2007) extends his notion by further claiming that some parts of a program are understood perfectly on a denotative level, whilst other parts appear more confusing. Some moments in reception are characterized by intense engulfment, with moments of critical distance and attention to constructedness. The central insight is that audience members are not fixed in one set way of watching throughout a reception situation, but

will often move between a whole range of modalities. Schröder names this practice ‘commuting’ (Schröder, 1986)⁹. The practice of commuting is important for the present study, and will be used in part 4 of the reception analysis in order to conceptualize breaching moments. In order to establish what relevant modes informants commute between, I will now give a brief account of Michelle’s (2007) suggestion of a framework for reception analysis.

2.1.4.2 Modes of reception

Michelle draws on findings from previous audience research as well as on her own synthesis of previous models of reception in order to formulate a consolidated analytical framework to guide future reception research. Importantly, she rejects the dichotomy of active versus passive audiences, when understood in a manner that suggests for instance that informants reading a message “straight” are less active than informants reading against the grain of a text: “A significant proportion of audience reception does not critically deconstruct what is seen or heard (...) This is not to imply that they will always do so *passively* (...)” (Michelle, 2007, p. 195). Rather, one can treat informants as reading media text with a varying degree of closeness/distance, as well as subjectivity/objectivity.

Michelle is explicitly meta-analytic, and performs a wide-ranging and thorough synthesis of previous theories and findings in the field of audience studies, leading her to formulate four distinct “modes of reception” that delineate modes of viewer interpretation and response. For the denotative level of meaning: a transparent mode, a referential mode and a mediated mode. For the connotative level of meaning: a discursive mode. Michelle also includes, as Schröder (2000) does, the dimension of evaluation, in which the researcher places an informant reading along a continuum of hegemonic, contesting or counter-hegemonic readings.

⁹ See also (Gripsrud, 1995, p. 153; Liebes & Katz, 1990, p. 53f).

| DENOTATIVE LEVEL OF MEANING | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Transparent Mode: Text as life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Non-fiction texts:</i> perceived as a “mirror” of reality ▪ <i>Fiction texts:</i> “suspension of disbelief” ▪ Ideological/discursive content is <i>implicitly</i> read “straight” → dominant/preferred decoding | <p>Referential Mode: Text as <i>like</i> life</p> <p><i>Comparative sources potentially drawn on:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Personal experience/ individual biography ii) Immediate life world experience iii) Experience and knowledge of the wider social/ political/ economic/ cultural/ national/ international context of production or reception | <p>Mediated Mode: Text as a <i>production</i></p> <p><i>Heightened attunement to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Textual aesthetics ii) Generic form iii) Intentionality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textual • Generic • Professional/ Industry-based |
| CONNOTATIVE LEVEL OF MEANING | | |
| <p>Discursive Mode: Text as a message</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) <i>Analytical</i> (Comprehension of message) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification • Motivation • Implication ii) <i>Positional</i> (Response to that message) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Dominant/Preferred</i> <i>Negotiated</i> <i>Oppositional</i> | | |
| EVALUATION | | |
| <i>Hegemonic Reading</i> | <i>Contesting Reading</i> | <i>Counter-Hegemonic Reading</i> |

Close/ Subjective ←-----→ Distant / Objective
(Relationship between text and viewer)

Figure 1: Michelle’s proposed schema for reception research (2007, p. 194)

Figure 1 displays Michelle’s original consolidated framework. In a transparent mode, the viewer *views text as life*. For a non-fiction text, this implies perceiving the text as a ‘mirror on reality’, and for fiction texts this implies a strong suspension of disbelief or engulfment. Central to this mode is that audience members draw on aspects internal to the text in order to interpret it: “the text provides the primarily [sic] resources for its interpretation” (Michelle, 2007, p. 196). Consequently, audience members’ relation to what they are watching is characterized by proximity. A transparent mode of reception for non-fiction texts can be compared with the typical viewer expectations of journalism or television news. Truthfulness and accuracy become important in this respect, as is the expectation that what you are watching, although laden with various ideological attributes, presents “relatively undistorted reflections of reality” (Michelle, 2007, p. 196). Connecting this mode to political

advertising, viewers of the genre will come across both fiction and nonfiction texts, although the latter is predominant in my material. In many cases, as I will show later in this thesis, transparent readings of political advertising is characterized by informants' seeming belief that what they are watching can tell them something true and valid about a particular politician, a political party, or a political issue.

In a referential mode, informants view the text as lifelike. Michelle conceptualizes this mode as “one step removed” (Michelle, 2007, p. 199) from the “close” transparent mode. Here, viewers draw upon their own experiences outside the text, and compare and contrast or otherwise draw upon these experiences when interpreting the program they are watching. Michelle delineates between three levels of extra-textual experience that viewers may draw upon, at a micro, meso and macro level. These are personal experience (own experiences from primary socialization such as from childhood or parenthood), immediate life world experience (drawing upon experience from extended family, friends, the workplace or other stable institutions that the viewer has been in contact with), and experience drawn from wider contexts, such as international politics, economic systems, mainstream public opinion, social and cultural norms, et cetera (Michelle, 2007, pp. 199-203). This mode contains both elements of proximity/involvement and distance. A referential reading entails comparison between text and a perceived reality, but as Michelle argues: “participants must first consider the text *as* life in order to evaluate its *similarity to* life as they understand it” (Michelle, 2007, p. 202).

In a mediated mode, audience members treat the text as text – or in Michelle's words: as production. Here, attention is directed towards the text as construction. In Michelle's view this mode is characterized by distance between text and reader. Viewers direct their attention to aesthetic dimensions, generic form and intentionality – be it textual, generic or based on impressions of what producers are attempting to do or achieve with a particular text – or knowledge of how the media industry works, for instance.

At the connotative level of meaning, Michelle's “discursive mode” means the content of a media text. The model separates between viewers' comprehension of the

message content (analytical discursive), and viewers response towards the message (positional). In the analytical discursive mode, informants identify the message that is to be conveyed, explicate their perceived motivations for why a producer would want to convey such a message, and/or the implications of the message. Viewers might simply just identify a particular argument or a message in a text. However, Michelle stresses that the analytical-discursive mode also implies that some viewers may consider aspects of argumentation: whether the evidence provided is sufficient, identifying ‘conspicuous silences’, as in what was not said. Furthermore, viewers may speculate on the motives behind a message. Drawing on Richardson and Corner’s (1986) notion of “manipulative intent”, Michelle argues that viewers may insist that producers are attempting to persuade them of something, in order to achieve some goal. Consequently, the language that signifies this mode can be one of suspicion of deceit, manipulation or distortion. Viewers may also talk about implications – either of their own thoughts or emotions, or engage in speculation about a text’s possible effect on other people (Michelle, 2007, p. 207f).

After comprehending (or not) the message content, Michelle argues that viewers may adopt one of Hall’s three possible decoding positions. Notably, the notion of “oppositional” in this model is less about hegemonic struggle, and more about various types of disagreement. This insistence on the distinction between ideological struggle and textual negotiations resonate with the arguments of both Schröder (2000) and Ross (2011). Schröder does this by insisting on the importance of comprehension, and Ross writes about the important distinction between ideological positions and text relative positions (Ross, 2011, p. 5)

Thinking in such a way is a good fit for the present study, and I would like to argue that Michelle’s (and Schröder’s) more nuanced understanding of decoding positions more closely resembles a type of polyvalence. In other words, it resembles a state in which people generally understand a media message in the same way, but end up having very different reactions and sentiments towards it, not to mention very different reasons behind their reactions. While a complex process, this is quite

different from the oppositional readings within some strands of early active audience-theory.

As I do not want to adopt Michelle's (2007) model without some necessary corrections and nuances that make it a better fit for this project, I will now introduce some short remarks. Doing so is in a way in direct contradiction to Michelle's stated aim in her article, as she calls for a consolidated language for reception researchers. While the argument that a common framework could make good sense in order to avoid the worst pitfalls of anecdotalism, and a form of academic confusion of tongues, it is important to stress that Michelle treats the understanding of reception as an endpoint of research itself. In my project, I also use reception as a means to understanding larger phenomena. Thus, I will adjust the model accordingly while relating thematically specific concepts to the models proposed generic terms.

My first issue concerns Michelle's connection between the transparent mode and a dominant/preferred reading (as seen in Figure 1):

A dominant/preferred position in relation to privileged textual meanings can thus be assumed of those reading solely in this mode (...) as uncomfortable as we might be with a concept that seems to imply a lack of critical engagement (and perhaps also) the "easy" transmission of ideological messages, this viewing mode is clearly documented within the body of existing research (Michelle, 2007, p. 198)

While Michelle is perfectly right to assume that this will be the case in many situations, she is running the risk of connecting the transparent mode far too closely to a preferred reading. This might lead to thinking that informants in a transparent mode are digesting the message in front of them, and that 'all is well' in terms of producer intentions. What is missing from this argument, is the reactions that might occur precisely when people are in a transparent mode, watching politicians appear on screen. A supplementing perspective to the transparent mode can be found in Mutz' (2015) studies of audience reactions to politicians behaving uncivilly on-screen. Mutz explains this by following Lombard's (1995) proposal that people can also respond to audiovisual media not as a portrayal of a real world, but as if the people or objects were immediately present in their environments. Following this line of thinking, on

some levels, media users will react to mediated norm-violations much the same way they would an unmediated norm-violation (Mutz, 2015, p. 21f). If a politician one loathes is suddenly seen being close and personal on screen, this can trigger subjective and close (negative) reactions that are very much in line with the transparent mode of viewing, but that cannot rightly be called a preferred/dominant decoding, nor said to be an “easy transmission of ideological messages”. People can watch Donald Trump on television and get angry or frustrated – without commuting to a referential or mediated mode. Sometimes, one just reacts to being “too close” to someone one does not particularly care for. Here, the concept of polyvalence is key. The concept of polyvalence is not explicitly present in Michelle’s model. However, given that this thesis concerns itself with political advertising, the concept must be stressed to a greater degree than what might be the case for reception research on other genres.

Lastly, I want to introduce a notion from Sven Ross, who has a different approach to nuancing ‘decoding’ than Schröder and Michelle. He explicitly states that the encoding-segment of the model proper has been neglected, as reception researchers have tended to focus on decoding, for the most part (Ross, 2011, p. 5). Ross generates a number of possible positions by considering the various ways a text could be encoded, and the consequences this could have for the decoding. For instance, a media text by a radical political group could be encoded in an oppositional manner. If this text is then decoded from a dominant/hegemonic position, it could lead to a form of rejection that Ross calls “neutralization”. Ross uses the example of a conservative viewer shrugging off a program containing critique of inequality as a product of “leftist media” (Ross, 2011, p. 6). Ross also stresses the outcome of neutralization on a text level. Naming this mode “text-oppositional”, Ross wishes to open up for a whole range of possible outcomes along various dimensions, including “ (...) ’distraction’, ‘non-comprehension’, ‘indifference’ and ‘program construction awareness’ (...)” (Ross, 2011, p. 7). One could imagine someone rejecting a message because it ‘looks bad’, for instance. Key here is, again, the insistence of keeping denotative and connotative in mind simultaneously. Ross’ concept of neutralization appears to be of relevance for this study, and will be employed in part in the following analysis.

Summing up, in order to obtain a more fine grained understanding of what the process of decoding entails, I have introduced several nuances: a range of modes that we can expect informants to showcase, and the fact that these mods are not preset, but rather represent points in a continuum which they can commute between. Furthermore, I have signaled that I would like to tone down the ideological lens of decoding, favoring processes of agreement/disagreement rather than ideological struggle. Lastly, I have highlighted the importance of polyvalence – both at a denotative and connotative level. Specifically to Michelle’s modes of reception, I have introduced the notion that a “straight” reading in a transparent mode does not necessarily entail liking or acceptance of the message presented, and that people may talk about effects, intentions and aesthetics not only at a discursive, connotative level – but also at a denotative one. Lastly, I do not wish to follow Michelle’s step of researcher evaluation of ideological textual struggle – simply because that is outside of the scope of this thesis. Rather, I will be evaluative in line with my research interest in this chapter, which is to contribute to our understanding of how political advertising can function as a resource for citizenship.

However, in order to understand how political ads can function as a resource for citizenship, we need a clear understanding of what type of citizenship I am referring to. I now turn to this question by describing rhetorical citizenship, which is the understanding I employ in this project.

2.2 Political advertising and receptive rhetorical citizenship

In this thesis, I argue that political ads can function as a resource for citizenship, and more precisely function as a resource for people's enactment of a receptive rhetorical citizenship. In the following I explain how I conceptualize the notion of rhetorical citizenship at work in this project. Because the research on rhetorical citizenship has not yet explored receptive dimensions empirically, I make a proposal towards how this can be done. In the following, I suggest examining the everyday political talk generated by the reception of political ads at two levels. First, at the level of concrete manifestations of everyday political talk that the ads generate, and second, at the level of values, affinities and ideals that citizens orient themselves towards in said talk. I propose four "receptive virtues", a range of orientations, affinities and values that are indicative of people enacting receptive rhetorical citizenship.

2.2.1 Towards receptive rhetorical citizenship

"Citizenship" is traditionally understood as a formal status entailing certain rights and duties given by a state to the individual, or as a concept relating to identity and feelings of belonging to a community (Turner, 1997). The first, citizenship as solely a possession of rights, mainly evolved in postwar political theory, and entails a form of membership with expanding rights: legal, political and social (Marshall, 1950). The reason this form of citizenship is often called passive, is that it places emphasis on entitlements, rights as possessions, and has an absence of obligations (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994, pp. 353-355).

The second form of traditional citizenship treats the term as a sense of identity and belonging. Whilst early scholars had hoped that membership to a polity would help integration into 'common culture', sociocultural identities (feelings of difference) can easily trump socioeconomic status (being a citizen) (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994, p. 370). The thinking around such issues as the relation between citizenship and culture as well as cultural belonging, informs a theoretical line often called "cultural citizenship". In a review article examining some recent literature on the connection

between culture and citizenship at the time, Delanty (2002) points out that there are at least two distinct conceptions of cultural citizenship.

One strand grows out of political theory, and is concerned with solving problems of multiculturalism and striking a balance between recognition of difference and equality (Delanty, 2002, p. 63). Costs and benefits of minority rights, the limits of tolerance, and problems of group representation are key concerns. The quest seems to be “extending a more or less established framework to include excluded or marginalized groups” (Delanty, 2002, p. 61).

The other strand that should be mentioned grows out of the field of cultural sociology, and is concerned rather with bringing about “inclusion in the sphere of identity and belonging” (Delanty, 2002, p. 61). For this strand, “culture” does not mean diversity, but rather “cultural resources, identities and the cultural presuppositions of the polity” (Delanty, 2002, p. 64). Key here is that the citizenship in this conception of cultural citizenship entails “the status of culture as discursively constructed (...) the main issues are less normative than symbolic and cognitive, since it is about the construction of cultural discourses” (Delanty, 2002, p. 64). Weight is put upon “the power to name, create meaning, construct personal biographies and narratives by gaining control over the flow of information, goods and cultural processes is an important dimension of citizenship as an active process” (Delanty, 2002, p. 64). In this second strand of cultural citizenship, we observe a shift in focus from passivity to activity. Citizenship becomes not only a question of rights, but a question of learning and participation in a political community – a process of understanding what it means to live amongst each other as self and other (Delanty, 1997, p. 290). Delanty comments that a particular heed to “the styles and forms of language, cultural models, narratives, discourses that people use to make sense of their society, interpret their place in it, construct courses of action (...)” makes the strand of cultural citizenship particularly relevant for among others communication and media studies (Delanty, 2002, p. 66).

The shift from the more passive, private citizenship of rights to the more active, public citizenship of identity and meaning-making can be summed up with Dahlgren’s

divide between “received citizenship” and “achieved citizenship” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 62). In the latter meaning, citizenship as a form of practice, it is necessary for citizens to constitute themselves as citizens by actually participating in society and enacting their citizenship or civic agency. Dahlgren draws on both theory and empirical evidence concerning citizenship and deliberative democracy to formulate some criteria for what could constitute “civic culture”. This type of culture needs to implement certain civic values, civic affinities, civic knowledge, civic practices, civic identities and lastly civic discussion among people (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 20). We can note Dahlgren’s emphasis on both identity and practices – people need both a sense of democratic belonging and a self-definition as a potential participant (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 21). They also should (ideally) engage, talk to each other and discuss. In this understanding, people are not only being citizens – they are also *doing citizenship*.

Similarly, Robert Asen (2004) calls for viewing citizenship as a performance, not only a possession. Asen does not regard discourse as something citizens do before actually doing the important, democratic routines of voting, or other activities. Rather, he views discourse practices themselves as everyday and potentially powerful enactments of citizenship (Asen, 2004, p. 207). Asen’s article is an explicit point of reference and an inspiration to the concept of “rhetorical citizenship”, which is a different lens with which to view citizenship than the traditional ones. As we recall, these tend to talk about citizenship as formal rights or freedoms. Rhetorical citizenship is understood as something people *do*, a communicative practice (Rønlev, 2014, p. 22). Rhetorical citizenship is defined as both a conceptual frame and an analytical approach (Kock & Villadsen, 2017, p. 572) that examines how the nature of affinitive dimensions of citizenship is discursively constituted:

To the extent that citizenship means to be a member of a polity and take on that identity, the specific nature of such membership is dynamically crafted (constituted, defined, shaped) by rhetorical acts (...) (Kock & Villadsen, 2017, p. 572).

I understand *Rhetorical citizenship* as both a “(...) conceptual, analytical and critical approach to studying the discursive aspects of civic life” (Kock & Villadsen, 2017:

571) – that is, as an umbrella term encompassing a discursive understanding of citizenship (Kock & Villadsen, 2012b, 2014b) that brings rhetorical aspects to the foreground – and as an actual civic practice. As I mentioned previously in this chapter, (deliberative) rhetoric is concerned with the domain of future choice (Kock, 2009), the realm of debate and participation. The fundamental notion of rhetorical citizenship is that citizenship is, in addition to questions of status, rights and identity, also something one does, through symbolic language use of various kinds (Kock & Villadsen, 2017). The notion of rhetorical citizenship understood as practice has both a producing and a receiving dimension (Kock & Villadsen, 2014b, pp. 13-14; 2017, p. 574). Citizens should both enact citizenship through performing arguments and using rhetoric in public, but also through being critical and evaluative towards the rhetoric they themselves are exposed to. As Kock and Villadsen write:

(...) to understand the discursive elements of citizenship as lived experience we should study the ways it is constituted in communicative practices, not just by elite actors such as politicians, journalists, etc., but also by ‘lay’ citizens whose participation can range from actively communicating to a greater public to more ‘passive’ critical participation in public debate in the form of reception and assessment of the rhetoric they are presented with. (Kock & Villadsen, 2017, p. 571)

The quote above includes an explicit call for the importance of receptive dimensions. However, the empirical studies emerging from scholars of rhetorical citizenship are indeed tied to typical and immediately observable types of political participation, such as citizens participating in online comment fields (Rønlev, 2014) or online forums (Just & Gabrielsen, 2012; Kaposi 2012) debates initiated by cultural elites in newspapers (Lund Klujeff, 2012), speeches made by heads of state (van Klink & Lembecke, 2012), controversial public statements (Villadsen, 2012), deliberation around controversial issues (McDonald, 2012), people deliberating in public (Tatarchevskiy, 2012), and satirical songs (Hansen, 2012), to mention some.

Indeed, in the decade that has passed since the term “rhetorical citizenship” was introduced in an academic setting¹⁰, there has not been a single empirical examination of receptive rhetorical citizens. No such studies are present in the two anthologies produced under the research paradigm (Kock & Villadsen, 2012b, 2014a), and the scholarly work relating directly to this emerging sub-field of citizenship studies have examined other aspects of rhetorical citizenship such as public debate between politicians and citizens (Villadsen, 2017). Livio (2017), examining citizenship as a communicative construct under the umbrella of rhetorical citizenship, employs group interviews, but does not address questions of receptive rhetorical citizenship, rather focusing on how people talk about citizenship.

2.2.2 How to study receptive rhetorical citizenship

This lack of focus on empirical audiences mirrors the lack of focus on empirical audiences in rhetorical research generally (Kjeldsen, 2016, 2018). Examining various manifestations of public discourse is perhaps also a natural consequence, following rhetoric’s traditional research interests of public speakers, as well as the fact that the strand of rhetorical citizenship draws much inspiration from the republican strand of political theory, often urging people to pursue an active life and to make their voices heard – particularly in public (Dagger, 1997, 2002).

However, this means that there is an imbalance in the field between studies of citizens as *rhetors* and citizens as *spectators*. When turning towards receptive rhetorical citizens, the ideal of participating in public is the wrong metric. Because we in the following are interested in audiences – spectators, and not necessarily public participants per se – we need to qualify where to look and what we are looking for in terms of enactment of rhetorical citizenship. The outcome of receptive rhetorical citizenship may not be manifestly observable public speech. Receptive rhetorical citizens, however, may have different types of agency at their disposal. In the

¹⁰ The term emerged from two separate sources around the same time period: Robert Danisch (2007, 2011, 2015) and Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen (2008, 2012b, 2014b, 2017). I draw my inspiration from the latter sources in this project.

following, I suggest that the audiences of political rhetoric display a slightly different repertoire of political action, and should be studied accordingly.

In their treatment of photography, Hariman and Lucaites employ the term *spectatorship*, which they define as a sort of civic capability akin to literacy (Hariman & Lucaites, 2016, p. 14). Following Rancière's thoughts on spectatorship, that "Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation (...)" (Rancière, 2014, p. 17), they further posit:

Spectatorship is not a series of behavioral reactions; it is an extended social relationship that works more like a process of attunement or affective alignment than a logic of direct influence. (Hariman & Lucaites, 2016, p. 15).

For Hariman and Lucaites, this observation also carries political implications. They suggest that one should go beyond models of citizenship that primarily define civic agency in terms of reason, verbal agency and direct action to influence policy, and suggest that one should also be sensitive to "gradual shifts in norms instead of abrupt action" (Hariman & Lucaites, 2016, p. 268).

By accepting that spectatorship could very well be a 'normal mode', I am shifting my focus to other types of agency and other types of enactments of rhetorical citizenship that have been explored thus far. The type of talk my informants engage in can hardly be called deliberation, nor is the talk public. They do not necessarily walk out of the focus groups with the intent to write letters to the editor, create political action groups, rallies or with a renewed sense of trust in democracy. However, looking for these types of political action would be both to misunderstand what happens in the reception situation, and to employ a less-than-realistic burden on what citizens are supposed to get out of watching political ads. I am here not interested in how citizens move from "latency to agency" (Schröder, 2012, p. 190), or how their talk can be compared to deliberation proper. Rather, I posit that there are other, perhaps less dramatic or visible modes of political action present when citizens encounter political rhetoric, that should not be left unexamined, or at least not be undervalued. As Dahlgren writes: "there remains an awful lot of discussion which can have political relevance but which has no status in a strict deliberative perspective" (Dahlgren, 2006,

p. 278). In my informants' interpretations and evaluations of the appeals presented in the ads, and in their articulations of these, norms are being negotiated, and practical judgement is being made.

We can assume that people who are exposed to various kinds of political rhetoric not only occasionally thinks about it, but also occasionally talks about it. In this thesis, I pursue audience research to gain insights into the political talk that people produce. Although all audience research is necessarily obtrusive (Drotner, Schröder, Murray, & Kline, 2003), this can provide insights into how people make sense of and use political rhetoric in their orientations towards the political realm, and in their own arguing about politics. In short, it can provide insights into how political ads can function as a resource for citizenship. It should be mentioned that receptive rhetorical citizenship can be (and should be) studied at several different levels and using different approaches both qualitative and quantitative. For instance, one can study how the reception of political rhetoric affects voting intention, behavior, organizational membership or learning (See Freedman, Franz, & Goldstein, 2004). Furthermore, one can study how the reception of political rhetoric is processed and worked through over time, including a glance at how citizens potentially formulate their own utterances in public or in private. Because I have designed the present study as a study of reception in the vein of audience research, however, the main output of my group interviews are best thought of as a type of everyday political talk (Mansbridge, 1999). Although everyday political talk may be far removed from deliberation proper, it still warrants our attention (Mansbridge, 1999). In such talk, "people come to understand better what they want and need" (Mansbridge, 1999, p. 211). Several scholars have noted that everyday political talk is a neglected aspect of deliberative theories (Eveland, 2004; Mansbridge, 1999), and that political talk can have beneficial effects in terms of knowledge, engagement and interests (See Vatnøy, 2017, p. 13 for an overview).

Through this talk, there is the possibility to examine how people relate (or not) to the political realm. First through their manifest talk – what people talk about thematically. Second, at the level of orientations and affinities – a «deep» level. Closely examining the political talk that the reception of political rhetoric generates is

a good starting point for a venture into receptive rhetorical citizenship. Here, I suggest we search for *enactments* of rhetorical citizenship. We should do this through identifying people's orientations towards civic virtues and civic culture. I am inspired here by amongst others Street, Inthorn, and Scott (2015), who, in their study of popular culture and citizenship, employ a wide concept of "citizen engagement", and define it as "the formation and the expression of a relationship with both formal politics, and with the interests and issues affecting different social groups more broadly" (Street et al., 2015, p. 31). They stress that this can be a very tentative relationship, and refer the idea of "public connection" (Couldry & Inés Langer, 2005; Couldry & Markham, 2007) as a type of "pre-condition for those maybe much grander seeming civic activities like campaigning for a political issue or donating money to a political party" (Street et al., 2015, p. 31).

Nærland (forthcoming), who aims to further qualify and sensitize the notion of public connection in his study of fictional entertainment, argues for three interdependent levels of orientation. Drawing on amongst others Dahlgren's (2002) framework of civic culture and the dimensions of "civic practices" and "civic values", he suggests the manifest orientation, the everyday orientation and the deep orientation. The first and the third are highly relevant for the present project. The second, concerned with peoples' patterns of media consumption, is less relevant, as this is not a study of people's everyday media diets. The first is concerned with observable political action such as "action concerning issues of political significance", but also "discussion". The third concerns people's "resources, values, motivations, affinities, dispositions, sensibilities" (Nærland, forthcoming, p. 5). In this project, I start by examining the *manifest* everyday political talk that political ads generate, and I look for signs of *deep* orientation. I take these signs to indicative of people orienting themselves towards, and enacting, virtues of citizenship, through the articulation of precisely values, motivations, affinities, dispositions and sensibilities. This also entails a look at resources, in particular communicative skills, identified as a key civic knowledge (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 21), and understood as a type of media literacy. I will now briefly sketch out a suggestion for what virtues that can be relevant to this type of

receptive rhetorical citizenship. These virtues serve as traces of rhetorical citizenship that I will look for throughout this thesis.

2.2.3 The virtues: traces of receptive rhetorical citizenship

In people's everyday political talk, I suggest we search for moments of orientation and connectedness towards a greater polity. These are what I propose to call "traces of receptive rhetorical citizenship". These orientations are revealed through the analysis of what people talked about in their reception of ads, and how they talked about it. The virtues I will be looking for are gathered from rhetorical theory, as well as virtues identified as important by both republican and deliberative theorists. There are many virtues one could plausibly connect to the term rhetorical citizenship, but in the following I will focus mainly on the following four:

- **Inclusiveness:** A willingness to take other people (and their needs, communicative or otherwise) into account.
- **Openness:** Openness towards other views than one's own. This includes the ability to question one's own views, as well as generally held beliefs.
- **Connection:** A willingness to be informed and connected to the polity.
- **Literacy:** The communicative skills to be able to articulate the above-mentioned, as well as to interpret and assess political rhetoric one is exposed to.

I will now qualify these orientations. I must stress that these virtues are not exhaustive, and that they are at times overlapping and interrelated. My point is not to create an exact metric by which I will judge the performance of my informants, but rather to put some sensitizing concepts into play. They are meant as conceptual yardsticks, and are to be treated as a number of virtues that are particularly relevant to my research interest concerned with exploring how political ads can enable the enactment of rhetorical citizenship. I end by describing two broad orientations that I will refer to throughout the thesis: that of the voter-consumer, and that of the voter-citizen.

By the virtue of inclusiveness, or a *willingness to take other people into account*, I refer to the amount or type of people that citizens are taking into account when they are thinking about politics and political decisions. A sign of citizenship, then, is to extend the amount of people one takes into account beyond a small circle of family and friends, ideally “to the boundary of whatever polity one is acting in – if not further” (Schudson, 2006, p. 203). This notion resonates well with elements of Richard Dagger’s liberal-republican virtues of fair play and civic memory thought to enable a sense of togetherness and attachment (Dagger, 1997). The virtue of fair play is underpinned by a sense of reciprocity. Beyond basic reciprocity such as citizens’ obligation to obey laws, Dagger also stresses an affinitive dimension, entailing that citizens view each other as part of a common enterprise. Combined with the virtue of civic memory, Dagger argues that this type of reciprocity can contribute to “(...) a sense of attachment to place and to people (...)”, a sensation of being in it together, a type of understanding of different workloads that different citizens must attend to in what Dagger dubs “the civic enterprise” (Dagger, 1997, p. 197). Dahlgren calls this virtue a “civic affinity”, which he understands as a sense among people that they belong to the same polity” (...) despite other differences, and have to deal with each other to make it work (...)” (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 21). In her writings on everyday political talk, Jane Mansbridge (1999, p. 226) mentions reciprocity as important: that one is able to acknowledge other people, and ideally that one should, using imagination and empathy, attempt to situate oneself in the place of another. This includes, as we shall see in the reception of the ads, taking the communicative needs of others into account. Similarly, Robert Asen argues for the *sociable aspects* of discursive citizenship, that it fosters a type of sociability through the taking of other people’s perspectives (2004, pp. 202-203). This leads me to the second virtue of receptive rhetorical citizenship.

By the virtue of openness towards other views, I refer to citizens’ willingness to imagine other people’s positions, but also their ability to question their own positions, as well as societal norms. Dagger explicitly mentions *tolerance of different opinions and beliefs* as a virtue of liberal-republicanism (1997, p. 196). While one part of tolerance is concerned with leaving people to their own convictions and beliefs as long

as they do not infringe upon the autonomy of others, Dagger also stresses an educative aspect of the virtue of tolerance: “(...) the tolerant person also believes that he or she will gain (...) from the opportunity to hear or see diverse points of view expressed” (Dagger, 1997, p. 196). This type of exposure to different sides is thought to better help people understand what they themselves and others mean and want – a question of personal interest (Dagger, 2002, pp. 151-152). Rhetoricians Kock and Villadsen point to amongst other the sophist Isocrates when they stress that perspective-taking is a key point in rhetoric:

[A commitment to] ‘getting through to’ those of different views runs through the rhetorical tradition, partly in terms of advice on how to keep the conversation going, to listen to and address the other’s stance, and to suggest solutions that take diverse perspectives into account (Kock & Villadsen, 2017, p. 573)

Other sources in which the rhetorical impetus of taking other people’s views into account are for instance the lessons of the benefits of taking other perspectives located both in the writings of Cicero (*De Oratore*), Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*), as well as in the ancient sophist text *Dissoi Logoi* (or *Dialexis*), which teaches to argue both sides of any issue, regardless of the issue. Importantly, the sophists did not praise the value of perspectives because they were extreme relativists. Rather, they intended to ‘make the weak argument stronger’ following the belief that having the best arguments for both sides clashing would make practical judgement of what to do in various situations easier and better for society (Kjeldsen, 2014, pp. 79-80). The key point here is that such perspective-taking can be educative, through citizens honing their own arguments or reflecting on their own positions, as well as integrative, through imagining other people’s position (Asen, 2004, pp. 202-203).

By the virtue of connection, or a willingness to be informed and connected, I refer here to traces of a minimal recognition that some form of public participation is necessary and good for the community, if not even enjoyable for the citizen herself (Dagger, 1997, p. 197). This entails a type of ‘public nature’, a citizen which is a “public spirited person” (Dagger, 2002, p. 150) that at some levels are able to place the

interests of the community ahead of personal interests. Moreover, while people “(...) need not be ‘political junkies’ (...) they will optimally attempt to stay well-informed and public spirited (Dagger, 2002, p. 150). This resonates with Dahlgren’s parameter of “civic values” (2002), which for instance can include a felt obligation to be informed or to vote. Because I am looking for receptive rhetorical citizenship, not examining people’s voting intention or their level of information, I am here looking for basic orientations. These can include traces of informants’ own efficacy, a feeling that social change is possible and that one can contribute to this change (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954, p. 187), a belief “(...) that a communicative relationship exists between oneself and the people and institutions that govern society” (Coleman, 2011, p. 51). It could mean a sense of connectedness – “an orientation towards a public world where matters of common concern are addressed” (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2010). In Villadsen’s words, experiences of “(...) being part of a civil society and having meaningful roles to play in its day-to-day existence” (Villadsen, 2017, p. 10). It could also include a felt willingness to engage and to ‘do one’s part’, or explicit celebrations of the importance of voting, or the importance of staying informed. The orientation towards connection also carries implication for the reception situation itself. For instance, there is a difference between the hypothetical citizen refusing to engage with a material he disagrees with, and the citizen who takes the time to discuss it.

By literacy, or communicative competence, I refer here to the ability to deconstruct and assess a communicative message. In order to critically assess rhetoric, one needs to be able to pick a message apart and to study its nuts and bolts. This notion is explicitly mentioned as important in the literature on rhetorical citizenship, for instance as “(...) critical observation, description, and evaluation (...)” (Kock & Villadsen, 2012a, p. 5) of rhetoric, or “the practical skills necessary to participate in, and to receive, public discourse (...)” (Kock & Villadsen, 2014b, p. 17). Peter Dahlgren foregrounds precisely “communication skills” as a key ability of civic knowledge in his framework for civic culture (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 21). Citizens do need a certain degree of ‘media literacy’, defined as the ability to decode, evaluate and analyze electronic media (Aufderheide, 1993). Livingstone (2008) has pointed out the

many parallels between the literature on literacy and the tradition of audience research. In the latter, there is a rich conceptual framework for breaking down various levels of “decoding”. Key here are how citizens are able to “commute” (Schröder, 2000) between different “modes of reception” (Michelle, 2007), in particular how they relate to a mediated mode, in which audience members treat the text as text – or in Michelle’s words: as production. As we recall from chapter 2.1, a mediated mode entails attention to the text as construction. It is a mode characterized by distance between text and reader. Viewers direct attention towards aesthetic dimensions, generic form and intentionality, be it textual, generic or based in impressions of what producers are attempting to do or achieve with a particular text, or knowledge of how the media industry works. This type of mediated mode necessitates a certain degree of implicit or explicit knowledge of film form and style (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). Traces of communicative skills, then, are conceptualized as knowledge about and application of film form in their practical judgment of the ads, as well as traces of citizens’ *analytic* and *evaluative* (Livingstone, 2004, pp. 5-6) capabilities. Importantly, a high sophistication in terms of formal aspects does not necessitate a critical position at an ideological level or at a level of substantive issues or positions. A high awareness to form, however, is a trace of communicative competence that is indicative of an interpretive repertoire that could be a necessary precondition for engaging in such critique.

Summing up, we now have a working model for how people can enact a receptive rhetorical citizenship as audiences. I will look for traces of rhetorical citizenship in informants’ everyday political talk generated in the reception situation. I will do so both thematically, asking what kind of norms are articulated and at work in their evaluation of the ads they are exposed to, as well as on a ‘deep’ level of orientations: what traces of receptive rhetorical citizenship can be gleaned from examining how they articulate norms, assess the ads, and relate to the rhetoric they are exposed to? The framework I have sketched out above is applicable along a wide array of genres. I will now concentrate on the genre of political advertising.

2.2.4 Political ads as resource and two basic orientations

In this thesis, I treat political ads as a potential resource for citizenship. This follows a larger movement in media studies, which have conceptualized a whole range of genres as potential resources for citizenship, important facilitators for citizenship, or necessary preconditions for enacting citizenship. Schröder argues that citizenship has been closely tied to (mass) media since the print revolution, a relation that has grown stronger following the general mediatization of society (Hjarvard, 2013; Schröder, 2012). In this view, crucial aspects of citizenship such as the subjective dimension of political and cultural identity, as well as a sense of belonging to a community, are intimately tied to media (Schröder, 2012).

Much of modern experience is lived through, with and by media. This also holds true for our interaction with those in power. Furthermore, media in general and public journalism in particular becomes our main source of information about the people we share a community with. Fiction becomes a source of imagination, and can be a resource for thinking about problems or potentialities in society. Media is a space in which people can gain access to common experiences of what is happening in the world (through news), or what could happen in the world (through fiction). As Kenneth Burke (1974) claimed for literature, various media products can function as equipment for living. To conceptualize media audiences as citizens has been a significant trend in the tradition of reception research. One example is the second stage of reception research, in which researchers were interested in whether news media truly was a resource for citizens to monitor society, and whether it could empower citizens to take political action (Schröder, 2012, p. 188). Another example is the third stage of reception research, in which many scholars were interested in whether audiences could learn citizenship qualities by watching deliberation in studio debate programs on their television screens (Schröder, 2012, p. 189).

Other examples still can be scholarship on “media as public connection” (Couldry & Inés Langer, 2005; Couldry et al., 2010). Public connection refers to a shared orientation towards a public world where matters of common concern are addressed. One key examination is the study of Street, Inthorn and Scott (2015) on how popular culture at times provides points of engagement which can enable citizenship for young people. These ideas resonate with the recent arguments of

rhetorical scholars Hariman and Lucaites (2016), who demonstrate how the institution and practice of professional photojournalism can facilitate a form of “civic spectatorship” – a way of seeing photography as a citizen – enabling and facilitating amongst other things deliberation around the good life.

The way I conceptualize political ads as a potential resource for citizenship in this thesis, is inspired by the perspective of media use. Thus, I am interested in exploring what people use the ads for (or not). I argue that the ads have the potential to function as a resource through providing substance and subject matter for citizens’ practical judgment on issues, candidates and situations, but also spark discussions on more general themes of political matters and democracy. While the reception of the ads and the ensuing discussion may not appear as grand moments of virtue or dramatic examples of enactments of citizenship, such small-scale articulation and negotiation are nonetheless important. As Isin and Turner remind us: “(...) citizenship virtues emerge from the humdrum politics of everyday life in democratic societies” (Isin & Turner, 2007, p. 16). In this thesis, I understand the people’s reception of political ads as a small piece of this humdrum.

Mainly, I aim to examine how this process works through analyzing the political talk that the screening of a range of political ads produce in my groups of informants. I will discuss how my results speak to both the concrete level of evaluations as well as the level of orientations and affinities that constitute my receptive rhetorical virtues.

Turning back to the virtues I discussed above, I would like to introduce two broad orientations that are fitting for the study of political advertising. These are the orientation of the voter-consumer, and the orientation of the voter-citizen. As political advertising exists in the intersection between political *speech* and commercial *message*, the genre can typically speak to people’s citizen and consumer sensibilities, often simultaneously. As Schudson (2006) has argued, there are several prominent examples in academic scholarship on the topic that tends to be highly critical of a perceived conflation of consumer choice and political choice. Typically, there has been a privileging of the citizen role, whereas the consumer role has been disadvantaged. This worry of commercialization has been particularly prominent in

the discussion on modern election campaigns and political ads, in which politics is perceived to be “sold as soap” (Schiller, 1986). Typically, there is a notion that “there is something sacred about civic or political life in a democratic society that should not be sullied by confusion with or treatment as consumerism” (Schudson, 2006, p. 193).

In the present project, I follow the lead of Schudson (2006) and others (Couldry, 2004; Keum, Devanathan, Deshpande, Nelson, & Shah, 2004; Scammell, 2000) arguing against the strict dichotomization and at times moralizing hierarchical division between people’s citizen and consumer roles. I recognize that discerning between people’s citizen and consumer identities is difficult, and at times perhaps even impossible. I do, however, discern between two different orientations. Importantly, I do not propose these as normative or moral categories, but as two different orientations that we can find both in the production and reception of political advertising.

By the *voter-consumer*, I am referring to an orientation in which a person is primarily occupied with voting – finding and choosing the correct political party that will maximize some interests for him or her. The voter-consumer is taking into account herself and a relatively small circle of people around her, mirroring ordinary behavior of consumption (Schudson, 2006, p. 203).

By the *voter-citizen*, I refer to an orientation in which a person is still occupied with voting, but also a whole other range of activities that are part of ‘doing citizenship’. This broader range of activities includes for instance discussion, which entails some sort of openness towards other views, and the testing of one’s own views. The orientation of the voter-citizen is broader – and extends the amount of people one takes into account to a greater community of people than one’s immediate surroundings. Thus, the voter-citizen’s behavior mirrors that of ordinary political behavior, in which one expands the circle of people one takes into account, ideally “to the boundary of whatever polity one is acting in – if not further” (Schudson, 2006, p. 203).

The orientation of the voter-consumer follows the logic of the “normal paradigm” (Henneberg, Scammell, & O’Shaughnessy, 2009, p. 169) of political marketing. This paradigm is the so-called instrumentally oriented version of political

marketing management (PMM) that many political parties in Western democracies follow. Rather than the outright selling of politics as ideologies grounded in basic social cleavages (today mostly known from special interest parties such as green parties), the instrumentally oriented approach seeks to employ a wide range of activities and strategies in order to maximize the total number of votes. Henneberg, Scammell and O'Shaughnessy describe this orientation as follows:

A sophisticated and managerial use of political marketing activities and strategies is employed to convince voters of the value of the political offering, adapt the offering to target segment preferences, and implement political marketing campaigns effectively and efficiently through the co-ordinated use of a multitude of political marketing instruments (Henneberg et al., 2009, p. 169).

While we can note that this orientation indeed is 'listening' in the sense that it is explicitly concerned with what voters want, and attempt to adapt the 'political offering' accordingly, it is fundamentally concerned with maximizing the numbers of votes for a political party through a variety of means. This orientation is at the core of what I call the voter-consumer.

Voting is perhaps the most important act of citizenship. However, there is more to citizenship than voting. Treating citizens as voter-consumers, to which one must cater a particular political brand whilst at the same time monitoring their needs in order to be adapt, presents a limited conception of the range of activities that can fall under the umbrella of citizenship. The orientation of the voter-citizen thus entails a wider repertoire of what it means to be a citizen, parts of which are discursively constructed or enacted. Here, talk among citizens (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 22) about "how we shall act and interact" (Hauser, 2008, p. 241) comes to the foreground.

Facing a political ad, then, the voter-consumer will use the ad for the evaluation of the best choice of political party, whilst the citizen-voter will additionally be interested in talking to other citizens about the ad. They will be in a problem-solving mode of conversation (Schudson, 1997, p. 300), and engaged in testing their own opinions and the opinions of others in ways that might be prefatory to opinion formation, explications of opinions in a more public setting with a more heterogeneous

audience, and so on. I am referring here to a type of civic talk that in itself constitutes civic engagement, or is a prerequisite for further engagement (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 20). In this type of political talk, citizens are in part upholding civic culture by interacting as citizens, and in this context, mainly practicing how to argue and how to articulate their own views on political rhetoric through verbalizing norms and preferences.

These two constructs can be found at both ends of the communicative interaction. Political parties may craft ads and messages that typically hail the voter consumer. Alternately, they may have additional goals that go beyond vote maximization. This could be stimulating discussion about politics, or maintaining some other symbolic relationship that goes beyond vote aggregation. We saw traces of this in the production interviews. At the other end of the interaction, voters may enact the voter-consumer, searching for his or her type of political brand and judging political advertising on the basis of a consumer orientation that foregrounds an inwardly directed self-interest. Alternately, they may enact the voter-citizen. The latter does not exclude using the content of political ads in a consuming mode in order to find the best political party for one's individual desires as a voter. However, it does also contain the possibility of enacting other modalities of citizenship, such as discussion among peers, talk about matters of common concern, discussion on political patterns, the negotiation of norms and doxa in society, or a friendly exploration of the views of oneself and others.

As such, the voter-citizen is economically interested (Downs, 1957) and interested in finding a voting choice that maximizes the interests of oneself and the circle of people in their immediacy. The voter-citizen is interested in voting *and* a wider repertoire of activities, such as discussion with peers or thinking around political issues, as well as taking a wider circle of people into account in doing so.

I will refer to this broad orientation throughout this thesis, including my examination of producer intentions. My proposed virtues for the receptive rhetorical citizen will also be discussed throughout, at the end of each empirical part of reception analysis. Before describing these empirical contributions, however, I will describe and discuss my method and methodology.

3.0 Method and methodology

In this chapter, I will present my method and methodological approach. I will start the chapter with some general methodological statements and dimensions that are relevant to the qualitative interviews and the thematic analysis of interview data that I employ in this study.

I will also detail and discuss the choices I have made with regard to research design and execution, as well as concrete choices of method. I then describe my procedure of analysis. I end the chapter by problematizing and discussing two key aspects of method and methodology that are relevant for the present thesis, namely the question of the external validity of my focus groups, and the question of *s-bias*, or the possibility of my informants self-presenting as good citizens in order to appease the researcher.

I have opted for a purely qualitative research design in the present project. This is a pragmatic choice, not a principled one. As a researcher, I find that quantitative and qualitative methods are both equally valid and productive, depending on research interest and state of the art in the field. Two main reasons directed my qualitative approach. First, because political advertising as a genre is relatively new in Norway, the amount of available ads at the time did not warrant a quantitative analysis, such as a content analysis. Because of the genre's relative novelty, quantitative examinations of the audience would also be problematic, because there was no "media use" of political ads at a substantial level at the time of the study. As such, I opted for an explorative approach that would investigate the workings of a relatively new genre.

Second, and most importantly, the qualitative approach followed naturally from my research interest and main research question. Investigating how political ads, through people's media use, can be a resource for citizenship involves a thorough look at how people actually make sense of the ads. As I am interested in how people think about, experience and make sense of a particular media product, a qualitative approach is most fitting. Following this logic, I see the choice of qualitative methods not as a choice between world-views, but as "choosing to emphasize particular aspects of a

complex phenomenon” (Ytre-Arne, 2012, p. 57). That said, I hope the present project contributes with categories and findings that spark the interest of future quantitative studies.

In the following, I detail my method and methodology for the research design contributing with the empirical foundation of the present thesis. By ‘method’ I mean the research techniques employed, the nuts and bolt of my strategy in executing the research design and answering my research questions. By ‘methodology’, I refer to the fundamental assumptions and epistemology underpinning the project.

I will start with a brief account of my epistemological position, because it carries consequences throughout a research project. In this thesis, I lean heavily on interview data gathered through single interviews and focus groups, as well as drawing in part on textual analysis. In the analysis of the data, I make use of thematic analysis. Because qualitative interviews and thematic analysis are flexible methods that can be used across several different paradigms of scholarly interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85), making these fundamental positions explicit will aid in the transparency of the overall research project. It is also considered good practice in terms of qualitative research in general, regardless of paradigm or interest (Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014), and thematic analysis specifically (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). An additional reason to explicate these positions is that they carry consequences both for the explanatory power of analytical findings, as well as consequences for how one thinks about and treats questions of validity. I will address these questions below.

In the following, I outline some of my basic methodological assumptions and reflections. Then I present and discuss my choices surrounding the producer (expert) interviews, the supplementary textual analysis and the focus group interviews. I then describe how I proceeded to analyze the focus group interviews employing thematic analysis. I end the chapter with a discussion on two perceived problematic sides connected to my choice of methods.

3.1 Methodology and fundamental assumptions

In this project, I take a position that acknowledges that scientific paradigms are not fixed, and that the boundaries between the different perspectives are fluid. As pointed out by Guba, Lynn and Lincoln (2011, p. 197), Clifford Geertz' prophecy of a blurring of the genres is taking place, leaving room for middle-ground stances, such as the type of *discursive realism* (Drotner et al., 2003) that I adopt in the following.

This project is at its core a study of how language is used and interpreted: a study of how political advertising is 'encoded' with cultural meaning and arguments, and how these codes are in turn 'decoded', perceived and evaluated by audiences. My meta-theoretical stance reflects this, as it is guided by a view that considers language as key when it comes to gathering knowledge – in saying and stating something about the social world. This type of 'discursive realism' is inspired by the tradition of critical realism, stating that "(...) we can have no direct knowledge of the objects of our accounts, and thus no independent entity to which to compare these accounts" (Maxwell, 1992, p. 42), as well as by parallel developments from humanistic and psychological disciplines, emphasizing a constructivist and discursive view (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 44). Discursive realism states a belief in the existence of a social 'reality' outside of language, but that the only route to examine said reality is through "(...) language and other sign systems" (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 45). Following Spencer et al.'s (2014) suggestion to treat the boundaries between paradigms less categorically, discursive realism can be considered a middle ground position in a continuum placing positivism at one polarity and constructivism in the opposite. The view of 'discursive realism' posits that research will be versions and interpretations of reality, but that some accounts are indeed better or more truthful than others (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 45).

A central implication of this stance is the notion that validity, "refers primarily to accounts, not to data or methods" (Maxwell, 1992, p. 42). Consequently, the validity of my project leans on my ability to draw high quality inferences and conclusions from my data. In order for others to be able to critically assess the validity of my claims, transparency is essential. Therefore, a guiding principle for my research will be to make explicit all choices, reasons for conducting the research in a particular

way, the process of analysis and all other relevant information to ensure a high degree of process transparency. This ‘rigorous reasoning’ resonates with a constructivist paradigm (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 197). At the same time, I emphasize rigor in the application of method, and the belief that such application may actually enable researchers to tap into stable attitudes that exist outside of the situations constructed and co-constructed between researchers and informants. While the latter inclination could give connotations to positivist strands of research (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 205), I do not mean to state that people’s opinions exist in the world as tangible as rocks to be counted. Rather, I intend this twin consideration to be a rejection of what has been called ‘the radical critique of interviews’ (See Hammersley & Gomm, 2008). Following Hammersley and Gomm (2008), I posit that people can give accounts of their relatively stable, commonly held beliefs and experiences. Furthermore, I assume that a researcher can get at these dimensions through for instance interviews (See also Krueger & Casey, 2014).

When treating the relatively large data sample produced by the focus group interviews (totaling 132,121 words across 463 pages of transcripts), I have opted for coding and quantification of the material. There were two reasons for this. The first was the need for an overview. The other reason was a conscious validity strategy in order to keep a tight record of my own reasoning, thinking and analytical decisions when processing and engaging with the material.

Through coding, I am able to produce tables that efficiently show the various themes’ and sub-themes’ proportional relation to each other. The tables resulting from the coding and quantification of qualitative observations give both the researcher and the reader a sense of how salient and present the various themes were in the data. It is to be considered a supplement to the verbal description of themes’ prominence – and a useful way to gain overview. I have also used the tables and the quantifications actively in my process of analysis – a form of ‘checks and balances’ – in an attempt to give the correct amount of attention to the most prominent of themes, rather than to proceed with a deep analysis of marginal voices in my material, and to avoid losing a sense of proportion as to what is salient and present in my informant’s accounts. This

is done in order to counter the perils of anecdotalism, in which marginal observations get to speak for a larger data set, that might be much more contradictory or rich than marginal bits of conversation and select quotes may imply (Bryman, 2003; Silverman, 2006, p. 47). This entails that the study should be convincingly conducted so that it reports on actual informants' media experiences, not a researcher's preconceptions (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 147). This demands transparency, which is something I have attempted to stress in this project. The goal is not replicability – but rather providing the reader with insight into how I came to the conclusions I did. As such, the code frequencies provide an analytic overview. While not at all meant to hold statistical power, or to be representative of the entire data set, the tables presented are meant to give a sense of the proportion of the themes I found.

Finally, a word on interviews. In the present project, I conceptualize interviews as a “discursive generator” (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 143) in order to get insights into the cultural and interpretative repertoires at work among informants when they produce or receive political ads. The interviews generate discourse, which I record, transcribe and analyze. The interview thus becomes a way of producing the “(...) media induced meanings of the informants' lifeworld (...)” (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 143), aiming to get people to articulate their experiences in the interview situation. Considering the highly constructed nature of the situation, as well as following from dimensions of power dynamics and social interaction, I view the interview data produced as jointly produced by informants and researcher (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 147).

3.2 Methods

In the following, I give more concrete detail on how I went about answering my research questions. As we recall, the research design revolves around eight films, produced for two different elections. While this project is first and foremost a study of audience reception, I have followed the holistic impetus I have located in reception research (and elsewhere) and conducted supplementary production interviews and textual analysis in order to be able to better understand the communicative phenomena

at play among informants. I will now go into detail about how I went about interviewing producers and examining the ads themselves, as well as how I proceeded to collect and analyze data from the focus group interviews.

3.2.1 Selection of ads

Table 1 shows the examined sample of films. From the 2013 national election¹¹, four films from four different political parties were chosen. The selection was based on availability, but it is also meant to be representative of factors such as party size, budget and film genre. The advertisements from the Labour Party and the Conservative party represent big budget commercials produced by political parties of a certain size, since these were the two largest political parties at the time of the study in Norway. They also represent the left/right divide in Norwegian politics.

Table 1: Selection of films.

| Ad | Title | Genre | Type |
|---------|--|--|----------------------|
| 2013 L | Taxi Stoltenberg | Non-fiction, candid camera | Advocacy |
| 2013 C | Pilots* | Fiction, satire | Attack (Soft-attack) |
| 2013 CD | Hareide Explains* | Non-fiction, talking head | Advocacy |
| 2013 CP | #Lifeforce and #Elderlyresource ¹² | Fiction, visualization | Advocacy |
| 2015 L | Our Norway: an exhibition in 92 seconds | Non-fiction, talking head | Contrast |
| 2015 C | Somewhere in Norway | Fiction, satire / non-fiction, talking head | Advocacy |
| 2015 CD | Sunday open* | Fiction, satire | Advocacy |
| 2015 RP | Vote for a challenger | Non-fiction, talking head | Contrast |

¹¹ Please note that genre, salience and type were established in the supplementary textual analysis, and is presented here to help the reader get acquainted with the films. Notably, producer interviews, textual analysis and reception turned out to foreground at times different aspects. For details, please see appendix D, or consult the summary chapter 7.1.1.

¹² These are actually two separate films, which I screened consecutively. I chose to do this because of their very short duration and similar aesthetic.

Fiction/Non-fiction refers to Michelle's (2007) distinction for reading modes. The distinction between types of ads in terms of valence is drawn from Jamieson (2000). * = title is author's own. L=Labour, C=Conservative, CD = Christian Democrat, CP=Centre Party, RP=Red Party.

The ads from the Centre Party and the Christian Democratic Party are representative of low-budget ads produced by a small party. They also represent the centre of Norwegian politics. The Conservative Party ad is a soft-attack narrative dramatization, the Centre Party ads are advocacy-narrative-dramatizations, and the Christian Democratic ad is representative of a lengthy, extended talking head type ad. *Taxi Stoltenberg* is a bit more difficult to place within the international literature on ad genre, but is a stunt borrowing heavily from the genres of documentary, candid camera and reality TV.

For the 2015 local election, I selected a sample of four films from four different political parties. The advertisements from the two major political parties, representing the right wing and left wing in politics, represented different poles on an axis of possible political information presented to the audience. The Conservative party ad contains no significant information, issue-content or political argumentation. Conversely, the Labor Party ad contains almost conspicuously high amounts of political argumentation.

The ad from the Christian Democrats employs parody and humor, and is based in a single issue that became a major topic in the election. The Red Party is situated on the far left in Norwegian politics. Their advertisement was produced as a reaction to the public service broadcaster not allowing them participation in the debates this year, based on the party's size. The ad is an outsider-appeal, claiming that all the other politicians and political parties are ineffective at solving the challenges of our time. As such, the four films represent both big and very small parties, cover the right/left/centrist axis of politics, and have a mix of issue-oriented, argumentative ads and ads more geared towards entertainment.

3.2.2. Producer interviews

In order to answer my first research question, “*How do political parties and advertising agencies intend for their ads to work, and what kind of rhetoric do they attempt to structure into the ads?*”, I opted to interview the key informants that had been directly involved in, or responsible for the production of the ads.

3.2.2.1 Informants and recruitment

In total, I was in contact with 23 key informants for the duration of the project, resulting in a total data material of 238 transcribed pages. I also conducted three interviews with journalists covering the *Taxi Stoltenberg* ad for VG. However, as the project evolved I deemed that these interviews did not speak to my research questions, and they were therefore left out of the data material. This was mainly because the interviews visited themes of journalistic work method, editorial decisions when faced with strategic messages from political parties and the journalists’ own thoughts on why the press coverage turned from positive to negative.

All key informant interviews were done on the record, and all key informants were thoroughly briefed and asked about this beforehand. Informants also signed an agreement of consent stating that I would cite their name on the record, as well as informing them about their rights to obtain a transcript of the material in lieu of any objections. The reason I opted for on-the-record-interviews was that I judged the landscape of Norwegian political operatives and advertisers to be so small that it would be near impossible to maintain a balance between confidentiality and interesting research insights.

Table 2 shows the informants of the 2013 production study. In total, 25 informants were interviewed in connection with the five films. In some cases, such as *Taxi Stoltenberg*, a high number of informants were interviewed, because a high number of people were involved in the planning and production of the ad. In other

cases, such as for instance the Christian Democratic ad, a low number of informants were interviewed, simply because it was a smaller production that involved fewer people. As a general rule, the number of informants reflects the size of the production. However, I have strived to interview as many key actors as possible for each case. I recruited the informants through reaching out to the political party and asking for the relevant person in charge of the ad in question. Following the initial contact with the informant, I asked them whether they could recommend other people in their organisation or partner organisations that I should talk to in order to get a fuller picture. Informants were also identified during interviews, when informants would suggest that “you should also talk to...”, or signal that someone else handled a particular part of a production. Additionally, at the end of each interview, I asked each informant if they thought there was someone else I should talk to next.

Table 2: Interview subjects, 2013 sample

| Name | Title | Employer and campaign | Interview Date |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|----------------|
| Marte Scharming Lund | Campaign manager | The Labour Party 2013 | 26/02-2014 |
| Pia Guldbrandsen | Head of communication | The Labour Party 2013 | 26/02-2014 |
| Morten Polmar | Creative | TRY for Labour Party 2013 | 27/02-2014 |
| Lars Joachim Grimstad | Creative | TRY for Labour Party 2013 | 25/03-2014 |
| Erik Schøien | Producer | Pravda for Labour Party 2013 | 26/02-2014 |
| Hildegunn Bernsen | Information advisor | The Christian Democratic Party 2013 | 03/11-2014 |
| Gunnhild Sørås | Information advisor | The Christian Democratic Party 2013 | 03/11-2014 |
| Jon Ingar Kjøenes | Creative/Producer | Buss&Media for Christian Democrats 2013 | 11/02-2015 |

| | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|--|------------|
| Christer Steffensen | Creative/Producer | Buss&Media for Christian Democrats 2013 | 11/02-2015 |
| Ingjerd Schou | Politician | The Conservative Party, 2013 | 20/02-2015 |
| Erik Milde | Politician | The Conservative Party, 2013 | 20/02-2015 |
| Gjermund Krogstad | County secretary | The Conservative Party. 2013 | 20/02-2015 |
| Pål Sparre-Enger | Director | Independently for The Conservative Party, 2013 | 23/02-2015 |
| Knut Olsen | Party secretary | The Centre Party, 2013 | 31/03/2016 |

The persons interviewed from the Labour party, were Marthe Scharning Lund (campaign manager for the 2013 campaign) and Pia Gulbrandsen (Head of Communications). Both were involved in the pre-planning of the election campaign in general and the Taxi stunt in particular, but Scharning Lund had a more hands-on role during the production, whilst Gulbrandsen's active role started at and continued to shortly after the launch of the film – particularly when the press coverage turned negative. From the advertising agency, the persons interviewed were advisor and project manager Morten Polmar, and creative writer/copywriter Lars Joachim Grimstad. In addition to these, I also interviewed the head of production, and the person in charge of the actual logistics of filming and organizing, Erik Schøien from the film production company PRAVDA. All these informants, with the exception of Grimstad, were contacted after first communicating with Gulbrandsen, who recommended the other informants. Grimstad was recommended during the interview with Polmar.

The informants interviewed from the Conservative party were party secretary Gjermund Krogstad, member of parliament Eirik Milde, as well as Member of Parliament and fourth vice president to the *Storting*, Ingjerd Schou. All three represent the Conservative party in the county of Østfold. From the production side of the

process, script writer Paal Sparre Enger as well as director Harald Zwart were interviewed via e-mail. A face to face meeting with the two was not an option, as Zwart normally resides in Hollywood, and because both Zwart and Enger were working with film production in Milan at the time of the interview. However, the fact that the two people principally in charge of production were actually engaged in work together at the time, enabled them to engage in direct conversation about the production of the advertisement before the interviews took place. This aided them in recalling the whole process.

The informants representing the Christian Democratic Party were communications advisors Hildegunn Berntsen and Gunhild Sørås. From the production agency, Buss & Media, Jon Ingar Kjenes and Christer Steffensen were interviewed. Buss & Media is primarily a film production agency, and in the making of the 2013 films for the Christian Democratic Party, Berntsen and Sørås handled the main creative part of the process, including script writing and ideas. This was a two-part collaboration between the political party and the film production crew, a result of both budget constraints and preference: The informants from the party stressed that they preferred using in-house resources for creative projects such as this. Placing the creative workload on party internal resources saves money otherwise spent on hiring a potentially expensive creative advertising agency to write ideas and scripts for the film. Furthermore, the party appears to have had some negative experiences with ad agencies.

The informant interviewed in connection with the 2013 Centre Party ad, was party secretary Knut M. Olsen. Gaining access proved rather difficult. After a long period of consideration, the party's head of communications, Christina Søgård, declined to participate in the project on behalf of the entire organization, citing "lack of time" as the reason. I then assured Søgård that I had plenty of time to wait until the situation was less hectic. After some back and forth, Søgård eventually quit her job at the Centre Party altogether. After this, the central organization pointed to Søgård, who was reluctant to talk – pointing back to the organization. Eventually, the party's general secretary agreed to an interview.

Table 3 shows the informants from the 2015 production interview. There were 9 informants in total. This is a somewhat lower number than the 2013 examination, which is partly due to the relatively lower scale and budget of the productions in a local election, and partly due to the fact that the need to uncover workflow and production processes was lesser in 2015, because they in some cases did not differ from the 2013 sample.

Table 3: Interview subjects, 2015 sample

| Name | Title | Employer and campaign | Interview Date |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---|----------------|
| Marte Scharning Lund | Campaign manager | The Labour Party, 2015 | 26/11-2015 |
| Bjørn Tore Hansen | Acting communication director | The Labour Party, 2015 | 27/11-2015 |
| Sindre Fossum Beyer | Creative | TRY for the Labour Party, 2015 | 27/11-2015 |
| Dag Terje Solvang | Head of marketing | The Conservative Party, 2015 | 26/11-2015 |
| Kristoffer Vincent Hansen | Producer/director | Hansen for the Conservative Party, 2015 | 01/03-2016 |
| Anders Linding | Producer/Director | Peiling for The Christian Democrats, 2015 | 25/11-2015 |
| Dag Fedøy | Communications advisor | The Christian Democrats, 2015 | 26/11-2015 |
| Iver Aastebøl | Party secretary / head of campaign | The Red Party, 2015 | 27/11-2015 |
| André Løyning | Producer/Director | Løyning for The Red Party, 2015 | 27/11-2015 |

The interviewed actors from the Labor Party were Bjørn Tore Hansen (functioning Head of communications) and Marthe Scharning Lund (Campaign manager). From the TRY advertising agency, I interviewed project manager Sindre Fossum Beyer. Beyer has previously worked for the Labor Party, and was a central advisor to Jens Stoltenberg during his time as Prime Minister of Norway. As such, he could speak to the processes of production from the point of view of both political operative within a party as well as an employee of the advertising agency. The process mirrored that of the 2013 cooperation between the two instances.

The interviewed actors from the Conservative party were the leader of the campaign division of the central organization, Dag Terje Solvang, and freelance filmmaker Kristoffer Vincent Hansen. Solvang has worked extensively with commercial advertising before working for the Conservative Party. Solvang headed a select crew of in-house resources, led the creative effort and came up with the idea. This was a point of pride for Hansen, who stated that he was happy that the Conservative Party did not have to consult a professional ad agency. Hansen was hired to execute the idea, and was thus only involved on the side of production. Hansen identified as politically independent, but had done a lot of work for a local branch of the Conservative Party in the past, and was at the time of the interview involved in producing the Conservative Party podcast.

The interviewed actors from the production of the ad “Sunday open” were communications advisor Dag Fedøy, working for the Christian Democratic Party, and producer and director Anders Linding, of the production agency Peiling. Fedøy and Linding knew each other from the university days, so it was natural for Fedøy to contact Linding when pressed for time and in need of creative competence. The ad was thus a joint effort of creative ideas, with Peiling taking care of the production of the ad itself.

The interviewed actors from The Red Party were press and party secretary Iver Åstebøl, and freelance film maker André Løyning. Løyning, having never made

political ads in the past contacted the Red Party after hearing about how the party was not invited to participate at the election debates at the public service broadcaster, NRK. Sympathetic to the Red Party cause, he wanted to help for a fee much lower than his normal rates. Iver Åstebøl, on the other hand, was able to raise money for the ad through crowdfunding on the Internet, thus enabling them to afford using Løyning's services at all. According to Åstebøl, the Red Party usually rely on people skilled in filmmaking and willing to volunteer or work for symbolic fees when making films, due to their very limited budgets.

3.2.2.2 Interview guide and procedure

The interview guides, which can be viewed in full in appendix A, were semi-structured in nature, and were originally constructed to touch upon two crucial themes: Process (how the films were made, cooperation, perception, inspirations and influence) and Rhetoric (Intention, devices, audience).

Importantly, I wanted to ask producers about their intentions behind the ads. An important caveat in this regard is that I do not take their explanations at complete face value, in a naïve spirit of romanticism towards interviewing as a method (Silverman, 2006, pp. 144, 381). Indeed, one could question whether people are able to give a valid account of their intentions at all. However, this was not the point. Rather, I was interested in “intention”, understood here as “producers’ own articulated intentions in a concrete rhetorical situation”, at two levels. First, I was interested in producers’ intentions as they articulated it, because I believed it could say something about how they perceived their own communicative actions. Secondly, producers’ formulated intentions provide a yardstick to which elements of reception can be contrasted and discussed.

I operationalized the guide as a set of open questions, moving from the theme of process, workflow and inspiration, towards the message itself and the preferred reading. Lastly, I touched upon evaluative aspects. Informants were first asked to “tell

a little about the production of this film, and your own role in the production”, with probing questions such as “Who did what?”, “Who decided what?”, “Did the film answer to a particular strategy”, and so on. I did this both to be able to get a better picture of the conditions of production in the various political parties and production agencies, and in order to put the informants in a retrospective mood, considering that the interviews were all conducted post-process and post-election. The second part of the interview guide concerned the preferred reading of producers. Here, informants were initially asked “What do you wish to say with this film”, followed up by questions such as “What did you wish to achieve with this film”. The interview guide then followed a funnel approach, landing in more concrete questions such as “What thoughts about [the political party] and/or [politician] did you want the audience to be left with?” and “What measures did you take in order to ensure the reactions you just described?”. I then asked more specific questions about audiences, such as whom the producers wanted to reach, and whether there were any special groups envisioned. What followed was that I asked informants what they thought about the movie now and whether something was problematic. Finally, I asked the question “why should a political party make moving image ads?”.

As it turned out, the interviews were able to give strategic information that I had deemed important beforehand, such as producers’ own articulation of intentions and their own identification of salient rhetorical devices in the films. However, the material also proved to yield interesting insights into emergent themes, such as “thoughts on role of film medium in political rhetoric” – a category that emerged and that I later went back to the interview transcripts in order to analyze and elucidate.

As the production interviews were done in a more closed format in order to discover factors identified beforehand, I did not extensively code this material, but found it of such a size that it was manageable to extract the findings without thematic analysis. However, as I coded the reception data thematically and revisited the production interviews, I found some themes to be recurring and judged them to be relevant. These themes are not coded, but I will describe them in detail in the chapters on production because they can speak to the findings in reception.

3.2.3. Analysis of ads

In order to supplement the production interviews, and the material for reception, I opted for a type of textual analysis¹³. This choice of method was set to fill in the gaps left by the interviews, in relation to research question 1B: *What salient aspects of argumentation and film style are present in the films?*

Because I am not solely doing a textual analysis in this project, a note on workload is needed. In this project, the point of my textual analysis was to supplement. As we need not necessarily speculate in producer intention or audience reception of salient aspects, the purpose has been to articulate elements of film style and form that are often left non-explicated in both production and reception interviews. Thus, I draw upon description for all ads, as well as the identification or elaboration of select salient aspects for other ads. In some cases, salient aspects are identified through reception or production. In other cases they remain unarticulated here, and are thus gathered from the textual analysis.

The reasons to pursue a form of textual analysis are based on the argument that merely examining producers own intention would be insufficient. As Villadsen (2009, p. 38) states, interpretation is relevant and necessary for all types of rhetorical texts, regardless of genre or explicit persuasive intention. Villadsen stresses that a type of preferred reading only highlights one possible reading, whilst others are always possible to some degree. Furthermore, a rhetor may have ambiguous intentions, which for Villadsen states a need to “decide what is meant” – but which for this project also could lead to unintended or unforeseen results in reception. Lastly, Villadsen states that a producers’ intention could be underdetermined in regards to meaning (Villadsen, 2009, pp. 38-39). I would like to add a fourth reason, which is that there can be a discrepancy between a rhetor’s intention and a rhetorical utterance that is caused by

¹³ Parts of 3.2.3 build on an argument and a method originally presented in Iversen (2017).

constraints, such as lack of communicative or creative competence, or lack of resources in terms of time or money, or any other constraint that exists in terms of production, that may shape or limit the rhetorical end-product. In order to supplement the production interviews, I therefore performed a textual analysis in which I wanted to establish genre as well as salient aspects of film style. In chapter 5, I have included portions of the analysis that supplement, contradict or contrast what the producers verbalize, in order to provide a richer understanding of the films as rhetorical utterances. The descriptions vary in complexity and length – often depending on the complexity and length of the film itself.

The reasoning for the focus on ad genre and salient aspects of film form is based on the results from the focus groups as well as on the field of reception research (Michelle, 2007; Ross, 2011; Schröder, 2000), which both suggest a close link between aspects of production, such as film form, and how people perceive a media message as truthful or authentic, or view the message in a mode of non-problematization or a more oppositional/skeptic manner. In terms of genre, I follow the findings of Richardson Jr (2008), who has shown how political advertising often borrows heavily from genres of popular culture. I posit that the use of various genres will affect viewers' expectations and consequent reactions in the reception interviews – and thus establishing genre for each ad will aid in the explanation and discussion of the citizen reception of the ads.

3.2.3.1 Procedure

When analyzing the ads as texts, I followed a three-step approach in order to gain immersion in the material. First, I watched the individual ads numerous times. Then I proceeded to transcribe the verbal components of the ads, as well as segmenting the visual and aural components, making note of where and when elements of music, sounds, verbal speech, special effects and editing occurred. I also determined the type and genre of the ads as understood from the literature on political advertising, for instance whether the ad was a pure advocacy ad, a pure attack ad, or an ad containing

elements from both of these, known as a contrasting ad. These observations are found throughout this thesis in various tables. See appendix D for an overview.

Importantly, because of the textual analysis' status as supplementary, I do not present my material in full, as it consists of many pages of transcriptions, segmentations, argumentation diagrams and notes comparing the ads to known genres and types of ads previously established in the literature. Instead, I opt to draw upon this larger material when relevant. The main bulk of material presented in chapter 5 is thus my descriptions of the ads, as well as my identification of salient aspects of film form and style.

The guiding principles behind my textual analysis are inspired by film studies. Following Blakesley's (2009) suggestion, I aimed to break down the totality of a film into parts by systemic segmentation and description, followed by descriptions of how the various parts relate to each other, and the whole of the film's form (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004; Larsen, 2005). This approach is a type of interpretation as explanation: "interpreting a feature of a film is to offer an account of why that feature is present in the film. To interpret a film is a matter of explaining the presence of its features and the interrelationships thereof (...)" (Carroll, 1998, p. 6).

In such a view, the goal for the analyst is to select the most salient aspects and features of a film, and attempt to explain why said features are present. The aim is to speculate on how some appeals and devices attempt to move viewers and lead their interpretations. Bordwell & Thompson provide five topoi that the analyst looking for salient aspects can visit (2004). Following their thinking, an analyst searching for salient aspects of film form and style should visit the dimension of formal system, mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing and sound. I will briefly elaborate on the concepts below, since I draw upon them in my description of salient aspects of ads. I also supplement Bordwell and Thompson's suggestions with Kaid and Johnson's aspects of *videostyle* in political advertising (Kaid & Johnston, 2001).

The first concerns the central organizing principle of the film, or the film's formal system. When breaking the totality of an ad into parts, it is useful to discern between

film formal systems and the film's stylistic system. Bordwell and Thompson (2004, p. 49) argue that films are organized in systems of cues that prompt the viewer to imagine, to experience, to notice or to think about certain aspects. In this view, film has a form, an umbrella term including both a formal system and a stylistic system. The formal system is a central organizing principle for the cues in the film. The stylistic system is the "patterned and significant use of technique", such as elements of mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing and sound (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 389). Relevant systems to mention in this context are the narrative system, in its broadest sense a "chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 69). Film spectators are constantly looking for causal motivation: "the spectator actively seeks to connect events by means of cause and effect. Given an incident, one tends to hypothesize what might have caused it or what it might in turn cause" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 72). The narrative formal organizing system is relevant to political advertising because many ads employ dramatizations and narratives to prove a point, or to visualize thoughts or ideas. The narrative structure can also create conflict or drama, prompting the spectator to take a stand towards something.

In the documentary system, the viewer is presented with a persuasive argument. The film attempts to move the spectator to a new position or conviction, to a different emotional state or to some form of action. This type of formal system is closer to the genre of television news or documentary (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 140). As Bordwell and Thompson explain, "The subject of the film will usually not be an issue of scientific truth but a matter of opinion, toward which a person may take a number of equally plausible attitudes" (2004, p. 140). A key point here is that an argumentative position is more explicit, and presented in the audio-visual grammar known from journalistic genres or factual programming such as documentaries.

Key here is the distinction between formats connoting fiction, and formats connoting facts – two key directions that undoubtedly shape expectation and reception (Michelle, 2007).

The second topic the analyst should visit concerns how the filmmaker has staged some event for filming, or the film's mise-en-scene. This concept refers to all elements of lighting, setting, costume and make-up as well as other elements of staging, in other words, what is actually filmed.

The third concerns how the event is filmed, or cinematography. This includes photographic qualities of the film shot, the framing and the duration of the shot. For instance, a wide-angle (short focal-length) lens will make distances appear to be greater – making characters moving towards or from the camera appear to move faster (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 237). Because of this exaggeration of depth, this technique can make parts of a scene appear more grand and powerful (Kaid & Johnston, 2001, p. 31). The framing of a shot is important because it “actively defines the image for us” by providing the spectator a certain perspective (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 252). Relevant dimensions to note besides lens are camera angle, camera height, tilt, framing distance, panning, zooming and use of a mobile frame such as a handheld camera. Particularly relevant to political advertising is the *cinéma vérité* style. This style employs the use of handheld camera, with effects such as unstable movement, and images that are more granular and less sharp than in conventional film. This contributes to the sensation of watching an authentic ‘piece of the real world’, which is associated with reality programs or news (Kaid & Johnston, 2001, p. 32).

The fourth aspect concerns editing, which is central to our understanding of moving images as a medium, because spectators make connections between different images put together in a sequence. Here, one should be mindful of interplay of graphic relations, highlighting differences or similarities between shots (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, pp. 287-300), and rhythmic relations between images – contributing to a hectic or slow impression. This impression of tempo can be relevant to the argument presented, for instance by creating a sense of hurry – that there is a need for immediate action. When analyzing editing, one should note how shots are graphically similar or dissimilar, and if there are any rhythmic, spatial or temporal relations that are salient and work towards supporting a larger whole.

The fifth aspect concerns sound, or how sound effects and music are used for narrative structure, narrative support or for cueing emotions or moods. Relevant dimensions of sound are loudness, pitch and timbre. Loudness has to do with the volume, pitch relates to high sounds or low sounds, and timbre has to do with the tonal quality, or harmonic components of a sound (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, pp. 347-348, 350-351). A useful distinction is between diegetic (originating from within the story world) sounds, such as a radio playing in the background, and non-diegetic (originating externally) sounds, such as an added musical score or the voice of a narrator (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, pp. 366-368)). Larsen (2005) describes three main functions of film music: to structure the narrative, to support the narrative, and to shape emotions and moods. The most important emotional function of music in films is to enhance or articulate moods that are already conveyed through other modalities – pictures, dialogue, angle of camera (Larsen, 2005, pp. 213-214). Music is for the most part given the role of supporting and structuring a narrative by employing known formulas and musical stereotypes (Larsen, 2005, p. 207). Music can establish time and space – defining the context of the narrative. Music can also be used to intensify events and create arcs of excitement that support the tensions in the narrative (Larsen, 2005, pp. 211-212).

The main point of visiting these five topics is not to find something to write about in each instance, but to draw upon aspects of film form and style when individual aspects are salient and relevant.

3.2.4. Reception and focus group interviews

My third and most central sub-research question concerned the reception of the ads, formulated as “*How do citizens make meaning of and use the ads in their own arguing about politics?*”. As mentioned, I chose the method of focus group interviews in order to answer this research question.

3.2.4.1 On focus groups

The benefits of focus groups for reception oriented rhetorical research are many (see Vatnøy, 2018 for an overview). However, there are three main reasons that I chose to conduct focus groups rather than single interviews, and these are connected to the distinct characteristics of the focus group as method. First, that they are truly *group* interviews, taking into account that individuals rarely form opinions in isolation (Jarvis, 2011, p. 284). This means that focus groups are good for investigating group norms (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 17). A focus group is as much of a constructed situation as any research interview, but still allows for witnessing of how people negotiate meaning collectively, a form of simulation of how the social production of meaning normally occurs (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 152). A second reason for choosing focus groups are that they are relational, as research participants create an audience for one another as they ask questions, exchange anecdotes and comment on each other's experiences and points of views (Jarvis, 2011, p. 284). This could facilitate a cooperative atmosphere in which informants supplement each other's answers. This is beneficial because political ads often argue in emotions and imagery – inviting to experiences that can be hard to put into words (Gentikow, 2005, p. 86). Third, because focus groups are tied to meaning, they are especially suited for answering research questions of *how* and *why* (Jarvis, 2011, p. 284).

The limitations of both interviewing and focus groups are also many (See Bloor et al., 2001; Morgan, 1997 for good overviews). I will discuss two limitations of particular relevance to my project at the end of this chapter.

3.2.4.2 Informants and recruitment

In total, 16 groups of informants were interviewed in two distinct phases. A popular rule of thumb for qualitative interviews is to continue conducting interviews until little new information or new ideas are provided (Jarvis, 2011, p. 286) – often described as *saturation* (See Fern, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Morgan, 1997). While I planned my number of focus groups beforehand, I did experience a rising sense of saturation

for both the 2013 and the 2015 phases of data collection. This was a notion I experienced after the sixth focus group interview of eight.

I recruited informants from existing social networks or groups. On the positive side, this means less time was spent on formalities, warming up and getting to know the other participants. On the negative side, such a selection could suffer from certain aspects of natural group dynamics. There is the question of having everyone contributing equally, which is rarely the case in a natural group, as any natural group will typically include both outspoken and introverted people. As such, this imbalance is practically unavoidable when working with natural groups. Paraphrasing Liebes and Katz (1990, p. 29), real life is like that. At any case, I attempted to honor the researcher's responsibility towards ensuring all informants get to have their say and have equal amount of time to do so (Gentikow, 2005, p. 87).

The groups were mostly gathered through a snowball technique. I first reached out to people in my existing social networks, who could then point to people I could use as gatekeepers in order to gain access to particular groups. I then reached out to this key contact person that I spent time on informing and briefing, who then assembled the group, organized the meeting and kept in contact with the informants. This was done to minimize the workload and time spent on contacting individuals, and was done on the assumption that people would be more prone to show up at an event part organized and endorsed by someone they personally know and trust, rather than an arbitrary person from a university. Thus, I hoped to address some of the issues concerning low turnout frequently connected to focus groups (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 33). Not all groups were recruited in this manner. In some cases I did not have anyone in my social network to guide me to the groups. In such instances, I reached out to various groups and organizations myself, but followed the same method of attempting to brief one key contact who would then assemble the group.

The focus groups were selected to be externally heterogeneous and internally homogenous. Having people with very opposing views debate issues relating to politics can be counterproductive, as this can lead to "(...) high levels of conflict which will crush discussion and inhibit debate (...)" (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 20). The

groups were not meant to be representative for an electorate or a population, but nonetheless aimed to present some diversity along set lines of demographic factors such as age, political interest, education and work type. The phase 2 groups were a pure student sample, but aimed for diversity in terms of line of study, interest, political leaning and interest in politics. In other words, the sampling and recruitment was done purposively, as informants were selected because I believed them to possess certain characteristics (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 159). Although I aimed for diversity, it should be mentioned that the groups are not very dissimilar. For instance, there are a lot of young people, and all informants live in urban areas. Throughout, there is a relatively high level of education. However, I found the groups to be different enough that they could provide some nuance between them that proved interesting in analysis. The main aim of recruiting in such a manner was to provide a wide range of readings that was not too guided by initial concepts, and then analytically pursue the emergent themes and topics that the groups had in common.

Table 4 below shows the focus groups that were shown the material from the 2013 election. For this phase of the reception project, a total of 49 respondents were interviewed across 8 focus groups, conducted in 2014 and 2015.

Table 4: Reception focus groups, 2013 sample

| Group | No., sex | Age, education | Group attributes |
|-------------------------------------|------------|--|--|
| 1. Left-voters | 4 (2f, 2m) | 17-22: upper secondary school – bachelor: social sciences/humanities | Left leaning, very interested in politics |
| 2. Right-voters | 5 (2f, 3m) | 19-28: upper secondary school – bachelor: business, social sciences | Right leaning, very interested in politics |
| 3. Pupils in upper secondary school | 8 (f) | 16-17: in upper secondary school | Young, somewhat interested in politics |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|---|---|
| 4. Teachers in upper secondary school | 5 (2f, 3m) | 26-34: master degrees – social sciences, natural sciences, humanities | Higher education, interested in politics |
| 5. Seniors | 7 (2f, 5m) | 75-89: upper secondary school to master degrees | Seniors, mixed political interest, mixed political leaning |
| 6. Ship mechanics | 8 (m) | 22-34: mostly upper secondary school, some bachelor degrees | Manual-technical work type, slight right leaning, neither interested or disinterested in politics |
| 7. Dancers | 7 (5f, 2m) | 17-34: upper secondary school - bachelor | Manual-creative work type, left-leaning, neither interested or disinterested in politics |
| 8. Hairdressers | 5 (f) | 18-25: upper secondary school | Manual-creative work type, mixed political leaning, not interested in politics |

Focus group 1 consisted of four (two women and two men) members of a left-leaning political organization. The participants were aged from 17 to 22 years, and their education ranged from high school to ongoing undergraduate (bachelor) degrees. Several of the respondents had part time jobs whilst studying at the university. Respondents' areas of education were placed within the social sciences and the humanities. The interview was conducted in September of 2014 at the Department of media studies and information science.

The focus group was recruited through a person in my existing social network who is in regular contact with the organization. The intermediary did not participate in the focus group.

Focus group 2 consisted of five (three men, two women) members of a right-leaning political organization. The participants were aged from 19 to 28 years, and their highest completed education levels ranged from high school to undergraduate (bachelor) degrees. Some of the respondents were working full time, some part time,

and some only studying. Respondents' area of education ranged from business educations to social sciences. The interview was conducted in September of 2014 at the organization's headquarters, following an already scheduled meeting of the participants.

The focus group was recruited through contacting the central organization, through cold calling. The intermediary then allowed me to show up after one meeting. The intermediary did not participate in the focus group.

Focus group 3 consisted of eight men working as ship mechanics at a naval base. The participants were aged from 22 to 34 years. The majority of respondents' highest level of education was high school, but with several completed bachelor degrees and one-year study programs. All respondents were working full time. Respondents' area of education mostly consisted of degrees within engineering, electrical engineering, or officer candidate school. The interview was conducted in November of 2014 aboard one of the ships, in a cramped common area.

The focus group was recruited through a person in my existing social network who works at the naval base. The intermediary did not participate in the focus group.

Focus group 4 consisted of eight women going to class together at the same upper secondary school. The participants were aged from 16 to 17 years old, all taking a specialization in media. Two of the respondents reported having part time jobs. The interview was conducted in April of 2015 in a vacant classroom during a free session at the school in question.

The focus group was recruited on the spot, with help from a teacher already in my existing social network. I showed up at the high school during lunch break, made contact with my associate, who then proceeded to ask this particular group of girls if they wanted to participate.

Focus group 5 consisted of five teachers (two women, three men) working at the same upper secondary school. The participants were aged from 26 to 34 years. All respondents had completed master's degrees as their highest level of education, with

backgrounds from social sciences, natural sciences and the humanities. All were working full time. The interview was conducted in April of 2015 in a vacant classroom during the teachers' long lunch break at the school in question.

The focus group was recruited through a person in my existing professional network, who took the effort to gather a selection of high school teachers during their break. The intermediary participated in the focus group.

Focus group 6 consisted of seven persons (five men, two women) all attending the same discussion group for senior citizens held at a community centre. The participants were aged from 75 to 89 years. Education and educational background varied from high school as highest completed level, to master's degrees. Work background spanned from judges and engineers to nurses and import agents. All were pensioners. The interview was conducted in April of 2015 at the centre where this particular discussion group meets once every month.

The focus group was recruited through cold calling the organizer of the group, who replied positively. The discussion group in question gathers regularly, and I attended the end of one of these meetings, where I presented myself and asked for an hour of their time at some point. The discussion group generously proceeded to set up an extra date where they would gather, designated solely to my project. The intermediary that I originally contacted participated in the focus group.

Focus group 7 consisted of seven professional dancers (five women, two men), working together in the same dance crew. The participants were between 17 and 34 years old, with highest level of education ranging from high school to undergraduate (bachelor) degrees. Educational backgrounds ranged from physiotherapy, dance and performing arts, to media and communication. The majority of the respondents were working full time. The interview was conducted at the Department of media studies and information science.

The focus group was recruited through a person in my existing social network. The intermediary did not participate in the focus group.

Focus group 8 consisted of five hair dressers (all female) working at the same hair salon. The participants were between 18 and 25 years old, and all had high school as their highest level of education, all with specializations in hairdressing. All respondents were working full time. The interview was conducted in a slightly quieter corner of the hair salon, during opening hours.

The focus group was recruited through a person in my existing social network. The intermediary did not participate in the focus group.

Table 5 below shows the focus groups that were shown the material from the 2015 election. For this phase of the reception project, a total of 38 respondents were interviewed across 8 focus groups, conducted in 2016. These groups contain students only, and were recruited through reaching out to various student organizations at different faculties.

Table 5: Reception focus groups, 2015 sample

| Group | No., sex | Age, education | Group attributes |
|---------------------------------|------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Business students, elite | 5 (2f, 3m) | 20-24: bachelor | Slight right leaning, neither interested or disinterested in politics |
| 2. Business students, non-elite | 7 (3f, 4m) | 19-29: bachelor | Slight right leaning, not interested in politics |
| 3. Vocational nurse students | 5 (4f, 1m) | 22-26: bachelor | Centrist, not interested in politics. |
| 4. Fine arts students | 5 (2f, 3m) | 22-34: bachelor and master | Strong left leaning, neither interested nor disinterested in politics |
| 5. Natural sciences students | 5 (3f, 2m) | 22-26: bachelor and master | Centrist, not interested in politics |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|------------|----------------------------|--|
| 6. Humanities students | 3 (2f, 1m) | 23-24: bachelor and master | Left leaning, very interested in politics |
| 7. Social science students | 4 (2f, 2m) | 19-24: bachelor and master | Left leaning, very interested in politics |
| 8. Law students | 5 (4f, 1m) | 22-23: master | Centrist, neither interested nor disinterested in politics |

Focus group 1 consisted of five students (two women and three men) at the same elite business school. The informants mostly reported to be somewhat interested in politics, with the exception of one informant – reporting a very high interest in politics. Politically, most informants placed themselves in the center, mentioning parties such as The Labour Party, The Liberal Party and the Conservative Party as likely parties for them to vote for. Participants were aged from 20 to 24 years. They were all studying at bachelor level.

The interview was conducted in April of 2016, in a locale suggested by the intermediary, in which these students usually met, at the business school in question. The focus group was recruited through a person in my existing social network. The intermediary did not participate in the focus group.

Focus group 2 consisted of six students (four men and two women) at the same private, non-elite business school¹⁴. The informants mostly reported to be somewhat interested in politics. One informant reported to be “quite interested”, another “less interested”. Politically, not many chose to report what party they would vote for, but the Conservative Party and The Labour Party were mentioned, indicating a position towards the center. Participants were aged from 19 to 29 years, and all were studying at bachelor level.

The interview was conducted in April of 2016, in an vacant classroom in the business school, which I was able to book through contacting the school’s

¹⁴ In this case, the elite business school is state run, and the non-elite business school is private.

administration. The focus group was recruited through a person in my existing social network. The intermediary did not participate in the focus group.

Focus group 3 consisted of five students (four women and one man) enrolled in the vocational program of a nursing education. The informants reported a somewhat-to-low interest in politics, and all reported a desire to vote for the Labour Party, except one blank answer and one informant who liked the Liberal Party. Participants were aged from 22 to 26 years, and were all studying at the bachelor level.

The interview was conducted in May of 2016 at the Department of media studies and information science. The focus group was recruited through a person in my existing social network. The intermediary participated in the focus group.

Focus group 4 consisted of five students (three men and two women) at the same fine arts education. Three informants reported to be quite interested in politics, one somewhat, and one reported a low interest in politics. When asked what party they would want to vote for, one informant was uncertain. The rest reported The Labour Party, The Green Party, the Feminist Party and the Red Party – indicating a somewhat left leaning group politically. Participants were aged from 22 to 34 years. Three were studying at the bachelor level, and two at the master level.

The interview was conducted in May of 2016 at a seminar room at a fine arts school. The focus group was recruited through a person in my existing social network. The intermediary did not participate in the focus group.

Focus group 5 consisted of five natural science students (three women and two men) at various study programs. Political interest varied – one reported very high interest, another low interest, and the rest reported being somewhat interested in politics. Two informants did not report a party preference, one reported to be uncertain, but leaning towards the Liberal Party, one reported the Labour Party and another the Conservative Party. In other words, a group located relatively close to the center of Norwegian politics. Participants were aged from 22 to 26, and were all studying at the bachelor level, save for one student at master level.

The interview was conducted in September of 2016, in a meeting room at the faculty the students attended. The focus group was recruited by reaching out to the student's interest organization at the faculty in question. The initial contact person did not participate in the focus group.

Focus group 6 consisted of three humanities students (two women and one man). They reported to be somewhat interested in politics, with the exception of one student reporting a high interest. One was uncertain about party preference, one reported the Liberalist Party, and one the Labour Party. Participants were aged from 23 to 24. Two were studying at master's level, and one was engaged in a one-year study program.

The interview was conducted in September of 2016 at the Department of media studies and information science. The focus group was recruited by reaching out to the student's interest organization at the faculty in question. The initial contact person participated in the focus group.

Focus group 7 consisted of four students at the Department of social sciences (two women and two men). Three respondents reported a very high interest in politics, and one a high interest in politics. Two informants preferred the Socialist Left Party, one the Green Party, and one the Centre Party – in other words a somewhat mixed group politically. Participants were aged from 19 to 24. Three were studying at bachelor level, and one at master level.

The interview was conducted in September of 2016 at the Department of media studies and information science. The focus group was recruited by reaching out to the student's interest organization at the faculty in question. The initial contact person participated in the focus group.

Focus group 8 consisted of five students of law (four women and one man). All informants reported to be somewhat interested in politics, save one informant reporting a very high interest. Two respondents favoured the Conservative Party, one the Liberalist Party, and two were uncertain. Participants were aged from 22 to 23, and all were studying at master level.

The interview was conducted in September of 2016 at the Department of media studies and information science. Two participants in the focus group were recruited by reaching out to the student's interest organization at the faculty in question. The initial contact person did not participate in the focus group. The remaining three participants were recruited through a person in my existing social network. The intermediary did not participate in the focus group.

When citing from the focus group interviews, I will use abbreviations for the various groups. I will refer to male informants as M, and female informants as W. As I conducted all the interviews myself, I refer to myself as MHI. Informants have been given numbers, as they are to be anonymous. Consequently, a quote will typically look like this:

M1: Example quote

MHI: Example question

W2: Example quote

(Left leaning)

The reader will note that all interviews are transcribed in a manner closely resembling standard orthography (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014, p. 61). Prosodic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic features are described, not transcribed, and indicated by brackets. If an informant laughs, for instance, I write [informant laughs].

3.2.4.3 Interview guide and procedure

Informants were first of all briefed, stating the voluntary nature of participating, and asked if they felt comfortable being recorded on tape. I then provided information about confidentiality, including details on how I would use the recording, with

guarantees of anonymity. I informed them that I would transcribe the recording, removing all potential identifying data, and then delete the recording¹⁵.

Informants were then asked to fill out a small written survey, asking for their gender, age, level of education, interest in politics on a 5-point scale from “very interested” to “no interest at all”, and lastly a question asking what political party they would vote for if there was an election to the *Storting* the following day. As I have mentioned, this study was done post-elections. The election of 2013 resulted in a change of government – so the politicians that the informants were shown were both in power and out of power. In order to compensate for this, all the interviews started with some initial storytelling from me as moderator: “I want you to think back to the summer of 2013/2015...” followed by a listing of some major events that happened prior to and during those elections. Informants were then asked about their most vivid memory from the election of 2013 or 2015 in an attempt to put them in a retrospective mood. Despite these precautions, one should keep in mind that some informants may be less “tuned in” than others due to the non-election context.

I continually stressed that what we were about to talk about had no blueprint for correct answers of any kind, and that it was their own thoughts and experiences that I was interested in. Following Drotner et al’s (2003, p. 14) advice, I attempted to situate and enact the interviews as a type of friendly conversations between strangers. In order to do this, I consistently presented the speech event as “talk about” or “a conversation about”, and regularly stressed the lack of blueprint answers. I emphasized that what was interesting to me was their own experiences and thoughts. As moderator, I attempted to refrain from enacting an objective, neutral scientist, and would rather aim for some minutes of loose talk at various stages of the interviews. I would also encourage small talk about everyday matters with the participants prior to showing the films, if the group size allowed this. While it was important for me not to reveal my own position on the ads and the devices within, I did attempt to ‘give a little of myself’ in various situations, talking about my own experiences or thoughts of subjects

¹⁵ This conduct was chosen in order to adhere to the Data Protection Official (NSD) standards for designing a research project without having to notify the Data Protection Official beforehand. This also involves designing the interview guide so that personal and sensitive information does not occur, as well as using printed questionnaires. I adhered to all these rules. See http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvernombud/hjelp/vanlige_sporsmal.html?id=2 For details.

external to the ads themselves, or chiming in with a “I feel like that too sometimes” at statements that I did not wish to probe further or problematize in the interviews.

Interviewees were presented with fruit, soda water, nuts and chocolate in order to lighten up the atmosphere a little, attempting to shift it ever so slightly from “research interview” to “movie night with friends”. In this spirit, I attempted to find locations that represented “home turf” (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 150) for the informants, which I operationalized as any place this group would have met naturally without my interference. When this at times proved impossible or highly impractical, I employed a meeting room at the university. The procedure for the focus groups followed the pattern of showing one ad, then talking about it per the interview guide, before moving on to the next film.

The interview guide (found in full in appendix A) was designed to capture four main topics: decoding (how do informants perceive the ad’s content), intention (how do informants perceive producer intentions), evaluation (how do informants evaluate the films, their elements and their messages) and argument (what devices, arguments and other aspects do the respondents find the ads to be presenting or employing?).

The guide itself was designed with a funnel approach, which is a compromise between a loose and a structured interview design (Morgan, 1997, p. 41). Informants were initially asked very open questions such as: “What was this?” with follow-up questions such as: “What makes you say that?” prior to more closed off questions such as “What do you think about...” in regards to a particular aspect. At the very end of each focus group, I asked informants one general question for the 2013 groups, and two for the 2015 groups. These were: “What do you think about political ads” with the follow-up question of: “What do you think about being communicated to in this manner”, and additionally for the 2015 groups: “How would you make an ad, if you got to decide” with the follow up question of: “What does your ideal/dream ad look like?” Throughout the interview guide, I attempted to create an open atmosphere through asking many open questions. The ideal was a situation in which informants “(...) have considerable power to influence the agenda” (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 147), enabling informants to participate in a spontaneous and authentic manner (Drotner et

al., 2003, p. 148). I wanted informants to be able to steer the conversations towards aspects that they found important, salient and worthy to talk about.

3.2.4.4 Some comments on the interviews

Because the number of focus groups and participants are relatively high in this study, and due to the fact that I use thematic analysis, I would like to spend some extra space on describing and discussing my focus groups in this part. Thematic analysis tends to give a good overview – but one objection to the method is that it can to a certain extent obscure the finer nuances and aspects in the production of the interview data. It is my aim that the following descriptions can alleviate some of these concerns.

A total of six focus groups were conducted in a meeting room at the University. These were the group of dancers and the group of left-leaning voters from phase one, and the group of humanities students, social science students, law students and nurse students from phase two. I experienced most of these groups as unproblematic, if a little reserved. While the conversation flowed effortlessly, I could not shake the feeling that I was missing something by drawing them into the halls of the academe for interviews.

On that note, I did notice that when I conducted student focus groups outside of the informant's home turf, they would tend to show a kind of classroom behavior during sessions. This was the case for the humanities students, the social science students and the law students – although less for the nurses in vocational training. Informants in the former groups would often put their hands up when they wanted to say something. This could be due to the fact that these informants are used to such norms of turn-taking when they are gathered as students, but it could also be because I gathered them as students in a university building. It is also possible that they see me as a researcher and typical authority in this respect. What this entails for informant answers is unsure, but it should be mentioned. All of these groups were indeed very talkative, and did not need a lot of prompting to get the conversation going. In some groups, such as the law students, informants were so talkative that my role as a

moderator shifted into a mode of attempting to get time for everyone to have a say, as there was doubtlessly a lot of information and ideas streaming out of each member of the group. Some groups appeared almost to moderate themselves, such as the group of dancers. Other groups were especially succinct in probing their own answers without interference from me as a moderator. One example was the group of humanities students. In a particular situation, there was disagreement between two of the informants. The participants stopped talking, before one of them looked at me, asking: “Do you mind if we have a go at this?”. When I told them to go ahead, they performed a brief and quite argumentative exchange of opinion.

A total of ten groups were conducted out in the field – at something resembling home turf for the informants, the criterion being that the group would gather, or would be gathered, in the place of the interview naturally without my interference. These groups were the hairdressers, the pupils in upper secondary school, the teachers in upper secondary school, the mechanics, the right leaning voters and the seniors from phase one, and the elite business students, the non-elite business students, the fine art students and the natural science students from phase two.

Interviews done on informants’ home turf were seemingly very good interviews, at least judging from my interview diary. Of course, this could just be the illusionary thrill of doing “real fieldwork” talking. In any case, I did see a more spontaneous nature in the turn-taking and the flow of conversation among these groups. Several of these groups seemed truly comfortable. In such instances, some groups would often moderate themselves, and I could step back a bit more as a moderator. In other groups, informants were perhaps too comfortable, and had to be guided ever so slightly back to talking about the films – when they started talking about in-jokes or something that had happened earlier in the day that was irrelevant to the situation at hand. In most cases however, I did not have to do this guiding myself, as someone in the group would frequently do it for me, with comments such as “well, back to the ad” or uttering phrases like “come on people, poor guy [referring to me] he does not want to hear all this”.

One interview in particular, however, did not go as planned. While most interviews were conducted without substantial or noticeable friction and troubles, one particular group stands out in this regard: the group of hairdressers. As we recall, this focus group consisted of five hairdressers (all female) working at the same hair-salon in downtown Bergen. The participants were between 18 and 25 years old, and all had high school as their highest level of education, all specializing in hairdressing. All respondents were working full time. The interview was conducted in a slightly quieter corner of the hair salon, during opening hours. If one examines the total number of nodes (themes and sub-themes addressed) and references (amounts of coded segments of speech) in Nvivo, this group talked about fewer themes, and talked markedly less when compared with the other groups from phase one of the data collection (they addressed 42 sub-themes and had 118 references, the least of all 16 focus groups in both regards). At first I thought this could be due to a low number of participants, such as the 2015 group of humanities students (N=3), but this is not the case (N=5 for the hairdressers). The humanities students, being two less informants, addressed 63 sub-themes, and had 243 references. The hairdressers talked the least and touched upon the least topics of all the groups in the study.

Reading my interview diary written immediately after the session, I have made several remarks – mostly blaming poor planning and lack of foresight on behalf of myself as a researcher. First, I was under the impression that we would have a separate (private) room in which to conduct the interview. This turned out to be incorrect, and is something I could easily have checked if I had visited the space prior to the interview, or asked questions about this to my interview contact person. Second, there was not a separate screen or audio equipment available, so we all watched the ads together on my laptop screen, with a USB speaker. Third, the informants did not appear to be totally off-duty, as some of them would have to tend to customer service and answer the shop phone during the interview. Since I was under the impression that they all had the day off, or could take time to participate, I had not foreseen this development. These three factors directly impacted the quality of the interview. The space did not feel private, sound and audio were not optimal, and my informants

showcased a varying range of distraction. All in all, I left the scene with the feeling of having spoilt a good interview with interesting informants. My interview diary reads:

Felt like I had to force answers – too many closed questions. Bad. Awkward feeling in the space. Was not able to connect – and I felt that I was invading their space. They were wondering what they were doing there, and so was I. Glad to get out of there, which is probably not a good sign

While I think these technical and organizational affordances still do matter – I do have to revise my initial reflections in postscript. When transcribing and analyzing the transcripts from this interview, I was struck by two things. Firstly, the informants' answers were – if often short and not always elaborated – thematically and substantially quite similar to what the other groups were reporting, and although I did indeed ask more closed questions at times, these tended not to produce any answers at all, merely silence or utterances of “I don't know”. More salient were the answers the informants gave on their own initiative. Secondly, I gradually suspected an additional explanation to the perceived resistance I got from the informants in the interview situation. I had originally hypothesized that hairdressers, in addition to having a manual-creative work type, would have plenty of experience in talking to people about a whole range of subjects, and therefore expected the conversation to flow freely. I was surprised to see that this would not be the case in the actual interview. I would like to speculate that one further reason for this, other than the errors and shortcomings of my own design in setting up the interview, is these particular informants lack of self-esteem when it comes to articulating political matters.

Contrary to my original hypothesis, it would perhaps be more correct to say that hairdressers are experts at listening to other people's utterances, and responding in non-provocative ways that do not give away too much of their own private personae or emotions, something that is true for a whole range of professions. I might have misjudged their abilities, or more precisely their own belief in their abilities to articulate opinions on political matters. This explanation became increasingly clear as I transcribed and analyzed the material. The hairdressers made several remarks that they “don't have an opinion” about what they had just seen, or excused themselves by stating that their responses were “not very good”. They also said things that could be

interpreted as saying that this form of communication was *not for them* – for instance by saying that “those that care about politics” probably would like to watch these ads, rather than themselves. They also said things that I interpret as the informants distancing themselves from what they had just seen, instead of engaging with it:

W1: I did not really understand what they were talking about. But... they probably talked about the kind of stuff that politicians do. Since he is that kind of politician-dude (...)

MHI: (...) Who could this ad work for?

W1: Perhaps some clever people, that get it...

[other informants laugh]

In hindsight, I disagree with my informants’ self-presentation as politically ignorant. Considering that the hairdressers did indeed prove to know quite a bit about politics (even though they explicitly denied it) and obviously had valuable comments to give, I must take some degree of self-criticism for not providing an interview situation that made them feel more comfortable in articulating their views. In retrospect, I should have done the interview elsewhere – and spent much more time on getting to know the participants a little bit, to create a situation in which they would not be afraid to speak their mind, as I felt I achieved with the other groups. That said, this lacking feeling of self-esteem could be interesting in a research perspective. Further pursuing this line of analysis could prove fruitful. However, it would take a more conscious design and a greater focus than what I am able to give it in this project. It would be better to systematically explore these tensions, rather than stumble upon them, as I have done here.

3.3 Thematic analysis of interview data

3.3.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a method of qualitative content analysis allowing for the elucidation and categorization of themes in various human experiences (Butcher et al.,

2001). It is a method for “identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). A *theme* in this context is defined as a form of patterned response or meaning within the data material (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Consequently, what I aim to do in the following is to identify some key patterns of response, and to describe some core traits regarding how my informants perceive and respond to political advertising. The interview data in transcription form are intentionally fragmented, and in turn re-organized into a series of thematic headings. The main goal is to be left with a few themes that relate directly to my research question (Miles et al., 2013).

Abduction, a type of middle-ground between purely inductive and purely deductive approaches (Thagaard, 2003, p. 194), guided the process of analysis. This approach is characterized by interaction between inductive and deductive approaches (Thagaard, 2003, p. 197). Theory, both through the researcher’s educational background and through active reading throughout a project, creates the basis for the research, which in turn through analysis provides new perspectives towards theory (Thagaard, 2003, p. 197). What follows is a form of commuting between empirical data and theory. Throughout the process of theme-generation and code-generation, I adhered to this abductive logic of discovery. This meant that I continually attempted to develop themes, sub-themes and categories that would speak to the literature on communication, rhetoric and political ads, which I was reading up on as I re-coded (See Kreiss et al., 2018 and their application of Luker (2008) for a similar approach). I am attempting to provide a more detailed analysis of some aspects of the data that are informed by theory, rather than a rich description of the overall data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

I maintained an interview diary, making sure to note down initial thoughts after interviews. I also maintained a coding diary in which I noted second impressions of interviews, after transcription and after the first round of open coding. Lastly, I maintained a project log, in which I made notes of when I started pursuing or abandoning ideas, themes or theories. In order to avoid being blinded by the “powerful conceptual grid” (Paul Atkinson, 1992, p. 459) that a codebook constitutes, I found it

necessary to return to the original data at numerous occasions, allowing myself to read full transcripts from interviews, in order to assess whether I was missing key insights. This entailed particularly looking out for divergent cases (Bazeley, 2009, p. 12; Miles et al., 2013). I also continually revisited the theoretical and methodological literature that has informed this project, as per Bazeley's (2009, p. 13) recommendation.

3.3.2 Procedure for coding

In my analysis, I mainly followed Braun and Clarke's six steps of thematic analysis (2006, p. 87). First, I familiarized myself with my data by transcribing the interviews, and re-reading the transcripts. At this stage, I made tentative notes for possible codes and themes before starting the more formal coding process. I performed the generation of initial codes manually. This first initial coding was intentionally very inclusive. This resulted in a high number of various codes, many of which were redundant, similar or the same (See appendix for an example of an early coding scheme). To give an example, here is a list of codes and notes following the first read through of the transcripts from the group of teachers watching the 2013 Christian Democrat ad:

Christian Democrats 2013 thematic analysis early codebook

--teachers

Ad-like
 Awkward
 Bad acting
 Other ads
 Awkward / old fashioned
 Scripted
 Politician: Open, honest
 Underestimating audience / overstating
 Baby: creepy, weird, awkward
 Feels like a parody
 Hareide: Tryhard, tone of voice
 Intended audience: mother in laws, older people
 Intended audience: families
 Intended audience: Religious people
 Hareide/CDP: toothless, harmless – do not want to give them power
 Reflecting on own role as spectator
 Speculating on intended audience
 Intrusive – authenticity breach
 Production value
 Too present
 Intent: building ethos/image
 Evaluative: should have done it differently
 Stoltenberg as contrast
 Content: romanticizing core family
 Ridiculous
 Cheap
 – Constructed – fake -
 Not present
 Failing to communicate
 Misplaced / placed / awkward
 Pulling it off depends on personality

Figure 2: Early code generation from the group of teacher’s comments on the 2013 Christian Democrat ad.

In total, this initial process generated 170 codes for the 2013 Christian Democrat film across all eight groups. The other ads produced a similarly high volume. After the open coding, I turned to “second cycle coding methods” (Saldaña, 2015), performing focused coding, in which one attempts to code based on conceptual similarity (Saldaña, 2015, p. 151), as well as axial coding in which codes are related to larger categories, and thus placed in sub-categories. I then coded selectively, attempting to locate core categories that lie at the heart of the research project (Nilssen, 2012, p. 79). Thus I proceeded to examine the first-generation codes more carefully, and across groups and films, picking up redundancies due to codes being similar or the same. I also started deciding which codes could possibly function together to form a category, asking whether they spoke to similar aspects. A further condensation and grouping of

themes yielded more manageable concepts. To give an example, here are two early and preliminary groupings of two sub-themes of what was to become the theme of personalization:

- **Closeness and distance**
 - “at our level”
 - Closeness through clothing
 - Closeness through role/form of address
 - Closeness through manners/acting
 - Distance through clothing
 - Distance through role/form of address
 - Distance through manners/acting
 - Feeling close
 - Feeling distance
- **Person – Image – Politician – Personality**
 - Awkward
 - Contrasting Stoltenberg and Hareide
 - Credible
 - Cute
 - Funny
 - Human
 - Likeable
 - Of the people
 - Other country or culture as contrast
 - Politician as party
 - Scripted – not real – fake
 - Unscripted – conversational – natural
 - Too much/Too nice

Figure 3: A process snapshot during categorization of codes

Further rounds of coding, re-coding and re-ordering resulted in the operative codebook shown in table 4.3. I ended up with four major themes, with 20 sub-themes in total. Each sub-theme has subordinate categories, but for ease of navigation I have not included these in the figures used in the main text. They are, however, always mentioned explicitly in the text itself, and available for inspection in appendix B, which details the complete codebook with frequencies¹⁶. When the codebook in table 5 was complete, I proceeded to code the entirety of my data material for this project in Nvivo 11. I coded the interviews at the level of meaning, per line or paragraph. My guiding principle was whether the bit of text related to the code in a meaningful way

¹⁶ Please be advised that complete transcripts of all interviews with complete coding stripes (in Norwegian) are available to the evaluation committee and other interested parties upon request. Please contact the Department of Information Science and Media Studies at the University of Bergen in order to facilitate such a request.

(DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). The codes were not mutually exclusive. Several bits of text have been coded to several codes.

Table 5: Overview of key themes and sub-themes.

| Theme | Description | Sub-themes |
|---------------------------|-------------|---|
| The image-issue-continuum | | Image-issue balance Concrete/general Single issues Humor |
| Negativity | | Problems/solutions Critical comments Neutral comments Legitimacy |
| Personalization | | Ordinariness Authenticity Leader-follower-tensions |
| Receptive modes | | Aptum breach Authenticity breach Mediated modes |

Please see appendix B for full overview.

The themes and sub-themes presented in the figure above are thoroughly presented consecutively throughout this thesis. I now turn to what I identify as two possible elephants in the room for the present research project: the question of external validity, and the question of whether my findings are produced by the research situation itself.

3.4 Two key limitations

Two key limitations connected to the method of qualitative interviews and focus groups speak directly to my findings. Therefore, I choose to spend some extra time on them in the following.

First, an affordance of focus groups: Focus group interviews can at times work like “consensus machines” (Drotner et al., 2003, p. 153) due to the fact that participants often conform in order to dampen conflict and disagreement among themselves. This points further towards the potential problems of self-presentation. Informants might be saying things they don’t really mean, or saying things to make them appear as good, decent people. This is crucial particularly because I am looking for informants’ enactment of a type of citizenship. How can I know that people are not just enacting ‘the good citizen’ in front of a researcher in order to come across as precisely a good citizen?

Second, because the focus group interviews are a constructed and exceptional type of situation, one must ask questions of external validity. This is a crucial concern particularly because I interpret informants’ manifestations of “political talk” and “political discussion” as a trace of citizenship. In what way can my results then speak to situations outside of the interview situation? Have I not just forced some people to have a conversation before treating that conversation as evidence of something?

In this thesis, I claim that political ads have the potential to function as a resource for citizenship in two ways: First, by sparking “political talk” or semi-public “civic discussion” on a range of topics, such as experiences of citizen-consumers in the

face of political marketing, negativity and conflict and personalized content. Importantly, I also discuss how informants at times enact a rhetorical type of citizenship through a variety of ways, for instance through engaging heavily in film form, articulating and questioning their preferences, taking other audience groups into accounts and negotiating communicative norms of political communication, to mention some.

The validity of these findings must be discussed and taken into account, considering that I employ focus group interviews. The first and perhaps most obvious objection to the claims and conclusions I draw from the focus group data, are that focus groups make people talk, and since I have showed people political ads, talk about political matters or “civic discussion” would have occurred anyway. As such, claiming that political ads spark civic discussion could be both banal and wrong, depending on outlook.

The second objection concerns people’s enactment of citizenship. I find people to engage with the ads in such a way that it warrants the label “orientation towards civic virtues”, or a type of enactment of receptive rhetorical citizenship, that involves articulation and questioning of norms, articulation and questioning of preference, and a reflective stance in which one takes other people outside one’s immediate circle into account. A critical objection to these findings is that this could be largely a result of informants wanting to put their best foot forward. Informants are probably performing some idea of “the good citizen”, in order to come across as good citizens in front of the researcher. Fundamentally, it is a question of self-presentation (Goffman, 1956; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Silverman, 2006). Importantly, my production interviews are a type of expert (Bogner et al., 2009) or elite interviews. Elites also engage in self-presentation, and experts are often also experts in being interviewed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 147), which is particularly the case for the communication advisors and managers in political parties. This means that the informants in some instances may “(...) more or less have prepared ‘talk tracks’ to promote the viewpoints they want to communicate (...)” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 147). An employee at a political party will perhaps be unwilling to reveal information that puts the party in a

bad light, or unwilling to talk about tensions with the ad agency fearing to spoil future endeavors. Alternately, informants could be providing idealistic reasons for making ads, when the main motivation could be winning the election, and so on.

Both of these objections concern *external validity*. What my informants said in the interview situation is possibly all well and good, with lots of civic talk and enactments of citizenship. But what about how people actually behave out in society? Can my results say anything about that?

First, concerning how people behave outside of the research situation. I assume that people will not always behave in the way I have observed in my focus groups. Furthermore, there are a lot of other types of people than those in the groups I have gathered and talked to, that could all behave in totally different manners. However, I do not claim my material and findings to be representative. Rather, my aim is to show the *potential* of political ads as a genre, as well as people's *potential* to enact rhetorical citizenship, in an attempt to shed light upon hitherto unexplored areas of receptive rhetorical citizenship. The general empirical media use of political advertising out among citizens when they are not being prompted by a researcher will probably vary greatly. Following decades of research on media use, people will show a high degree of selective behavior in terms of attention and processing, as the literature on selective exposure suggests (Sears & Freedman, 1967; Zillmann & Bryant, 2013). Media use is often motivated. While citizens can be exposed to political advertising through a wide variety of genres, they may simply lack the motivation there and then to engage as a citizen. They might not give the ad much second thought. They might temporarily phase out, go to the bathroom, or look away from their smart phone screens until the ad has run its course, or can be skipped. They can quickly recognize that the ad is political, and not engage in it, if their mind is made up. Or they can watch the ad, perhaps pick up some information from it, and then move on. They could watch the ads without much critical thinking at all, a mode of non-problematization, something all media users engage in regularly.

Or they might not. They might be provoked and make a snarky comment to the person sitting next to them. That person might respond. Or they might think. Or

otherwise orient themselves towards the political realm in some sense, or reflect on their real-but-imagined relationship to the political elite. My main point is not to claim that the behavior I observed in the focus group always manifests outside of the research situation, but that it *can* manifest. How and when are empirical questions for future studies. I return to this question at the concluding discussion of the thesis, in chapter 5.

Second, are my thematic findings simply the result of self-presentation (Goffman, 1956; Silverman, 2006)? In the following, I take the position that this is a factor not easily disentangled from an interview situation. Thus it is something to be wary of throughout the project, and something I will discuss at several stages throughout. Mainly, I answer this worry by stating that it is not necessarily so, because informants' answers frequently differ from what one would expect if they were solely engaged in self-presentation.. Examining the informants' answers, I am repeatedly struck by how they could have answered otherwise, or reacted differently – and at times indeed do so. The material appears to be too contradictory to fully support an explanation that says that informants are simply doing their best to come across as good people. I will give examples of this when I discuss my findings at the end of each chapter. The main point is that my informants said and did a whole range of things after viewing the ads. Some rejected the material, and almost refused to engage with it. Others scoffed, and took the ads to be evidence that all politics is a circus. Others went into a cynical mode of suspicion and distrust that is not particularly aligned with the type of media engagement connected with rhetorical citizenship. These are not necessarily traces of virtue of rhetorical citizens. These reactions are indeed present, and they point to how informants indeed *could have responded differently*. They are not, however, the mode most present in my material. Most people I talked to engaged with the material and most people showed a keen interest in articulating their own views and interpretations after watching it. Additionally, informants' heavy focus on film form and aesthetics is not necessarily a given, judging from prior audience studies. Ytre-Arne (2012), for instance, reported troubles in getting her informants to talk about formal aspects of printed magazines. My interviewees could have answered in other ways than they did.

Moreover, it could very well be that people invoke norms that they think are good, that they are for instance indeed articulating “what culture honors”, rather than the dimensions they actually use in real evaluations when watching a politician on-screen (Garzia, 2011, p. 701). However, I argue that the articulations of such norms, although their epistemic value may be unclear, are still interesting because they can say something about the repertoires of political culture that informants draw upon in reception.

I now turn to the empirical contribution of this thesis, and the analysis of the eight ads in the data material from the perspective of production and textual analysis.

Part II: Production and text

4.0 Production and text

The research question for the examination of production was: *How do political parties and advertising agencies intend for their ads to work, and what rhetorical devices and strategies do they employ in order to achieve their goals?* In order to examine this, I chose to interview the politicians, communications advisors and advertisers that were behind the ads. I also examined the finished ads as texts, following the research question of *what salient aspects of argumentation and film style are present in the advertisements?* I did this to articulate aspects that were not brought up or discussed during interviews, but that I still identified as important and at work in the reception situation.

Together with the descriptive textual analysis, this exploration of production gives us a better picture of what the audiences actually are watching and receiving – an understanding of what they are presented with and what sort of communicative resource this might pose, what kind of interaction that is facilitated from the producer end. As such, the purpose of the chapter is twofold.

First, to identify intentions and salient aspects in the ads. In combination with the textual analysis, these will be used to explain and discuss citizens' varying reception of the ads. This includes describing what communicative affordances are present in the rhetorical situations in which producers perceive themselves to be acting. Second, to gain a better understanding of how producers envision their audiences, and how they perceive the genre of political advertising. This will tell us something about how the political elite wishes to address citizens and what type of rhetoric is employed. Thus, it can ultimately contribute to an understanding of what kind of mode of citizenship that these films invite.

In this chapter, I will show that the political ad, understood as a rhetorical practice, is still in a seeking phase, or a state of immaturity, and produced in an environment of political communication that is not professionalized (Negrine et al.,

2007) to a high degree. Producers are navigating a landscape in which they are either experimental or uncertain towards the format. A general pattern in the interviews are a type of uncertainty, both towards political ads as a new tool and towards the communicative workload political ads should carry. A consequence of this is that the genre presents itself in many ways in my data material, offering the possibility for examining a range of types of political ads in light of their potential to function as a resource for citizenship.

There are several different sub-genres in the selection I have examined, but for the present chapter, three dimensions are relevant: the balance of image and issue information, the degree of personalization and the degree of attack/advocacy. Some ads are full of political argumentation, others focus on entertainment and engagement. Several ads focus on personalized content, attempting to maintain or forge a personal connection between individual politicians and the citizens. Others attack or present critique. This allows a thorough examination of how voters navigate the balance between image and issue information, personalized content and the balance between attack and advocacy. Furthermore, we can examine what kind of political talk this content produces in the following analysis of reception. Table 6 below gives an overview of the films in the data material, and their most relevant characteristics from the perspective of the production interviews. Note that these dimensions differ from the dimensions that are activated in reception. See appendix D for a full overview.

Table 6: Examined ads and aspects relevant to resource for citizenship

| Film | Formal system – genre – type (text perspective) | Relevant dimension (producer perspective) |
|---------|---|---|
| 2013 L | Non-fiction – candid camera – advocacy | Image, Personalization |
| 2013 C | Fiction-satire – attack | Image |
| 2013 CD | Non-fiction – talking head – advocacy | Image, Issue, personalization |
| 2013 CP | Fiction – illustration – advocacy | Issue |
| 2015 L | Non-fiction – talking head – contrast | Issue, Image, Personalization |
| 2015 C | Fiction – satire AND non-fiction – talking head | Image |
| 2015 CD | Fiction – satire | Image, Issue |
| 2015 RP | Non-fiction– talking head | Issue |

Turning to the producers own account of how they use the genre as rhetorical actors, I demonstrate how they in part adhere to norms of rhetorical citizenship in the way they conceptualize and think about their audiences. There is a distinct tension

present in the interviews between treating audiences as voter-consumers versus treating them as voter-citizens. As we recall from chapter 2.2, the orientation of the voter-consumer concerns finding a voting choice that maximizes personal interest. The orientation of the citizen-consumer is also interested in voting, but is open to take a greater deal of people into account in voting decisions, and is also potentially interested in other activities beyond voting, such as civic discussion. Producers wish to persuade, but are at the same time in part committed to ideals of an enlightened public that correspond to ideals of a healthy public sphere (Ferree et al., 2002). Their considerations are attuned both to persuasion and healthy public debate. The way in which they understand their own role is deliberative in the rhetorical sense, as they seek both persuasion and norm adherence simultaneously. Producers show a strong belief in the rhetorical power of the ads, to such a degree that some express moral qualms about using such a powerful weapon. At the same time, the immaturity of the rhetorical practice and the lack of professionalization in the field shows itself in that the producers are very uncertain as to precisely how effective the ads actually are.

There are also indications that producers treat political advertising as not just as an instrument for making people vote, but rather as a kind of resource for argument, engagement and discussion. Furthermore, content that falls under the umbrella of “personalization of politics” is often conceptualized as a bridge between political elite and people, meaning that political ads are understood in part as an instrument with which one can maintain a symbolic bond between politicians and the people. An interesting difference presents itself between small and large parties. The bigger parties treat political advertising as necessary for presence. The smaller parties treat political advertising more as an opportunity to box above their weight in terms of attention and to reach more citizens.

In the following, I present the findings from the 2013 and 2015 films before discussing general themes that were salient across interviews. For each film, I will identify intentions, the circumstances of the production, and producers’ thoughts on elements of the ads that are identified as salient, either by themselves, by the researcher or through informants’ talk in moments of reception.

For each film I give a descriptive account of what one sees and hears on screen gathered from the production analysis, before presenting findings from the production interviews. I then formulate what I take to be salient aspects of the ads, before moving to supplement the production interviews with insights from my own textual analysis.

While the interviews were long, and many themes were visited during the hours of talk, I have chosen to focus on three factors relevant to my research question: 1) Circumstances of production and workflow, 2) Intentions and the ‘preferred reading’ as verbalized by the producers, 3) Salient aspects of film form, argumentation or other. Examining production processes and workflow means shedding light on communicative affordances, as well as providing context to the rhetorical situation by showing means and constraints. Examining the preferred reading tells us something about how producers implicitly and explicitly conceptualize their audience – and with what means and strategies they choose to address them. Examining salient aspects of the films themselves help us provide a richer picture of what people are actually encountering, and how those devices and moments actually came about – be they intentional or not. These three areas of focus are chosen to best be able to give an account of the interplay between the intention, utterance, constraints and resources that in the end make up the rhetorical utterance that audiences engage with. Focusing on “salient aspects” is important, because it can provide key insights that can explain or supplement informants’ answers in the reception study. However, they also allow insights into communicative, cultural norms that the producers navigate and relate to, which I will use to describe the producers self-understanding as rhetorical agents and how they conceptualize the ads themselves, and the audiences they are intended for.

I end the chapter by discussing how the individual cases and the recurring general themes speak to my overarching research interest of investigating how political ads can function as a resource for citizenship. I now turn to present the ads, following the order I have indicated in table 6.

4.1 The Labour Party 2013: Put the Prime Minister in a taxi.

The film¹⁷ first shows Stoltenberg in formal attire in front of the Prime Minister’s residence, where he explains that he has just met with the King (as the Prime Minister does every Friday in Norway), but that the rest of the day will be different from most Fridays. We then see Stoltenberg putting on a taxi driver uniform and getting into a cab. The film then presents a rapid selection of cuts that show us how various people and groups of people enter the car. We follow their behavior shifting from unsuspecting, to suspicion, to bewilderment, surprise and subsequent reactions. We are then presented with a selection of the various conversations Stoltenberg had with his passengers in the car. It is cross-cut with brief scenes in which Stoltenberg is alone, humming to himself, or tapping the steering wheel to a song he seems to be enjoying, or taking a break in the street – attracting the attentions of passers by. Finally, a senior passenger exits the car whilst telling Stoltenberg he will vote for him. A cheerful tune starts playing in the background, increasing in volume until the end of the ad, which displays a text plaque encouraging viewers to continue the discussion on social media.



Figure 4: Scenes from *Taxi Stoltenberg*. Top left: Stoltenberg explaining what is about to happen. Top right: A scene of joy from the taxi cab. Bottom right and left: Stoltenberg takes a break, attracting the attention of passersby.

¹⁷ The film can be seen with English subtitles at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xq7LTnwS7Bs>.

The film length is 3 minutes and 41 seconds, and does not quite correspond directly to any typical genres known from the literature on political advertising (In for instance Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2006; Kaid, 2004). However, considering the use of hidden cameras, the look of direct cinema/cinema vérité (Thompson & Bordwell, 2003, pp. 483-488) and the structure of setup-reveal-reaction, the film is clearly similar to reality television (Hill, 2005) or surveillance reality (Andrejevic, 2004) in general, and variations of the candid camera/hidden camera genre (See Hill, 2005, p. 21; Kavka, 2008) in particular.

4.1.1 Process and workflow

Taxi Stoltenberg was created and produced by TRY, with the assistance of the film production agency PRAVDA, who performed the actual camera work, organized the film shoot, and did post-production and editing. PRAVDA is a much used partner for TRY in their work with commercial advertising, and TRY is the Labour Party's favoured advertising agency. TRY and the Labour Party have been involved with each other since the 1980s. TRY's current CEO and founding partner has previously worked as a political advisor for the party, and is considered to be a close friend to Jens Stoltenberg himself. As a consequence, the political party and the advertising agency appear to work comfortably together, and they seem to be relatively set in their individual roles:

TRY, that is to say Kjetil himself – but also his agency – knows us well. We have been working with them since 1989, which means we skip a lot of the processes one would have to go through if we were to choose a new advertising agency for every election year. In addition, Kjetil [the CEO] knows Jens well.

(Scharning Lund, 2013)

This perspective is shared by the TRY advertising agency, who talk about Stoltenberg's and Kjetil Try's friendship as a "great advantage" that enables them to "make decisions at the correct level, of those who are in charge" (Grimstad). The representatives of TRY also mention idealistic reasons and non-profit as a motivation to cooperate with the Labour Party, stating that having them as a customer was not of great economic significance, but that "we are a group here that thinks that it's alright

to help the Labour Party” (Polmar). This is a good example of advertisers expressing an ideological proximity to the party they are working for as part of the motivation, rather than purely operating from motives of profit. This is indicative of a landscape of political communication that is not professionalized through and through.

An additional probable but unmentioned reason for helping the Labour Party is the added PR effect for the agency. Working with such highly profiled and prestigious customers most certainly adds to the agency’s reputation. An additional motivation could be the possibility of winning prizes and awards for their work. TRY won several awards for their work on *Taxi Stoltenberg* after its release. Polmar explicitly referred to these cases during the interview.

The cooperation between advertiser and political party starts in ample time before the party's national congress in the relevant election year, both locally and nationally. TRY then designs the visual profile for the meeting and proceeds to make the rest of the campaign accordingly. The scope of the campaign is usually larger for the national elections. On this note, it is important to mention that the production of moving image advertisements were just one part of the campaign that the ad agency designed in collaboration with the Labour Party. Almost all informants pointed out that the taxi stunt was but one of many forms of political communication that they produced in the campaign. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the taxi stunt was not really meant to contain a lot of information about the Labour Party’s policy – a task left to the more confrontational part of the campaign. This consisted of print-posters and billboards (that were also distributed through social media) inspired by 50s and 60s boxing posters – showcasing the positive consequences of Labour Party politics "VS" the negative consequences of the right-leaning political parties politics: An example of this includes a poster featuring Jens Stoltenberg in a serious pose, and the text: "School and health first VS. Tax Cuts for those well off already". The taxi video was but one of a whole range of different ads, messages and media strategies that the party utilized to gain voter attention and to spread their message. Informants clearly stated that the taxi stunt was a part of the "soft campaign" – whilst the boards and the posters, for instance, was a part of the "hard campaign". That said, it also seemed to

stand out – and was mentioned as part of a tradition to do “something else” (Scharning Lund).

The main inspiration for putting the Prime Minister in a taxi was worked out "on a plane headed for Washington" (Grimstad) and an inspirational seminar before the kick-off for the work with the election campaign. Grimstad had previously written a children's novel in which the plot contained amongst other a taxi driver becoming Prime Minister. This was also the main idea and pitch that they later brought before the political party: "They brought some simple manipulated pictures and said: “Let's put Jens in a taxi!” (Scharning Lund). The party immediately took to the idea, as did Jens Stoltenberg, with the added remark: "But somebody has to clear this with PST [the bureau in charge of the Prime Minister's security detail]".

As told by the informants, the planning stage of the production took quite some time. Primarily this was due to the fact that the protagonist of the film was the Prime Minister at the time. As a consequence, Stoltenberg's security detail and the institution managing it would have to accept the fact that Stoltenberg would drive around alone in the center of Oslo whilst accepting random passengers. This resulted in a lot of practical issues that had to be resolved:

At first PST thought this was a horrible idea, and insisted on having a body guard in the front passenger seat. But that would make the whole idea fall apart – with a body guard present, there would not exactly be much spontaneity in the back seat

(Schøien)

The end result was a veritable procession of cars driving both in front of and behind the Stoltenberg's taxi cab. The taxi was equipped with low-end hidden cameras and microphones that streamed live footage both to a car containing the film crew from PRAVDA as well as an additional car controlled by PST.

In contrast to his other work with commercial advertising, the informant from the production agency emphasized the lack of control and direction that this type of production entailed. In terms of special effects use and post production, Schøien said

that he had never experienced a production less flashy. He explained that when making an ad, they would normally be in full control of cast, special effects, cameras, lighting and sound conditions, et cetera. The opposite was the case with the taxi stunt.

However, he also maintained that there was a lot of editing to be done after a day of shooting film:

The camera rolls for a long time with nothing happening. So one makes selections where things actually happen – and in this way, we have control. We select some things, and omit other things. Ninety nine percent gets omitted. I mean, the first minutes of a taxi trip – nobody usually talks at all, which was also the case in some instances here

(Schøien)

The most important criteria for what was selected to be in the final film was that it should be ‘worth watching’. These parts had to be immediately understandable – parts that would require an explanation or a full five-minute conversation before being shown, were considered boring or uninteresting. Schøien emphasized the importance of clear lines that went straight to the point: "When people sit and talk together for a few minutes, most of it is not very watchable". Furthermore, it was essential to select cuts that underscored the film's main message, and not just the most harmonic meetings, where Stoltenberg came out as the most reasonable or eloquent:

It was important not to show only clips where Jens Stoltenberg made the best impression, because the whole point of the stunt was to show that he cares for normal people, and what normal people have to say, and that he talks well to these people – as such it is important to convey his human side

(Schøien)

This notion of not only showing perfect encounters fits well with the literature on personalized content and authenticity. Here, not coming across as perfect is perceived as more spontaneous and human rather than a very polished presentation (Enli, 2015; Kjeldsen & Johansen, 2011).

4.1.2 Intention: Stoltenberg as a man of the people

What emerged as a common, shared intention in the interviews was the intent to reshape the public image or impression of the candidate, Jens Stoltenberg. Thus, the movie can be seen as a response to a situation in which Stoltenberg is considered a

little too serious, too much of a technocrat or bureaucrat, and not overly exciting after being in power for the last eight years. Consequently, a central intention of the film was to establish Jens Stoltenberg as a man of the people, and showcase his ability to talk to people and to be funny, and how well he interacts with other people as a person. To show that he is more than just a stiff and serious politician:

Jens (...) can very much appear as a technocrat. People are a little bit sick of him now, we thought. He is a little stiff... very fact-oriented-man. Very issue-oriented. Very controlled, very calm. So, we thought we had to do something that would create a little more sympathy for Jens as a person – to get him into something or other that would make people think: Oh, damn! He's really a damn nice and cheerful fellow (...)

(Polmar).

It was mentioned that Stoltenberg usually is a little media shy. He is usually very issue oriented and serious. This, of course, comes with the role of being Prime Minister:

As Prime Minister, one has to be pretty serious, I mean, he has to be. He can't just fool around. In addition, he is a numbers guy, he's a very fact based politician and an economist, and all that

(Polmar)

Several of the informants maintained that there was a stark difference at the time between the Stoltenberg one could observe in the media, in contrast to the Stoltenberg they knew as a party leader and a person. Scharning Lund talks about how Stoltenberg “does fantastically well with people” and how he is able to be “present and close” to people in small talk, how he makes people he meets feel good: “he is that kind of person” (Scharning Lund). This in contrast to the mediated image of Stoltenberg, as Guldbrandsen articulates it:

We know that he is an extremely charming man. That he is comfortable talking to people. To a much larger degree than the impression that people get [from the media]

(Guldbrandsen)

All informants seemed to agree that the Stoltenberg we see in the taxi video is a truer representation of Stoltenberg than the previously mentioned public image.

Besides presenting Stoltenberg as a pleasant person, a man of the people, another intention of the producers seemed to be that the ad should get a lot of attention, through being funny, surprising, and placing a much known face in a new situation:

I think we wanted people to have a positive entrance to the election, that it would be a little surprising, a little funny, and not so stiff. That people could laugh a little, and be surprised

(Scharning Lund)

A secondary motivation mentioned was a desire to engage the Norwegian population in general. From the Labour Party's side, both Scharning Lund and Gulbrandsen maintained that a central intention for them as a political party was to be engaging – to create conversations about politics – in the electorate in general, but also in younger voters more specifically. They maintained that a lot of politics and election campaigns from time to time seem like mere quarrelling, politicians hitting themselves over their heads with numbers and facts, et cetera. They stated that in a situation like this, it is important for the Labour Party to be perceived as a political party that listens to what people have to say, as well as to combat perceptions of the party as top-heavy, and run by the party whip from their offices at Youngstorget in Oslo. The informants explicitly named this desire to present their party as listening – a party in touch with the troubles and worries of normal people, and in touch with their everyday needs, rather than as an aloof, governing central power. There was also a certain idea that stimulating people to engage in conversations about politics would increase the total turnout. This seems like a very idealistic reason to spend a lot of money on an advertisement, but it would be too cynical to dismiss idealistic notions within political parties altogether. Another motivation for increasing the turnout for the election is that the Labour Party would actually benefit from a higher turnout, since many abstaining voters would have voted the Labour Party if they had voted. The motivation of engaging people is an example of producer adherence to communicative norms resonant with participatory democracy (Ferree et al., 2002). The talk about presenting a listening party reveals how an ad can function as a symbolic encounter between politicians and citizens, forging or maintaining a bond between the two groups. The

reception of a political ad thus becomes an event in which one negotiates and actualizes norms, ideals, ideas and political personas presented in the advertisements – thus functioning as a resource for enacting citizenship.

4.1.3 Salient aspects: Candid camera, persona and press coverage

Turning to salient aspects of the ad, one is formal, one is thematic and one is contextual, located in the ad's media reception. During my preliminary textual analysis, the ad's resemblance to the genre of candid-camera-television and other genres of 'reality' came to the forefront, and was thus something I asked explicitly about in the production interviews. From a production standpoint, this led to the use of so-called spycams (as described by Schøien) – and a very hands off approach in terms of editing. There was for instance no color correction done, which is unusual for most ad productions. All in all, there was little editing, which was also conscious as it was to feel "raw" and "real". As such, the finished look is both a result of having to use low quality cameras that were small enough to be hidden, and a conscious decision to mimic a certain style associated with reality television and the "real situations" (Schøien), or at least real reactions from the candid camera genre. The genre is also explicitly mentioned as an inspiration – as well as programs such as MTVs "You've been punked" (Schøien).

A striking aspect of the ad is the low amount of political argumentation and issue-information. This was presented somewhat differently amongst the informants. Those working for the political party foregrounded idealistic reasons such as increasing interest in the election (even though they did mention that this could benefit the Labour Party), the importance of an election campaign being something else than quarreling politicians, and the political party's tradition for doing "something else", some type of funny stunt, during an election.

The informants at the ad agency worded their answers somewhat differently. Polmar, for instance, compared political parties and frozen pizza – in the sense that both are as products to be sold. Furthermore, the advertisers are more explicit about

the whole “selling of politics” and seem less worried about the relative lack of political issue information in the film:

There is a limit to how much substance you can get into this taxi thing (...) we're not going to claim that this was a deep, strategic move to convince voters and shift political stances – it is clearly a charm offensive

(Grimstad)

The notion that the taxi film was a separate part of the campaign is also highly present among the informants from the political party, but the advertisers are more explicit on the dimension of liking and the fact that the ad is about making people feel good about Stoltenberg as a person, not about political issues.

As the film was launched through VGTV, it received broad positive coverage in the newspaper the following day, with headlines such as “The Prime Minister's wild election stunt” (VG, front page, 11/09/13) and “Receives praise as driver” (Hvidsten, 2013). However, two days later the press coverage turned negative, as VG discovered that some of the taxi passengers were recruited through “street casting” and thus ran the headline “Norway was fooled” (Johnsen et al., 2013). All informants perceive the negative attention as unfortunate. Some of them talk about how this was a sort of misunderstanding when moving from the realm of politics to the realm of advertising, because employing street casting is a clear given for a production agency when they have just a few hours with a VIP lead role. For them, the most important point was that nobody knew they were actually going to be in a taxi with Stoltenberg, and they thus argued that the surprise and all the reactions were “real”, so to speak: “We got criticized for staging it (...) To defend myself a little concerning that, we feel that we did it as real as we could, because there were some preconditions that made this stunt impossible from the outset” (Grimstad).

Guldbransen mentions that the notion that acting was involved in politics, and in something that was supposed to be spontaneous, is something that can be perceived “a little bit dishonest”. This is interesting because a lot of the supposed outrage could stem from the fact that the use of the term “street casting” connotes the world of acting. The notion of acting flies in the face of the very premise of what made the film

spectacular, but moreover, it is in conflict with an ideal for politicians and politics: that they should be authentic (Johansen, 2002). In this sense, the notion of acting is a very negative one – as we shall later see in the reception interviews. At the same time, when asked to evaluate the film, informants do not seem too worried about the press coverage: “I wish those 500 kroner would not be the main headline afterwards, of course, but I think that was a bit of a tempest in a teapot, really” (Scharning Lund). Advertisers describe the coverage as “a rock in the shoe”. At the same time, both parties seem to think that negative attention is part of the price of garnering a huge amount of attention, as the ad did in this case: “It is not certain that this recoil would have hit us if it [the ad] had not gotten such an enormous spread. Because when things become very popular, there is also a bigger need to take it a little down again”, said Gulbrandsen, who also explained that she informed VG about the street casting in the very first article that was written about the ad, but that it was not presented as shocking until a couple of days later.

4.1.4 Insights from textual analysis

In terms of film formal aspects, the intention of bringing Stoltenberg closer to the people and presenting his human sides is further accentuated by the film form and camera use of the advertisement. The setup of the cameras allow for Stoltenberg to be filmed almost completely in close and medium shots, cuing a relation of intimacy and sociability (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 148). The genre of reality television can also be said to be a fit with the explicated intention. As we recall, the producers wished to give a “truer” representation of Stoltenberg than his performance in other media gave. As such, presenting Stoltenberg in a style of pixelated graphics, with low quality cameras and time markers left unedited in the corners, add to this impression. It is also in part an implicit claim to authenticity, as they function as a testament to the low degree of post-production, wishing to give off an impression of something raw, unedited – closer to reality than what a more polished look would signal.

One aspect that I identify as present in the text, but unarticulated in the production interviews, is the opposite of Stoltenberg’s appearance as a normal human, as the man in the street. I base this both on how the ad is structured in terms of narration and on one of the main premises of the ad itself. While the intention was to

give a sense of proximity, the ad also positions Stoltenberg as *eminent* and *extraordinary*. This aspect is unarticulated in the production interviews. As we shall later see, it does not become salient in the reception interviews either. There are three main expressions of Stoltenberg's eminence present in the film, of which two are explicit – and one implicit. Stoltenberg's tale, as told by the man himself in the outset of the stunt, is one of *descending*. Stoltenberg literally moves from the King's table to the people in the street. He undergoes a transformation to do so, as he changes his garment from that of officialdom – the formal suit – into the garb of the common taxi driver. He also puts on sunglasses, which in part disguises him. The latter is a point on its own, as we see Stoltenberg consciously remove the glasses, and then take a meaningful look in the rear view mirror at one point in the film – followed by a reaction of recognition from the passenger. One could further suggest that the tale of the ruler disguising himself to pass as a commoner – either to listen to their worries, or to achieve some other end – is a well-established trope both in fairytales and stories, as well as popular entertainment formats such as “Undercover Boss”. The point is that Stoltenberg enjoys a special position – he is *not* proximate, or of the people per se, but he allows himself to move among them in order to listen to them. This eminent status, that Stoltenberg carries through the role of Prime Minister, is further proven by one of the main premises of the stunt itself. After all, the fact that Stoltenberg is suddenly among common people is an important part of the surprise of his passengers and the excitement of the film's spectators. Stoltenberg's eminence is also alluded through in a brief sequence in the film, in which he is taking a break from his endeavors as a taxi driver and stands outside of the cab, wearing sunglasses. This is cross cut with the image of a female onlooker, turning several times to look closer – signifying that Stoltenberg standing by himself in the street is something that attracts attention in itself. Such a shot, often called a reaction shot (Butler, 2010), is a well-known trope from candid-camera television – and has the effect of calling attention to the fact that something spectacular, extraordinary or even weird is going on. In this case, the interesting and entertaining anomaly is Stoltenberg – both as a known face and as Prime Minister – hanging out in the street.

4.1.5 Sum-up

To sum up, '*Taxi Stoltenberg*' was created by the largest political party in Norway, a party that has considerable resources to spend on campaigning, including access to and a good relationship with one of Norway's most celebrated advertising agencies. Both political party and advertising agency appeared pleased with their relationship.

The preferred reading of the advertisement as verbalized by producers is that Stoltenberg is a man of the people, has an ear to the voice of the people, and is close to the people as a candidate. This appears to be a quite clear cut response to a situation in which Stoltenberg is perceived to be stiff and technocratic, and a person that people are a little sick and bored of after eight years in power. Furthermore, the advertisement wishes to establish the person seen in the taxi as the 'real', or 'authentic' Stoltenberg. The ad wishes to establish this sense of proximity through showcasing Stoltenberg's abilities of interpersonal communication, or in Meyrowitz' (1985) terms: his abilities at successfully performing a kind of middle-region behavior. Salient aspects of the ad are the similarity to candid-camera productions, the films reliance on the personal and human qualities of Stoltenberg rather than emphasis on political argumentation or information, and the extensive negative press coverage that circulated some days after the film's original release and consequent praise in the press. While producers stress the films' emphasis on proximity, the text also positions Stoltenberg as eminent and extraordinary, both through narration and choice of genre.

Taxi Stoltenberg places a heavy emphasis on strategies of personalization and the forging of personal bonds between a political leader and the people through demonstrating a form of ordinariness and proximity. The ad is also devoid of political content in the form of information on issues and standpoints. Understood as a potential resource for citizenship, the ad should provide a springboard for discussing both the role of the pure image-appeal in political advertising, as well as providing fuel for talk about and thoughts around what a good political leader should be like – and what balance of proximity and eminence citizens want and appreciate.

4.2 The Conservative Party 2013: The periphery politicians and the Hollywood director

The camera is faced directly towards a small airplane cockpit¹⁸. We see two pilots inside, one male and one female. The male pilot flips switches, we hear the sound of an airplane engine powering up. The female pilot reaches for the controls, but has her hand slapped away by her colleague, who states that he is the one in control. The copilot responds by stating: “I thought you said work for all”, to which he laughingly responds: “You obsess about everything I say”. The female pilot then proceeds to state that a lot of things don’t really work in the plane. Her colleague replies by stating that there are a lot of things functioning too, and that if one “focuses on what works, they’ll forget about everything else”. The man, now addressing himself as captain, speaks on the intercom, stating that the plane soon will be ready for departure and that the estimated flight time is two hours. The copilot appears shocked and attempts to interject, but is shushed. When she confronts the captain with the fact that the flight time is much longer, the captain says that: “It takes a little longer than that, but we have to say this to get passengers”. The screen cuts to a white background, and the text “Tired of empty promises?” appears on screen, fading into a logo, stating “Vote the Conservative Party. New ideas and better solutions”. The screen then cuts back to the airplane cockpit, in which the female copilot says that it’s time to go. The captain checks his watch, turns off the plane engine and says “No. Now it’s lunchtime”. As he puts on his captain’s hat, the screen cuts to the white background, and the text “Use your right to vote on September 9”, fading back into the party logo.

¹⁸ Watch the ad here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ac2em-CFmrc>



Figure 5: The exterior shot of the cockpit, and the captain talking.

4.2.1 Process and workflow

Interestingly, the advertisement was originally produced not for the 2013 National election, but for the 2011 local election, speaking directly to a situation in Østfold County at the time:

An important part of the background here is that the Labor Party had been in power for 25 consecutive years in the county. We really wanted to communicate our wish, which was a change

(Krogstad)

According to the informant's own recollection, the director Harald Zwart approached the political party first, offering his assistance in the upcoming local election campaign. As a consequence, there was no advertising agency involved, but rather a more direct cooperation between director, script writer and political party. It would appear as though the former were involved for idealistic reasons. Zwart, who himself grew up in Østfold county, apparently wanted to contribute to his local political party. Considering Zwart's long career as a director, the informant's initial wishes were that he could make some sort of film for them, because of his special competence within that field.

It is clear that a lot of creative freedom was handed over to the director and scriptwriter. The politicians emphasized that their main message for the campaign was the need for a change of power:

Eventually we had a little meeting where we aired some ideas and ways to do this. We also got to see the script before it was final. What we wanted to focus on was the main message, which was that someone has been in charge for many, many years – now is the time for something ... new. And then they came up with this idea, which I think works very well

(Milde)

Over all, the politicians seemed very pleased with the end result. Milde stated that it felt good and fun to both meet and work with an environment of creative people. Krogstad said that the movie itself was an example of what skilled professionals can achieve within their field, and Schou particularly maintained that she was pleased with both the overall quality as well as the humoristic tone in the advertisement.

After the initial contact between Zwart and the Conservative Party was made, the party contacted scriptwriter Pål Sparre Enger and Harald Zwart. They subsequently functioned as both advertisement agency and production agency, a two part collaboration. The political party did not contribute creatively, as this was handled by the producers alone. Zwart and Enger mention that they experienced the cooperation with the political party as professional and trust-based.

As mentioned, the film was originally produced for the local election of 2011, and then reused in 2013. The informants could tell that the advertisement actually got a lot more attention in the national election than in the local election.

It generated the most traffic in 2013. We just put the movie out on our Facebook page, which at the time had 500 followers. And the movie ... it really took off, it stopped at 290,000 views on Facebook

(Krogstad)

Both politicians and advertisers draw on the film's more universal and general appeal as a possible explanation for why the transfer from local to national context apparently worked well: producers Zwart and Enger maintain that "the message is as much a general Conservative Party message as a specifically local message". Furthermore, the politicians, who really seem to have taken a stronger liking to the ad as time has passed, offered the more general topics of the film as an explanation:

I think many people can relate to this situation. It is universal, in a way – that there is a stiff management, and then there are the young, who wish to take over. This could be true for workplaces as well, and other arenas where people might recognize the situation – and this makes the whole thing a little deeper

(Milde)

As we shall later see in reception, and as I will mention later in this chapter when going through insights from the textual analysis, the ad's general themes could also lead to an appeal that is too universal, in the sense that people might interpret the ad as belonging to other domains than the political.

4.2.2 Intention: time for a change

As a response to a situation in which the opposition had been in power for 25 years, the Conservative Party in Østfold wanted to communicate the need for a change in power.

The main message is very simple. The thought behind it is that you have one person that has been doing the same thing for many, many years – and who did not care for new ideas and new thoughts, and pushed these away. And then you had one person who had these new ideas. And this should be presented with humor

(Milde)

In addition to presenting the main message with humor, the informants emphasized that it was important not to overstate the message in the advertisement. They wanted the viewers to think for themselves, and not feel like the message was delivered in a heavy-handed manner:

There is a trust in the voter in this film. It presupposes that people are wise, that people can think for themselves and realize what is going on (...) the film is funny; it is not just all about the fight, the issue, and work for everybody and so on. People can recognize a little something from their own lives in it as well – sometimes it pays off to do things a little differently. It is more universal, not only political

(Schou)

The quote above indicates a preference for argumentation through enthymeme and missing premises, which the viewer has to infer for herself. This form of argumentation has been popular in some traditions, for instance the US tradition after Tony Schwartz and his theory of the responsive chord (Diamond & Bates, 1992, p. 114f; Schwartz, 1974). However, it has not really been typical for the Norwegian type of political advertisements seen since 1995 (Iversen, 2016). It is also a good example of an audience conception that envisions people as intelligent and able to reach their own conclusions that are reminiscent of ideals of rhetorical citizenship.

When asked if there were any clues in the script, which point towards the fact that this advertisement should be interpreted politically, the politicians mention the use of the heavy dialect – which undoubtedly would work as a clue in a local context, but not so well in a national one. However, they also mention the copilot's utterance of "I though you said work for all..." which is a reference to, and a mockery of a well known slogan for the Labour Party: "Work for all".

Producers Zwart and Enger sum up their intended message briefly: "Time for something new". They elaborate their execution of the intended message by stating that they wished to produce something that showcased why the old solution was a problem: "The Labour Party's dogmatic belief in old recipes was a nice point of departure for the advertisement" (Enger).

According to the politicians, the movie was intended to convey a message that the Labour Party is stagnated, and in desperate need of replacement. The lead pilot is slow, elderly, and not open to new ideas. As for what the film states about the Conservative Party, the politicians mentioned that the female copilot seems competent, more so than the lead pilot. Furthermore, she is "fresh and good looking" (Schou) and honest. Whereas the lead pilot wants to mask the truth, she seems concerned about promising too much, and wants to say it like it is. Informant Schou then extrapolates this idea to a bigger idea, that she feels is central to the Conservative Party:

[The copilot] is more concerned with keeping promises. And that is... that is the Conservative party. If you are to govern, you have to state your intent, you

have to follow through – but you also have to mention how much it costs and how long it takes – and then you have to stand by that

(Schou)

Producers Zwart and Enger vocalize this even clearer:

Ideally, the film should leave the impression that the Conservative Party is the only responsible option in a system that is stuck. As for the Labour Party, the film should communicate that they are in fact the party responsible for the system getting stuck

(Enger)

The success of the “stuck system” narrative that Enger talks about in the quote above, is dependent on viewers actually connecting the dots between the two pilots and the two specific political parties. As I shall argue below, this could be a problematic point in some instances.

4.2.3 Salient aspects: *Soft-attack, metaphor and understatement.*

Salient aspects of this ad are connected to valence and the use of metaphor and understatement. In terms of valence, the ad does not argue for the benefits of the Conservative Party, but only makes fun of the weaknesses of the Labour Party. It is an attack ad. However, as it is presented using humor, ridicule and bright colors, it is what is called a “soft attack” ad (Swint, 1998), as opposed to the “hard attack”, which uses dark colors, somber music and often dystopian scenarios – borrowing heavily from the genres of horror and thriller (Richardson Jr, 2008, p. 67). When confronted with the criticism present in the ad, the producers implicitly point to precisely this “soft” character as a redeeming factor:

MHI: There is a certain criticism here, too.

Erik Milde: Yes, of course.

Gjermund Krogstad: But it is also the case that when he flips switches, he says that a lot of things are working, too. [laughter] So it’s not pure mudslinging!

Seemingly, the producers are of the opinion that the use of humor takes the edge of the criticism, and makes it more feasible. Schou states that the film is made with humor and irony, and not in a way that “paints it black”. Milde also stressed that they wanted

no mudslinging or typical platitudes that are sent from one side of politics to the other. Krogstad mentioned that they were concerned about the film being perceived as “negative campaigning”, and that they sought to avoid this. Schou comments on negative campaigning in the Norwegian context, stating that it does not fly well in Norway, and that “you can argue against, but you should not badmouth the opponent, we don’t like that in Norway. You have to stay with the issue, go for the ball, not the man” (Schou).

When asked about the potential *risk* of understatement, the politicians answered by confirming their belief in the viewer, and stressed that this was intentional: “It is central that people have to think a little for themselves – that people aren’t told everything – that they think: ‘Yes, this is the Labour Party and the Conservative Party’, but here you had to use your own intelligence to understand that...” (Milde).

4.2.4 Insights from textual analysis

Recalling the producers explicit trust in the viewer, one could still imagine that the advertisement is too implicit – for instance if one does not catch the small cues, such as the mockery of the Labour Party slogan “work for all”. A possibility then is that viewers either do not make an explicit connection to the realm of politics, or that they do not catch the intended reading of the pilots representing the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. Not making the political connection is possible through thinking that the ad is about competing airlines, or some sort of play on gender or age. Not making the party political connection could lead to vague notions of opposing political sides, but uncertainty as to who is who. Granted, the sender of the ad is revealed by the ending still and the party logo. However, the relative implicitness until that part of the ad could lead to a range of different readings. As we shall see in the reception interviews, people with a keen interest in politics grasped the connection immediately, whilst people not as interested in politics initially thought the ad was about something else entirely – even though they were participating in a focus group on political films. It is possible that the producers somehow made an ad that is subtle and requires a certain knowledge about current politics to decode it in the manner that the admakers intended.

While the producers fended off questions of negativity by pointing to the soft character of the attack, there still is absolutely no *probatio*-argumentation present. Such an argument is typical of a pure attack ad (Jamieson, 2001). In the present case, the ad implicitly argues against the Labour Party's way of governing, but does not implicitly or explicitly argue for a particular way of government represented by the Conservative Party. In the best case, the viewer attains a notion that the Conservative Party would govern differently from the Labour Party's way of complacency and stagnation. The party's slogan helps towards this interpretation – "new ideas and better solutions" – however, the spectator is never let in on the actual content of these ideas and solutions.

A final aspect that was salient in examining the text, is the possible unintended reading of the Conservative Party as powerless. The ad positions the two pilots in a clear hierarchy, the captain is calling the shots and the copilot, while verbally expressing dismay and posing questions, follows suit, if somewhat disgruntlingly. This setup allows for effective ridicule of the captain, but runs the risk of rendering the copilot, representing the ad sponsor, as impotent. After all, the ad does not show her stopping or altering the course of action in any way. Combining this potential reading with the lack of *probatio*-argumentation could give the impression of a political party that is in a way playing along with the status quo, a party that is expressing some form of criticism, but that is not in a position to do anything about it. Such a position might not seem very attractive to a citizen about to cast her vote.

4.2.5 Sum-up

Summing up, the ad was seemingly made and disseminated by a large political party with a considerable budget for campaign material. However, this was not the case for the airplane ad, as it is a result of chance cooperation between a local branch of the party and a crew with a very high skill level in filmmaking working pro bono. The ad was originally made for the local election of 2011, but was disseminated again for the national election of 2013, where it gained a considerable audience on social media. The main intention of the ad was to communicate that there was a need for change in power by showing one side which was clearly stagnated and responsible for a "system that is stuck", and one side that was a fresh alternative. Conceptually, this

was done by presenting a dialogue between a pilot and a copilot in an airplane. From examining unarticulated tensions in the text, I gather that the ad holds the potential of being misunderstood through being too implicit, thus appealing mostly to people that are politically savvy. The ad is a soft attack ad, presenting only critique of the opposition. While the producers stress the use of humor and irony when asked about this, the fact remains that a lot of people will react to the ‘all-negative’ approach. This also runs the risk of presenting the Conservative Party as completely unable to alleviate the situation.

The ad is a good example of how a soft attack ad can look in a Norwegian context. It provides no substantial issue information, and only critiques an opposing party while employing humor to avoid being perceived as too crass. The ad is also implicit – the producers have chosen to trust that viewers will understand that the ad is really about the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, and to understand the airplane/pilot, country/leader-metaphor. In terms of how it can function as a resource for citizenship, this ad provides plenty opportunity for discussing when and how negativity is perceived as legitimate and reasonable, as well as the role and function of entertainment along the entertainment-issue-continuum. Lastly, the reliance on metaphor is an interesting case from the perspective of reception research. As we shall see in the reception interviews, the cues that were dead giveaways to the producers were interpreted quite differently among the groups of informants.

4.3 The Christian Democratic Party 2013: Personalizing the political platform

The ad¹⁹ features a series of scenes presenting different aspects of the Christian Democratic Party’s (CDP) policies, with party leader Knut Arild Hareide placed in the center of all situations. Hareide starts off talking to the camera whilst walking on a gravel path in nature. We then see him in various degrees of immersion in a series of situations. He interacts with the people he is present with, but more importantly, faces and talks to the camera, presenting policy related to the environment he is in. We see him having breakfast with a young couple and an infant, at a preschool, in front of a

¹⁹ Available to watch at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXWV-7z8xNI>.

school, walking his bike on the street, playing soccer with children and visiting a senior lady in her home. Finally, we see Hareide in front of the Norwegian parliament. The screen fades to white, and the party logo is shown. The joyful music that has been playing throughout the ad increases in volume.



Figure 6: Hareide feeds a baby, and proceeds to address the camera, leaving the family as background (Top left, top right), plays soccer with children and visits a senior lady in her house. The lady is seen making coffee and preparing biscuits in the background, while Hareide talks about policy for the elderly in her couch in the foreground.

4.3.1 Production and workflow

According to the actors themselves, this was the first cooperation between CDP and Buss & Media. Additionally, this was Buss & Media's first experience working with a political party, since their normal customer base lies in private business and work with documentary filmmaking. In this case, the CDP contacted the film production company on their own initiative. What followed was a phase of back-and-forth-discussions regarding what type of film that could work. However, both the representatives of the film production company and the communications advisors in the CDP emphasized that it was Sørås and Bernsen that worked out the general

purpose of the ad, as well as the idea of how the ad would look, work and function. Consequently, the CDP came to the production company with a clear idea that they could start working on in a practical manner, with limited time and resources on their hands.

Both workflow and production is to some degree characterized by a sparse budget. As a consequence of this, filming was conducted during one day of shooting in Bergen, Norway, as well as some additional scenes shot in Oslo. There were no professional actors involved, in spite of the film consisting of a series of constructed situations. The people seen in the background of the film are "people close to us, and around us in Bergen. It's people we know. My son is there, playing football", as film maker Kjenes put it. The featured people are friends, family and acquaintances. Additionally, some local CDP politicians and members of the youth party were used as extras. Time constraints are explicitly called attention to. One producer mentions an "extremely tight schedule" (Kjenes), and another seems to be critical of his work in hindsight: "What annoys me a little bit is the short time that was available when we were working on it. We should have made sure we had enough time to make several takes" (Steffensen). The time constraints are also mentioned by the communications advisors at the Christian Democratic Party. When asked if there were any issues involved in making the film, they stated "major problems with time" and talked about experiencing a situation in which they were constantly under pressure, which made it so that "things could have been better all the time" (Bernsen).

4.3.2 Intention: personalized presentations of the party program

A central intention, mentioned both by political party and production agency, was to present the party's political program, or at least some core issues, for the 2013 national election:

Knut Arild [the party leader] walks through the most important parts in his party program, and we have a background to visualize it. He is put into settings that tie everything together – some placed in Bergen, some in Oslo. The point is to visualize the points of his speech, without just putting him up against a neutral and boring background. And this could be experienced as everything from interesting to awkward – but the point here is to visualize.

(Kjenes)

In the film, we see Hareide at home with a young family, playing soccer with some children, using a bike, visiting an elderly lady, et cetera. The decision to visualize and dramatize the political speech in the talking head format to a greater degree, was based on previous experiences the CDP had with advertising agencies. Recalling the election of 2009, informants told a tale about an expensive and good looking but dead and boring commercial. It featured some of the top candidates from the party talking to the camera. For the 2013 election, they wished to do something more exciting, and to save money by using their own creative in-house competence for ideas and script writing, as well as a wish to attempt to create an emotional bond between the party and party leader, and the voter. In their own words, to "say something more than just state the individual policy cases". Throughout, there was a wish to create a positive feeling about the Christian Democratic Party.

We had done studio productions before, but this time we wanted to go for a more everyday setting – to make the whole thing more natural and accessible (...) if someone is just standing upright and talking into a camera, it can appear very preachy – and we wanted to soften this aspect a little

(Bernsen)

In addition to avoiding the “preachy” feel of the pure talking-head ad, informants also talked about appealing to emotions through bringing Hareide closer to the voters:

To speak to people’s instincts– and to place Knut Arild into situations that people actually experience in their lives, rather than having Hareide talking to people, we wanted to place him in the actual environments that we have politics for

(Sørås)

The reason for appealing to such "warm emotions", was part of a deliberate communications strategy, according to the informants. They desired the film to be "informative, but in a light way" (Bernsen), and to be very understandable. Thus, they attempted to strip the manuscript that Hareide performed in front of the camera of any signs of "politician's language" (Bernsen) – to keep the language more in an everyday tone than what is usually the case for politicians.

How do you visualize a type of politics where you want a safe childhood and better conditions for the elderly? If you want to do this, you have to put the

party leader together with a lot of kids, and he has to look comfortable with them, so that people realize that 'oh, he likes kids!' Just that can contribute to them thinking or feeling that they believe in their message about wanting good politics for children... or the volunteer's section

(Sørås)

The use of party leader Hareide as lead character was, as the two informants from the political party put it, mainly caused by Hareide being their "strongest card". The informants mentioned that they have surveys showing that there are quantitatively more people who are positive to Knut Arild Hareide than to the Christian Democratic Party in general. Furthermore, foregrounding their likeable party leader seems to be a red thread throughout the planning of their campaign in general, and the advertisement in particular:

If you like a person, then the message that person brings has a much greater credibility to you. And that is how we have been thinking in terms of building up Knut Arild Hareide's profile. He is a likeable fellow, and the moments where you create that feeling do not happen when you are just talking about politics (...) it is a conscious choice from our side, in order for people to get to know him as a person. And people you know a little more personally – you might be more open to thinking that their political message actually has real substance

(Sørås)

The above quote is a good example of how producers operationalize the logic of personalization (Hjarvard, 2013) when they craft their messages, but it is also indicative of how personality becomes a way of thinking about and around politics for producers – which is also highly at work in the reception interviews. Personality becomes a factor for navigating the world of politics, and is often used to answer inherent questions of trustworthiness and ethos (McCroskey, 2001) – in this case *eunoia*, good will, as an important prerequisite for trust.

In terms of desired audience, young people were named explicitly, as well as people for whom family and family values are important. It was mentioned that one way to reach younger voters is simply to make a film and distribute it through new media, in contrast to just delivering a letter to the potential voter through the mail. Although the main audience were supporters on Facebook, which according to the

informants automatically entails appealing to a younger crowd of people, there are elements in the film that appeal to other groups of voters as well. For instance, the sequence at the end featuring the senior lady:

That part with the elderly lady, it is deliberate in many ways, because even though we were not appealing mainly to elderly voters, we do know that Knut Arild Hareide is very popular among the old ladies. So to put him there on the couch next to an old lady, we thought that would warm... a lot of adult hearts...
[laughs]

(Bernsen)

Seemingly, the film is meant to appeal to different audiences at different times, depending on who is featured in the background of the film.

4.3.3 Salient aspects: people as props and split intentions

A salient aspect of this ad is how Hareide is presented as the main character in each separate situation, while the people he is surrounded by seem to be presented as part of a static background, that Hareide may choose to interact with or not. In the film, Hareide moves from situation to situation, not changing clothes for instance – wearing a sport coat and a business casual style throughout the film. Having conducted some focus groups, I noticed that many informants laughed at the moment in which Hareide feeds a young couple's baby, while they are watching, before he turns away from them and faces the camera to speak. This made me question the producers regarding how they conceptualized this idea, but also whether some of these situations contained jokes. The division between Hareide and the people in the environments he visits were explicated as intentional by the producers. Furthermore, it was a conscious decision to have Hareide wear a suit throughout all scenes. It was a conscious decision to have Hareide feeding the baby, in the home of the family he is visiting. This is in line with a central thought for the advertisement – that Hareide is the main protagonist in the different scenes:

The thought behind it is that he is in the situation and talking to the camera at the same time. And the others should not relate to the camera. They are extras, in a way, and Hareide is moving through the different environments

(Bernsen)

The theme for this scene was "flexibility for families". In this scene, the mother in the house goes to work, and the father stays behind with the baby. The informants mentioned that this was also a way to counter critiques and myths about their political party:

We meet his kind of argumentation from other parties – saying that we want the women back in the kitchen. But that is not our point; our point is that the families should have the freedom to choose, and flexibility

(Sørås)

The informants stated that they had not employed humor in the ad. When I told them that some people I had shown the film to had reacted with amusement to Hareide feeding the baby, they restated their intent that “he was supposed to be in the situation while talking to the camera at the same time”. Bernsen added that she understood that people laughed a little at it, “if it was a little weird”.

The fact that Hareide is wearing a sport coat in all scenes was also a conscious decision. An alternative could be more informal wear, or changing attires to match the different situations, but the producers and political party decided to opt for having Hareide wear his more formal wear in all scenes, with the reason that the intention was to introduce the *politician* into different scenarios. There seems to be a form of tension between this placing of the politician into various settings, the wish to employ people as a form of props or background, and the wish to showcase Hareide’s likeable personality. Recalling Kjenes’ brief mention of this in the quote I cited earlier in this text, further accentuates this: “It is unnatural that he’s there from the get go, but that is to visualize a point” (Kjenes). As I will discuss below, this tension could prove problematic.

4.3.4 Insights from textual analysis

While it was a conscious choice to let Hareide wear his sport coat in all situations, as a form of device intended to secure some visual consistency, it could have undesired effects. Here, the producers are running the risk of accentuating Hareide less as a main character or narrator – and more as an intruder or anomaly. A man running

into a soccer field with formal attire to play ball can be perceived as unnatural. Generally, having Hareide function as a focal point and the other people in the ad function as background, could have further unforeseen consequences. Following the logic of personalization of political communication, it could be beneficial to show how Hareide was able to have relaxed and ‘normal’ conversations and interactions with various people (Hjarvard, 2013; Meyrowitz, 1985). Rather, there is little or no interaction. This gives the impression of Hareide ignoring all the people present with him, in order to deliver long political speeches to the camera. This might come off as rude and impolite – as we watch the old lady make coffee and prepare biscuits for Hareide in the background of the shot, I am tempted to think of her – and indeed all the other persons acting in the film – as props. Means to an end for Hareide, who positions himself in all these situations – but ultimately ends up using people to come off as a man that can appeal to a lot of different people. Hareide is talking about people, in front of them, instead of talking properly to them. As we shall later examine in the reception interviews, the lack of interaction between Hareide and the people in the film also produces some moments that stand out: Hareide feeding the baby constitutes a norm violation: one does not feed other people’s children, especially when the parents do not appear to know Hareide, or be comfortable with him – since there is no talking or interaction going on. In some situations, Hareide can appear as an intruder – an anomaly – which is precisely the opposite of what the producers intended.

This distancing between Hareide and the other people present in the ad through clothing and (lack of) interaction is further accentuated by the way the film is filmed. Hareide is usually presented in medium-to-long-shots, with only the occasional close-up. While this is not necessarily a barrier for proximity, it does not necessarily support the invitation to intimacy that the producers envisioned either, following the logic of Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996) on visual language and framing.

Considering the articulated intention gathered from the production interviews, the ads’ intention is split: seemingly, the producers’ wishes are torn between wanting to inform the viewer on political issues and standpoints on the one hand, and

emphasizing personal attributes of the party leader on the other. It is questionable whether this is possible to a satisfactory degree. Coming across as a true individual could be hard if all one talks about is the collective decisions of a party, gathered from a party program. Hareide is performing the role of the politician rather than enacting his own persona. The ad belongs to the talking head genre, in which a politician normally presents verbal arguments to the camera. One could posit that this is not really the best format to show off abilities of natural conversation, or aspects of the politician as a private/personal individual.

4.3.5 Sum-up

To sum up, the film from the Christian Democratic Party was made by a small political party with a limited budget and considerable constraints in terms of time. These were explicitly mentioned as problematic by both communications advisors and production agency. The ad was the result of a combination of ideas made by in-house communications staff, executed by an outside production agency. Conceptually, the ad shows party leader Knut Arild Hareide moving between situations in the role of the politician – he is the centerpiece, and the situations and the people in it are meant to function as a form of illustrative background. The main intention of the ad is split: both to inform and argue for a number of key political standpoints on issues, but also to bring Hareide close to people. The thought was that these two aspects – the personal and the issue-oriented, could be combined through foregrounding the party leader Hareide and his pleasant persona. Turning to my analysis of the text, I identify as problematic the choice of using Hareide as main character and people as background. Hareide could be perceived as an intruder rather than a natural part of the situations in which he is featured. The choice of film language and genre does not necessarily fit with the intention of showing off Hareide as a pleasant person.

The ad is a good demonstration of a mixed form in which large amounts of political argumentation meets personalization. Thus, it should provide fertile grounds for discussion on and thinking about the balance between image and issue, as well as personalization. Furthermore, the salient and potentially dissonant use of clothing and acting (sport coat in all situations, feeding babies) provides an interesting example from the perspective of reception: how do people read these signals as cues? Do they

read the feeding of the child as proof of intimacy and Hareide's personal skills, or as a norm violation? Do they view Hareides soccer stunt in sport coat as spontaneous and natural, or as scripted and contrived? As we shall see in the reception interviews, the split motivation and the mentioned cues in some instances lead to a complete breakdown in perceived trustworthiness and social approval, making this an interesting case study of how filmic cues trigger different reactions in audiences. Regardless of execution, the producers' thoughts on personalized content is interesting in terms of how political ads can function as a resource for citizenship, as it indicates how communicating personality in film form can provide a way to navigate the realm of politics.

4.4 The Centre Party 2013: Skin, hand wrestling and body paint

Two men armwrestle against a white background²⁰ to the tune of a sombre piano melody. Their clashing hands, and their strained facial expressions are shown in close-ups and extreme close-ups. We see drops of sweat on their forehead. Hashtags, such as #lifeforce, #strengtt, #wholelife, #zestforlife and #lifetotheyears appear on screen. The senior man wins the duel, and celebrates intensely, raising his fists to the sky, cheering. The screen fades to white, and the party logo is shown, before cutting to a still image of party leader Liv Signe Navarsete.

²⁰ A local version of the film can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPG0Z0U-DmM>. Note that this differs from the national version I analyzed by showing a local politician, not the party leader at the end.



Figure 7: An old man and a young man armwrestle. The senior man wins, celebrating with great intensity. The ending still of the party leader is shown bottom right.

A map of roads²¹, rivers and streams is seen, with the hashtag #lifeblood superimposed, to the same tune of music as before. A new shot presents the same map, but from a different angle, revealing the shape of an upper body, with skin visible to the right. The hashtag #transportartery is superimposed. Another shot reveals a human neck painted in the same fashion, visibly breathing or swallowing, and the hashtag #viable. Cut to the upper body of a young man, in complete body paint, save for his face. The background is white, and the hashtag #lifeblood has reappeared. The young man looks directly into the camera, before turning his gaze down upon himself, smiling, and once again making eye contact with the camera. The hashtag #allofNorway appears. The screen fades to white, and the party logo is shown.

²¹ The film can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ4Ngh3yZyw>.

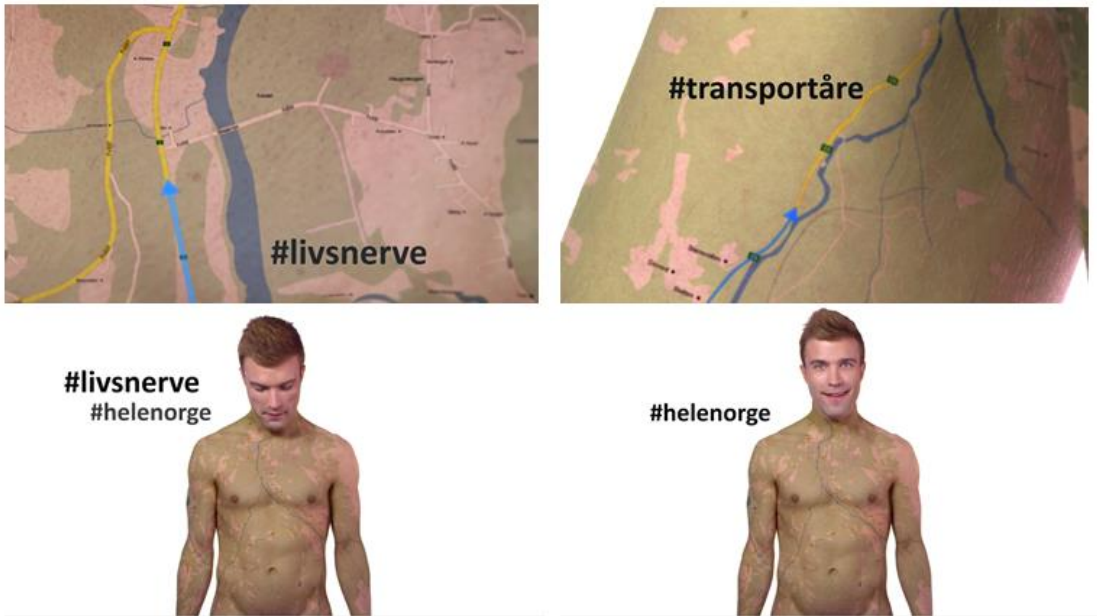


Figure 8: A map is revealed to be painted upon a young man, who looks down on himself with wonder before he gazes into the camera, smiling.

4.4.1 Production and workflow

According to my informant, the two films produced for the election were conceived as a consequence of wanting to “strengthen the areas of elderly care and transport in the campaign” (Olsen). The Centre Party is a small party, and this is reflected in the size of the production:

We have a small party organization, so this was not more complex than that those who worked with communication and myself discussed how we could use the movie format in social media in a good way. We discussed this with those who were to produce the film, and after some discussion, we went for their idea to use the persons in the film in that way

(Olsen)

Olsen further elaborates that the Centre Party experienced the party’s cooperation with the advertising agency as “tidy and clear”. This may very well be the case. However, there is good reason to suspect that this is a somewhat sugarcoated version of events, as secondary sources can attest to. The 2013 election was not good for the Centre Party, who lost a significant amount of votes. Judging from an internal report

evaluating the 2013 campaign that leaked to the press, the process was less than optimal. The following can be read under the subheading “Film and external partners”:

There is doubtlessly potential in producing films for social media, but the products came too late, had too unclear messages and were simply not good enough when compared to the quite extensive use of resources. Some of the other material from the external partner worked well, but too much was delivered too late, and without meeting the order. The external consultants still functioned positively as sparring partners (CP, 2013, p. 59).

Interestingly, this quote could suggest a process that was too fast, and not sufficiently anchored in the political party as organization to be accepted. In light of the statements on the importance of organizational anchoring that Sindre Fossum Beyer explains for the Labour Party film of 2015, this seems to be a potential trap that producers can fall into. Mainly, however, the above quote indicates a problematic production process.

4.4.2 Intention: communicating policy

The explicit intentions of the ads, according to Olsen, were to attempt to gain or strengthen issue ownership concerning policy for the elderly and for transport and infrastructure. The Centre Party wanted to communicate that “the elderly are not a uniform and weak group, but are as diverse as people in society at large, and because of this we should have policy that takes this into account”, and that “good arterial roads are as important for the country as arteries for a human” (Olsen). By making and disseminating ads on these very subjects, the aim was to alert voters that the Centre Party “are conscious of this, and that we have good political solutions for these important areas of Norwegian public life”. Furthermore, Olsen stated that they hoped that the movies would arouse people’s curiosity, and have a certain “stop-effect” that would ensure exposure. In terms of intended audience, Olsen is not specific, but he talks about how “our experience is that it is not just seniors that are concerned with senior care, and because of this, it was relevant for most groups. The same goes for transport, because almost everybody uses a road almost every day” (Olsen). The Centre Party did not have a narrow target audience in mind, but attempted to make an ad for “most groups”.

While Olsen was not explicitly evaluative or critical of the ad in our interview, secondary documents suggest that there was explicit discontent in the party organization around the films after the election was over. In the internal report that I referred to above, the films are criticized to such an extent that it even sparked some attention from the press, with the headline “CP representatives slaughter their own election campaign film” (Sørenes & Kristiansen, 2013). In the report, the films are characterized as “useless” (CP, 2013, p. 44).

4.4.3 Salient aspects: Use of skin, use of hashtags, low narration/anchoring.

I identify the conspicuous presence of bare skin, the use of numerous hashtags and a noticeable absence of verbal and textual anchoring of the message and meaning of the ad as salient aspects. Because the interviewee, while generous to grant his time and answers, was not the principal handler of the situation, as well as the fact that the interview took place quite some time after the production of the ad, I will draw on aspects of my textual analysis to a greater degree in the following part.

4.4.4. Insights from textual analysis

Both scenes feature a high degree of nudity, and a focus on the human body. A sympathetic reading of this is that the Centre Party, being an agrarian party, is concerned with healthy and locally produced food, in combination with adherence to the ideal type of the healthy, hardworking farmer, and thus in extension fit and active bodies, such as those we are presented with on screen. Furthermore, that the presence of bare skin is something that is natural and good. While none of these statements are controversial, a less sympathetic reading would argue that this high use of nakedness and focus on bodies, while perhaps suitable for other contexts, is a complete misfit in the domain of politics. Both the armwrestling men and the painted man showcase a form of childish naïveté: The two men are completely engulfed in play, and the senior man seems completely enthralled by his own emotions after winning. He succumbs to the rush of winning, and celebrates like no one was watching, in a moment of pure glee. One might even say that the intensity of the celebration is overblown, as such intensity is usually reserved for truly lifechanging moments, or performed after great athletic achievements – not simply beating another man at armwrestling. Such an

overblown glee at one's own victory can be perceived as childish. The painted man can trigger similar thoughts as he stands in front of us, proud and fascinated by himself.

The fact that he gazes down on himself, and smiles in what seems like a sensation of pride and wonder can be perceived a naïve act, because it looks like he is marvelling at his own physical form in a moment of childlike wonder. One could suppose that many specators, as they also did in the reception of the ad, thought that he was looking down on his own genitals in pride, further adding to the sense of lacking decorum.

Thinking along a nature/society-dichotomy, the realm of politics is that of civilization, of clothing and of roles – not the realm of a kind of suspended natural state of innocence and wonder that the ad presents. Furthermore, the whole presence of naked skin is in conflict with norms and traditions of Norwegian political culture, that usually shows a preference for arguments and issues over personality, and a style that is modest and unassuming rather than glamorous or spectacular. Although the Centre Party has played on the nudity/natural-connection before²², this has usually been the exception rather than the rule. The use of bare skin can invoke a form of glamour or sex appeal that is in conflict with the more sober ideals of Norwegian political rhetoric. As we shall later see in the reception interviews, several informants reacted strongly to these scenes, experiencing them as norm violations, both in terms of the usual discourse of political content, and in an interpersonal manner. Or as one informant exclaimed: “I can't understand why they were supposed to be without clothes. They could have arm-wrestled with clothes on, too” (M2, Left leaning).

The amount of hashtags presented in both scenes can be confusing, or lead to a presumably unintended humorous response. Hashtags, while in no way a stable genre of communication, can be said to represent a focal point, or a form of communicative peg one attaches ideas, thoughts and utterances to (Bruns & Moe, 2014, p. 17ff). A hashtag

²² At one point during the 1960's, the Centre Party's Prime Minister Per Borten gave an interview wearing nothing but underpants. The Centre Party's youth organization has released a calendar with scantily clad youth politicians, and the Centre Party itself has in the past produced election material playing upon the themes of nudity, the natural, and nature, appealing to a sort of farmer-ethos.

is part headline and part topic (Bruns & Moe, 2014). By presenting many different hashtags, you risk confusing the viewer by introducing too many focal points – a continuing stream of headlines, lacking follow-up in the form of arguments or context. It is possible that the producers simply wished to introduce a number of keywords that they thought to be descriptive of some values or issues that they wanted the Centre Party to be associated with. In that case, one might ask why they simply did not write out the keywords as words, without the hashtag in front. It is also possible that the producers wished to give off a youthful impression. However, this could clash with the Centre Party's ethos as a party for rural areas and traditional values. It is also a possibility that the producers were simply unsure of how to use hashtags in a fitting manner, but had an impression that such devices are important on social media, and that the result mirrors this confusion. As I will discuss further in the reception interviews, some people might also find the use of numerous hashtags excessive, tasteless, or something one associates with teenagers desperately attempting to get likes – or even an old person's idea of what young people are all about.

An overarching issue with both advertisements is the lack of anchoring – of verbal, visual or textual elements that convey a sense of direction, narrative or argument, that guides the viewer's attention and focus. When analyzing the ad's formal system, asking the question of “what is the central organizing principle of the film” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 49; Iversen, 2017, p. 223), it is not clearly located in the narrative domain, nor in the genre of documentary. If the main argument is that one should vote for the Centre Party, because they have good policies for the elderly, or because good arteries of transportation are important – showing a man with bodypaint and an older man beating a younger man at armwrestling does not visualize or narrate that argument in a particularly explicit manner. For a spectator, witnessing the event of “senior man beats younger man at armwrestling” might just as well signify “the old are better than the young”, or “armwrestling is a fulfilling activity”, or even “winning is great”. The painted man gazing down upon himself could just as well express “I'm proud of how I look”, or “A man is like a map”. Because of the high degree of implicitness, and the relatively high reliance on visual metaphor, the admakers are running the risk of too high of a degree of polysemy, while at the same

time potentially coming in conflict with norms of appropriate behavior considering the heavy reliance on bare skin and glancing at one own's body.

4.4.5 Sum-up

To sum up, the two ads were made by a small political party with limited resources – only the Christian Democratic Party has less money to spend on an election campaign, when considering parties represented in the Storting in 2013. The intentions of the films were to create awareness around the areas of elderly policy and transport policy, and to state that the Centre Party has good political solutions for these areas of society. The texts, however, are characterized by the absence of narration. There is very little guiding the viewers' interpretation – and the excess of hashtags further clouds a clear argument. The effect becomes almost free-associative, contributed in part by the floating keywords. The risk then lies in the potential that viewers may interpret the ad in completely different ways than intended, because the preferred reading is not clearly enough articulated in the text. Furthermore, the choice to use bare skin because one wanted to communicate health and strength is audacious, because it might just as well be deemed inappropriate for the realm of politics.

Understood as a potential resource for citizenship, the texts present a rare opportunity to study political ads that has a high degree of polysemy. As we shall see in the reception interviews, they also become a springboard for discussing what is appropriate, as quite a lot of informants deem the whole endeavor unfitting and embarrassing at an interpersonal level. The films also become the center of a negotiation of what is the correct balance between a political party's initial ethos and what is presented in a persuasive message, as many informants deem the use of (modern) hashtags as out of place for the agrarian-oriented Centre Party.

4.5 The Labor Party 2015: Luring people into an argumentative long-form

The ad²³ starts off with an extreme close up of Labour Party leader Jonas Gahr Støre, with closed eyes against a grey background. He opens his eyes, and a medium-close-up shot of Støre appears. He is wearing semi-formal wear and smiles at the camera. An animated text reading “Our Norway: An exhibition in 92 seconds” pops up on his right hand side. A harmonic, light piano tune plays throughout the ad. A medium shot follows. Støre is standing next to a series of pictures hung on the grey wall behind him, showing different parts of Norway, as he starts speaking to the camera: “We live in a great country. But still, it matters who is in government. And now, there are things in our country that are headed in the wrong direction”. Støre then proceeds to talk about low employment rates and rising inequality. The camera cuts to pictures of young people in various occupations. The animations continue to follow Støre’s monologue, showing coins when he is talking about how the governments tax cuts leads to ordinary people getting only “a couple of kroner, whilst the kindergarten becomes more expensive”. Støre talks about how he would spend the money for the tax cut on more teachers, more employees in elderly care, and towards the development of climate friendly technology, creating tomorrow’s workplaces. As he talks about this, we see a close-up shot of young workers in the pictures – seemingly a young man working in construction, and a young woman working as a nurse. Støre then changes the subject to something else he “does not like”, which is worker’s rights under threat. He talks about the increase of part time employees, and how more people are forced to work on Sundays. Families will have more insecurity and less time together, Støre claims. Støre then turns to “another thing”: the increase of privatization and commercialization. He talks about the increase in commercial private schools, which could lead to “some of the nice things about Norway”, such as all children going to the same schools regardless of background, and experiencing the same things, being lost. The camera pans across a series of smiling children – one young boy in front of his desk in a classroom, another of a couple of pupils talking. Støre then states that he wants Norway to be a country with small differences and big opportunities, and he

²³ Watch the ad here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaGJPYHgmKg&>

ends by saying that he “hopes you agree with me, and will vote for the Labour Party”. As he delivers this final line, his personal signature appears in animated form on screen. Støre walks out of the frame, and the Labour Party logo appears in his place.

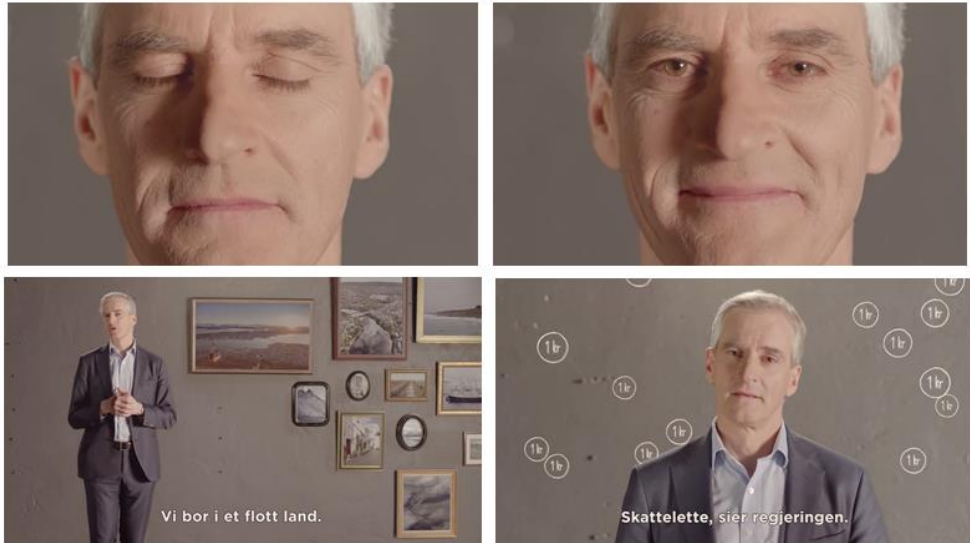


Figure 9: Jonas Gahr Støre opens his eyes (top) and proceeds to argue, alternated by pictures (bottom left) and animations (bottom right).

4.5.1 Production and workflow

As in the previous election, the Labor Party worked with the TRY advertising agency for their 2015 campaign. The process for 2015 seems to mirror that of 2013. Fossum Beyer describes it as “a normal process” in which one discusses a campaign strategy formulated by the central board and the national congress – something that is usually done one to two years before the election itself. An advertising agency is usually contacted and consulted when there is “a little under a year left until the election”. TRY then works with the convention, the national congress – work that involves a lot of design, such as visual profile, rigging, figuring out how the stage should look, where props should be put, et cetera. The second part of this concerns mediated communication. The party here usually approaches the ad agency with a formulated strategy and asks for “three ideas or three directions that can solve these tasks” (Beyer). Beyer describes the following creative progress as a back-and-forth, in which

the ad agency proposes something, and the party comments. He describes a situation in which the political party may very well have split motivations, or that the motives are not as clearly stated as they would wish:

(...) often in the dialogue, the political parties say: we need a very focused message. And the agencies make a very focused message, and then the parties say: well yes, and we also need school... care for the elderly

(Beyer)

Beyer describes this as “a lot of compromises between agency as party”, because one has to balance considerations of having a focused message, whilst at the same time maintaining a plethora of considerations that a large organization has to take at all times. Acting head of communications Bjørn Tore Hansen comments on this by stating that “it would be easier to just sell butter, but that is not exactly what we are doing here (...) we are supposed to reach all possible voters as well (...) like for instance [with] the Jonas film” (Hansen).

Interestingly, Beyer comments on his transition between working for a political party and advertising agency, and having a political party as a client versus having a commercial client. He states that in a commercial venture, there are a few people on top who are key players in deciding, and that a lot of the potential success of an ad is dependent on having access to these people. In a political party however, success is dependent on getting the entire organization on board, and then mobilizing around a message:

It is almost better to have a slightly poorer campaign that ten thousand people own, than a very good campaign that only those in Oslo own (...) the anchoring is incredibly important

(Beyer)

The above quotes point to an interesting constraint of the rhetorical situation in which one produces political advertising. Having to navigate organizational structures and creating a sense of ownership for the message is here emphasized as more important than crafting the best possible ad. In that sense, a political ad must in some cases not only persuade voters, but also large parts of an organization, whose members should feel that the message represents their values in a way that they are comfortable with.

Organizational goals and advertisers' goals are partly in conflict here . Organizations need to tend to several, and often contradicting, interests – leading to a wider focus – whereas the advertisers' logic would dictate a narrower, more focused approach. Hansen's comment on butter-selling is also interesting, because it is an example of adherence to deliberative ideals – he expresses a need to reach a lot of different people, not to persuade a target group, which is the more strategic way of going about the situation.

4.5.2. Intention: proximity and national narrative

The advertisement featuring Jonas Gahr Støre was part of a set of similar ads, in which the rest present local candidates for mayor in the major cities of Norway.

The informants were all well aware of the fact that a local election means concentrating on local issues, or as the campaign manager put it: “there were 462 elections [the number of municipalities in Norway at the time], and they were all supposed to be about local issues”. At the same time they were all explicitly concerned with the importance of addressing larger, national narratives. This was also stated to be a way of using the 2015 local election as a ‘springboard’ for the 2017 national election:

We were concerned with local issues and local candidates. But this was also the start of the road towards 2017. That's the reason for the value-based communication about Norway, right? The society that we want. Which values that give direction, both locally and nationally

(Scharning Lund)

An explicit intention of the advertisement was precisely to establish this “main message”, while evoking positive feelings about the Labour Party. As the head of communications formulates it:

One sets a mood, and we are telling our story, our main message, so that you are left with a feeling connected to this. That you are thinking – The Labour Party is good, plain and simple. I'm putting it banally, but that is what we want to achieve put in short

(Hansen)

Another aim of the advertisement was to communicate more general, value-based issues as the ones mentioned above, to appeal nationally during the local campaign. There was a clear conception that communicating the longer lines and greater issues like this would help maintain a steady narrative of Norway heading in the wrong direction ever since the change of government in 2013, which would prepare the ground in a beneficial way prior to the election of 2017. Beyer talks about this as “elevating the local election to also be about national politics and the greater challenges”. Beyer and Hansen both talk about “overarching stories” and “overarching elections” that have to do with the national government and the opposition, and communicating a “national main message” (Hansen). Beyer talks about how the film is supposed to anchor a “longer message in the apparatus”, by which he means the party’s supporters and partisans – and exposing them to a main line of reasoning and understanding the political conflict that they wished to foreground at a national level.

4.5.3 Salient aspects: Critique, balancing information and entertainment

I identify the relatively long duration (it runs for 92 seconds, which is considerably longer than most Norwegian political ads) of the advertisement, the presence of critique, the way party leader Støre is shot in extreme close-ups and close ups and the use of mise-en-scene and animation to guide attention to the important aspects of this ad. When asked about length, informants describe it as a form of experimentation. This kind of thinking around the value of experimenting is in line with the 2013 interviews in which informants expressed an explicit experimental attitude to new formats. Beyer describes this as having inherent value, while also cautioning against becoming “too modern”, in which the result could become “awkward” (Beyer). A key motivation in this experiment was to attempt to create a type of ‘long form’, containing substantial amounts of political argumentation considering the genre. The intention was that this should be tailored to catch people’s attention on Facebook. A main device to achieve this goal was to use animations, but also an extreme close-up of Støre’s face in the beginning of the ad. This has the intended effect of recognizing a known face, but the framing of the shot also invites intimacy, a known possible effect of such framing (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 148). Closeness, animation and an interesting mise-

en-scene was used intentionally in order to make the audience accept the length of the ad:

We believed that a narrative would make it interesting (...) combining this with closeness – we put our politicians straight in front of the camera. (...) We wanted length, but it had to make you interested immediately – enough so that you would want to see it.

(Scharning Lund)

The choice of this ‘long form’ was also a byproduct of the producers’ perceptions of the then relatively new party leader, Jonas Gahr Støre. As a politician, he is in positive terms known as an intellectual – a diplomat and a thinker with an academic background, and a successful run as secretary of foreign affairs. Støre writes book reviews, long opinion pieces and is perceived as nuanced in his communication. In negative terms, he is called elitist, vague, flip-flopping and indecisive – with a language that is ‘not of the people’. The producers had Støre’s *initial ethos* (McCroskey, 2001) in mind when composing the advertisement. “Jonas works well with longer lines of reasoning right?”, Hansen asks rhetorically, and proceeds:

One expects a little more from Jonas than a very pow pow advertisement. I think that would actually go against the impression that people have of him, and the impression we want people to have of him, too. We don’t want to break that impression just for the sake of it. So this is a good setting for him, it is a film that is a little longer and a little heavier on message than a normal advertisement

(Hansen)

The devices that were to keep people’s attention for the duration of this long form, brings us to the other salient aspects besides length and presence of critique. Scharning Lund, as shown in the quote presented previously, emphasized closeness and putting the politician straight in front of the camera as something that could command attention and interest among audiences. Commenting on the extreme close-up that is seen in the very beginning of the film, Beyer states that it is a device placed there in order to show the politician in a more informal setting: “It is often a point for persons in power and with authority to get people to relax, and communicate that now I’m going to tell you something. Get the guard down” (Beyer). The initial close up is placed there with precisely this intention, according to Beyer, who stresses that films

that are going to run in social media can't be "too stiff", and that "a usual corporate type film won't work on those platforms" (Beyer). Hansen supports these thoughts, and supplements that it is all about creating a calm feeling, that can be bold in itself: "It shows that we dare to state that this is serious as well. We take our time, we are saying that this is something we would like to take some time to tell you about" (Hansen). This is a good example of an audience conception which necessitates a certain degree of respect for the listener. Hansen also talks about the use of close-up as a different way of introducing the main character of the film, party leader Støre. For Hansen, the calm and "close" start is perceived as a contrast to much of the other content circulating on social media:

Going straight to a man in a suit who is talking, that is rarely any fun. I like that the start is so calm, it is bit against the current of what is typical of a lot of Facebook films (...) a lot of people would probably say that if we are to have a widely shared film, we should go straight for explosions or something very exciting. But here, the exciting part is the calm start

(Hansen)

The opening shot of the film shows Støre in extreme close-up. At first, his eyes are closed, then he opens them. Campaign manager Scharning Lund speaks of this device as "a way of inviting someone in. You recognize that it is someone familiar, but you don't get to see everything, right?". She further states that this serves the function of inviting the viewers to "something more personal". This was thought to be beneficial because there is "a jungle of these types of videos", and the Labour Party needed something that would make their video stand out. The solution was to bring the politician close to the viewer, with what can almost be described as an intimate moment. As a result, Scharning Lund deems the effect to be that "it becomes very personal, very close, very quickly" (Scharning Lund).

This logic of using the closeness, the human and the personal in order to get the audience's attention continues in the devices employed in order to keep that attention. In the film, the camera occasionally pans over photos in old fashioned picture frames. Scharning Lund describes the presence of these pictures as part of a strategy to show some of the politicians' personality. The pictures are meant to resemble childhood

pictures. Scharning Lund describes how they wanted the videos to function as a metaphorical hallway, inviting people in to the politician:

We knew we wanted these pictures, and that it should be like a wall that you have at home where you have family photos, that felt like a personal thing (...) there is a wall that you would see in any grandmother-home – round frames, and... my mom and dad has that kind of wall where all the family photos are put up in the hallway. It is the thought of inviting someone in

(Scharning Lund)

Another device to alleviate concerns of losing people's attention due to a longer format was the decision to illustrate the verbal script in the ad with illustrative text and animations. The lack of sound on Facebook videos were stated as the main reason for needing text. They considered the fact that the video would mainly be watched on social media, and on Facebook in particular – and considering the functions of Facebook, the video would play automatically, but with no sound. This led the producers to conclude that “it had to feature text, and the text had to appear immediately” (Scharning Lund). In addition to adding text to ensure that people actually got some of the message, the animations that are also present are described as underscoring the main message and adding emphasis. Furthermore, Beyer elaborates that these visual devices are meant to make the audience more curious so that they end up turning on the sound. Besides these more practical functions of the text and animations, they are also thought to add to the ad's entertainment value in total:

We are still dealing with a politician talking into the camera. There is not a lot going on in the film, except for the pictures in the background. He is very personal, very close. What can we do to underscore the talking points of the film? Because this is two minutes of monologue. How can we underscore it in a funny and creative way?

(Scharning Lund)

Beyer reinforces the message that the animations' main mission was to underscore the central talking points in the ad, as well as being entertaining, or as he puts it: “some humor (...) a little fun”.

Turning to the critique that party leader Støre presents, the informants describe this aspect as toned down, or not the centerpiece when asked explicitly about it in the interview. Scharning Lund states that the film was about “saying something about the nice things that we want to take care of (...) but there is also an undertone here, we believe that our politics is what will ensure that development”. Scharning Lund here points to the contrasting nature of the ad. At a later point in the interview, she also states that the attack present in the ad is not necessarily the fiercest. She explicitly states that she does not think the critique presented is “aggressive”, but rather:

an element of feelgood combined with an element of what was wrong – and what one should do more of (...) not being satisfied, but to be a little impatient in wanting to change things – without having to attack a person, or those in power, vehemently

(Scharning Lund).

Scharning Lund acknowledges the attacks present in the ad, but points to the positive introduction the ad presents, and argues that the ad is in a sense constructive. In the language of political advertising research, and the words of Kern (1989), one could say that Scharning Lund argues that the ad ‘gets you sick, but then gets you well again’, in the sense that it gives the viewer a way to alleviate the problems presented by voting for the Labour Party.

4.5.4 Insights from textual analysis

We recall the producers answering questions about critique and attack by pointing to the constructive nature of the ad. However, considering Støre’s script, one could posit that the ad comes out predominantly as critique, at least in the outset. Consider the opening lines of the advertisement:

We live in a great country.

But still, it matters who governs. And now some things in our country is about to head in the wrong direction.

Unemployment is rising, inequality growing.

Tax breaks, the government says. Normal people get a couple of kroner a day, while the kindergarten gets more expensive, and the tax on electricity goes up. While those who get the most, get thousands of kroner in tax breaks

While it is true that the following script is more constructive, including suggestions on how the money for tax breaks could be spent otherwise – a potential reading here is that the ad is not partly critical and mostly constructive, as the producers intend, but indeed highly critical from the outset. Støre and the Labour Party could be perceived as *going negative*, and painting a very bleak picture of the state of the Norwegian society. An additional potentially unintended consequence is that this perceived negativity is in conflict with the music in the film. The soundtrack is typically feelgood, and could lead to a contrast or even dissonance with the verbal message. A country headed in the wrong direction, inequality and a reversed Robin Hood scheme seems to warrant a different musical score. After all, some of the things Støre says is not intended to evoke good feelings at all.

A second aspect of Støre's script is how the placement of blame and proposed solutions put a great weight on the agency and power of politicians and political parties. Støre points to a lot of large societal developments and elements of macroeconomics. He implicitly and explicitly posits that the current government, consisting of the Conservative Party and the Progress Party, is to blame for the worrying developments, and that the Labour Party is able to alleviate the situation. While it is probably not a good idea for a political party to be modest about their own potential during an election, one possible reading in this regard is that of overblown political agency. Some viewers might experience that the large, macroeconomic movements that Støre is describing and talking about are in part out of politicians' control in a country such as Norway – where there is consensus on major parts of economic and labour policy, and that might be determined by other factors than shifting governments. The rise and fall of the price of crude oil is one such example, dictated in large part by a global market rather than who is in control of the Norwegian parliament at any given point. Here, Støre and the Labour Party are running the risk of being read as both attributing too much blame to another party, and to attempt to appear as more potent and powerful than they actually are. Støre's seemingly simple way out might be perceived as unbelievable and too simplistic by some viewers.

4.5.5 Sum-up

To sum up, the Labour Party's national ad in the local election 2015 was made by the central organization of the largest political party in Norway, that has the most resources available for spending on an election campaign. As in 2013, TRY advertising agency was involved in the creative work and facilitated the production of the ads in question. The explicated intention of the film was to establish an overarching narrative of the country moving in the wrong direction since the change of government in 2013, thus preparing the ground in a beneficial way for the national election of 2017. The format and concept was described by the informants as experimental. The ad runs for a relatively long duration of time. The producers talked about using animation, mise-en-scene through cozy old photographs, and filmic proximity and intimacy as three key devices, in order to both get and keep the attention of audiences in social media, which was thought to balance out the salient length of the ad. Turning to the textual analysis, the film is both highly critical and to a certain degree overplays the agency of politicians and political parties. The former aspect could be perceived as 'going negative', even though the producers stress the constructive nature of the script. The latter aspect could be perceived as simplifying a complex world of macrostructure, and reducing difficult issues to a political blame game.

If we consider the film as a potential resource for citizenship, it activates three specific topics. With its long form and attempt to balance the high amount of verbal argumentation with entertaining animation, the film provides an excellent case to show how these types of ads spark conversation and discussion on the balance between entertainment and issue information. The ad's strategies of personalization – showing Støre in extreme close-ups, presenting images that are meant to appear like they could have been in someone's home is, as we shall see in reception, a springboard for talk about the good leader, proximity and personality. The ad's verbal script is critical – and the ad itself a typical contrast ad. This provides a good case for showing how this type of content sparks talk on negativity and critique – and how people think about the role and legitimacy of these phenomena in the Norwegian democracy.

4.6 The Conservative Party 2015: Fun and style

The camera films a piece of clouded sky²⁴, with yellow text superimposed, reading “SOMEWHERE IN NORWAY”. A slow tune plays on clarinet and violin. It is reminiscent of the balkan strain of Romani music. The camera pans down to reveal a mansion. Cut to a richly decorated living room, in which Prime Minister Erna Solberg is pouring herself a cup of tea from an ornate jug, into an equally ornate cup. The composition of the shot is symmetrical. Solberg is flanked by two blue lamps with gold details, followed by body guards on each side. The room is full of blue objects – paintings, a decorative horse, flowers, et cetera (see figure 10). A whisper is heard, and Solberg asks one guard to bring her the “listening device”. The guard hands her a large funnel, resembling the speaker of old gramophones. The movement is accompanied by a cartoonish swoosh-sound, and the listening device is surrounded by a visual effect resembling glowing embers as it is handed over (it is implied to be a magical object). Solberg puts her ear to the device. The camera then cuts to a scene in which two employees at a senior home are making a bed. They are having a conversation about somebody’s mother, and how there was no room for her in the facility. Cut back to Solberg, who picks up a golden iPhone and makes a call. Cut to Oslo mayor (at the time) Fabian Stang, who is sitting in a dark room with a lot of black props. He has a small dog in his lap. A black phone on his desk rings, and he answers the Prime Minister's call. After hanging up, he yells towards the off-screen left for “Stian” – which we can assume to be the head of the city council in Oslo at the time, Stian Berger Røsland of the Conservative Party. We then see Solberg back in the blue room, hanging up – and looking content. She states that her job is so easy now, and leans back in the couch. The slow accordion tune is replaced by a faster, light spirited tune of string instruments. Cut to a woman, Fabian Stang and Erna Solberg walking towards the camera in a neighbourhood. Erna starts talking to the camera, explaining that it’s not like that, really. She goes on to say that now it’s time for the local politicians to make a heroic effort for school and health care. The camera cuts to show the three people ringing a doorbell and talking to a senior lady. Solberg’s voice, now

²⁴

See the ad here: <https://www.facebook.com/ernasolberg/videos/10153440376336832/>

presented extradiegetic, narrates that “we can make your municipality better together”. Solberg urges the viewer to remember to vote, as long as it is for the Conservative Party. The ending shot is a still image with the party logo encased in blue translucent hearts. The text on the hearts reads: “The Conservative Party. Possibilities for all”. Underneath, the text: “For safe workplaces, knowledge in school and quality in elderly care” is printed, and fades out to reveal the words “Vote the Conservative Party”.



Figure 10: Erna Solberg in her luxurious mansion (top), Fabian Stang receiving a call (bottom left) and the three politicians out visiting people’s homes (bottom right).

4.6.1 Production and workflow

The film, called “Somewhere in Norway”, was conceived after the Conservative Party, as Dag Terje Solvang describes it, “felt we had to have something” (Solvang). Explicitly mentioning the success of *Taxi Stoltenberg*, creating some form of content was emphasized as important in the production interview:

(...) We were thinking about the 2013 success of the Labour Party. Not their election result, but the taxi film. It became something that set the agenda, within the humoristic segment that kind of has to be present in the campaign

(Solvang)

Campaign manager Solvang mentioned working with two party employees in the social media team, as well as a local politician in a regional youth branch of the party that he described as “really creative”. Although *Taxi Stoltenberg* was a point of reference in the early stages, the team moved away from the “everyday fun” category, as they deemed it to be exhausted. In order to create something different, Solvang described that the team sought inspiration in an ad by General Electric for lightbulbs²⁵, in which everything was “excessively pimped in a 1970s disco setting” (Solvang). A main challenge that was mentioned in the interview was finding the time to shoot the film in the Prime Minister’s busy schedule. The location was a private mansion, owned by people that someone in the party organization knew beforehand. The shoot was eventually scheduled to take place the same day that Solberg and Oslo mayor Fabian Stang were set to visit residential homes in a particular part of Oslo. Freelance filmmaker Kristoffer Vincent Hansen was responsible for the production, post-production and special effects, of which he did much of the work himself, with some help of an associate. Hansen himself states that he is politically independent, but that he has done a lot of work for the Conservative Party in Haugesund in the past. Hansen experienced receiving a complete script and idea from The Conservative Party’s campaign branch, and was then given a short period of time to execute the plans and ideas. He described the process as “straightforward”, as he was not involved creatively. Eventually, Hansen and an assistant travelled to Oslo in order to shoot the film.

In his interview, Solvang was explicitly happy about the Conservative Party managing to mobilize and come up with everything without having to go a professional ad agency: “We delivered it ourselves, we did not go to an agency and say: come up with something funny”. However, he was also evaluative and reflected on the possible weaknesses this might entail: “If we had more help, we might have been more crazy (...) it is seen by many, but not many enough (...) perhaps we did not go all in, we could have come off even stronger (...) Or simply the launch – we could

²⁵⁵

See the ad here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYUTlcOPw5s>

have had help in timing it". These statements appeared more as nuances to an overall positive picture, however.

4.6.2. Intention: spreading content around

The intention of the producers as stated by campaign manager Solvang, was to "fill in the image of Erna in a positive way". Quite a general aim – to evoke positive feelings and sentiments towards the party leader. Interestingly, however, this intention appeared to be subordinate to another motive, that emerged during the production interviews. When asked whether there was a particular situation or strategy this film answered to, Andersen explained that this was not really the case:

What we wanted was to fill... that is, to fill something with content. It was like, we should have something, in the beginning of August, which we put on social media

(Solvang)

Consequently, the intention of the film is to create some sort of positive feelings around Erna Solberg and the Conservative Party – but the strategic move itself, and the choice of film in social media lacked a clear motivation, at least explicitly. This is a good example of uncertainty towards the genre of political ads. Rather, I got the impression that film was chosen because of its strong effects: "Film is after all what works best in social media. It is shared most, it engages the most, it gives the best effect" (Solvang). In retrospect, Solvang also mentioned that he thought the film might have had the best effect "at home" – as a lot of people in the party organization and among volunteers had found it funny and motivating, and that it was something that came up in conversation regularly, at the time of the interview. In terms of audience conceptions, then, Solvang imagines both potential voters and the party's own partisans.

At a later point in the interview, Solvang mentions "getting Erna on the agenda", "increasing recognition" and "setting the agenda" as important motivators. He explicitly states that they did not really have a political project they wished to communicate with the film, but stresses that it was about "creating traffic, plain and simple". In filmmaker Hansen's own words, the mission was to "engage as many people as possible, virally. That's the thought. The way they did it was, I guess, to let

Erna Solberg do something funny”. However, Hansen also mentions that a central idea of the ad was to focus on local politicians: “that’s what it’s about”. At one point in the interview, Solvang mentions that the ad is not “knowledge based”, but states that the ad has a knowledge element in that it is meant to communicate that “we want to talk to you – you know a lot of things that we believe”, creating the impression that the Conservative Party is also a listening party.

Merging these statements, the film’s intention can be said to create “positive buzz” around the party and the party leader, through humor – and at the same time communicate that local politicians are important, and that the Conservative Party cares what people have to say, that they are listening. An overarching motivation to make an ad in the first place appears to be “to have something” to put on social media accounts that potentially could be spread virally by followers.

4.6.3 Salient aspects: changing modes, stereotype and style.

I identify a switch in style and narrative delivery towards the end of the ad (as it starts showing the house calls and the local politicians knocking on doors), the use of stereotype of the Conservative Party, and a heavy reliance on mise-en-scene to communicate these stereotypes, as salient aspects of the ad.

Judging from my production interviews, the humor in the first part of the ad played on some stereotypes the creators felt existed around the Conservative Party. Namely that the party and their followers are rich, decadent and part of an elite that is far removed from the people and the common man in the street. Many of these stereotypes are communicated through mise-en-scene. Solvang mentions the style of film director Wes Anderson, with “oversaturated colors and grandiose rooms” (Solvang) as a key inspiration for this look.

Hansen talks about working extensively with color in order to achieve the desired effect. He describes the location as “incredible (...) a very special home (...) fantastic, really”, owned by a couple with an eccentric taste. The work on coloring was mainly done to actually show the striking aspects of the location as it appeared to them, while “turning [the colors] up a little”. In addition to poking fun at popular conceptions of people affiliated with the Conservative Party being posh, rich and

elitist, Hansen mentions that they also intended to play on the stereotype or prejudice of the central government of power, to “make fun of the prejudice that everything is controlled from the centre” (Hansen). When asked about what in particular should contribute to the elitist image, Hansen mentions the body guards situated behind the Prime Minister, the golden mobile phone, and drinking tea from a “posh little teacup”.

Another distinct aspect of the film is a shift – both in narrative style and cinematography. The first part of the film is clearly humorous, in a parodic style. This is established both through the narrative, through what one sees, and through what one hears. The other part, however, is shot in a documentary style. The colors are no longer saturated, and Erna Solberg assumes the role of narrator, as we see her and two local politicians stroll around a neighborhood, making house calls. In the interviews, the producers appear genuinely ambivalent about this shift. On the one hand, they deem the second part of the ad important and meaningful. On the other hand, they appear to suggest that this second part is a result of some sort of compromise, which ultimately lessens the ad’s potential impact, because it ends up over-explaining as well as breaking completely with the form of the first half: “It seems like there are two stories, and in a way, there is” (Solvang). The campaign manager talks about the second part of the ad as a sort of remnant of their very first idea of doing something similar to *Taxi Stoltenberg*. In an evaluative moment, he states that if they were to make the movie today, they would have copied the “Stoltenberg idea” to a lesser extent, and that when one moves from “the absurdity in the intro” to the second part, they are “back in the taxi setting”. Solvang is here referring to the documentary style and its promise of what is real. He then voices the possibility of staying true to the absurd scenario throughout, to “continue with the absurdity all the way to the end”, but explains the choice not to by pointing to a do-good attitude in the Conservative Party. In Solvang’s words, the party always feel that they have to explain the joke. He states that it is typical for them to experience that they have to explain something at the end:

We have to have a good tail. We are a little overachieving at times; we’re killing ourselves with kindness (...)

(Solvang)

Solvang continually revisits this theme throughout the interview. When talking about audiences, he attributes the fact that a lot of older men had shared the film to the “do good ending”. A completely absurd film, he argues, might have fared better among the younger segments of the population.

Filmmaker Hansen talks about the shift in narrative and style as “a requirement from the Conservative Party”. He is also explicitly critical to the device: “Many people probably found this to be spoonfeeding [them] (...) I partly agree with that” (Hansen). However, he does not seem to find the device damning for the ad, and also argues positively for it:

(...) one should not underestimate the cleverness of hedging your bets either. There were probably good reasons for it. They wanted to show a real situation, one that was not staged – a documentation of a house call

(Hansen).

The device of the narrative/stylistic shift is deemed as both good and bad – and informants do not seem quite settled about it in the interviews. The way the shift came about points to an organizational constraint that was perceived by the producers as inherent in the Conservative Party: to not make something that is too crazy or surreal.

4.6.4 Insights from textual analysis

The switch in style and narration that producers were somewhat unsure about is apparent in the text. However, the second part, intended to depict a more realistic image and showing the Prime Minister and her local politicians making house calls is made in such a way that it potentially leaves unresolved several points that were introduced in the prior humorous part.

The point is clearly made that Solberg is not all-powerful nor in possession of magical listening devices that allows her to quickly cater to every need. This is even addressed explicitly in the script. As Solberg leans back in her couch, she crosses her hands and says: “Look how easy my job is now”. We then cut to the three politicians walking towards the camera (Figure 10, bottom right). Solberg states: “No, it’s not like that”. While this effectively cancels the parody’s claim that Solberg can fix problems by listening and making calls, ordering her politicians around, it does not

address the previously shown extravagant room and items of luxury she surrounded herself with. Although the mise-en-scene and the location was intended as a mockery of stereotypes surrounding the Conservative Party, this joke is left unattended. While Solberg, Stang and the third local politician have changed their surroundings, Solberg's clothing is a deep blue shirt, quite similar to the deep blue dress she wore in the luxury villa. She has removed some of her jewelry, but the contrasting effect is not particularly great. Fabian Stang is wearing the very same shirt as he did in the ad's comedic universe, and has tied a sweater around his neck, a look associated with posh or aristocratic sensibilities. A possible reading here is that Erna is not all-powerful, but that she actually surrounds herself with luxury. In the production interviews, the producers thought that the over-the-top setting in the first part would be perceived as clearly parodic, and pointed to a reportage from Solberg's home some years earlier that got some attention because the Prime Minister's home was described by some as both folksy and common, even conspicuously messy (Krogstad, 2015). This reportage might be a known factor to those working in politics and journalism. However, the same might not be true for all viewers of the ad. If spectators do not have prior knowledge of how Erna Solberg actually lives, or if they don't really have a clear impression of the Conservative Party's ways, manners and habits, this may lead to different readings. Since the only fiction that was explicitly cancelled was the part about listening and power, viewers might come to think that the extravagance of the villa was not intended as parody. As we shall later see in the production interviews, some viewers even experienced that this extravagance as a reinforcement of what they thought was the modus operandi of the Conservatives. The producers are making a joke that they experience as obvious, but that might be too implicit or remote for viewers.

A second unintended consequence concerns the shift in focus towards the local politicians. The ad is seemingly explicit about this, as Solberg explains: "Now it's the municipal politicians that are responsible for, and are making a heroic effort for, better care and better school". As Solberg says this, she is walking side by side with two local politicians. The latter two are visually introduced by the verbal text "municipal politician" and two arrows leading to Fabian Stang and the woman. However, Stang or the woman are never introduced by name, and we are never provided with any

information about what they think about anything at all. While many people will know Fabian Stang, who has been highly visible in the media for many years, they might not know much about his values or his positions on political issues. In the film, he is presented as a man with a dog, sitting at a desk in a dark room, a man who does what the Prime Minister asks. In the ‘realistic’ bit of the ad, he is silent, and so is the woman. In this way, the ad can be read as paying lip service to the fact that a local election is going on, while mostly being about Erna Solberg, the Prime Minister.

A third unintended consequence is the risk of coming across as condescending. Showing a completely unrealistic depiction of governance and politics, and then explicitly explaining to the viewer that it’s “not like that”, could come across as overexplaining the situation and thus be perceived as talking down to the viewer, underestimating her intelligence.

4.6.5 Sum-up

Summing up, the ad “Somewhere in Norway” was made for the second largest political party, which has considerable resources to spend in an election. It should be mentioned, though, that the concrete cost of the film measured in money is relatively low, as the party employed an independent filmmaker, and used in-house resources for the creative process. Both political party and production appear content with their cooperation, and both talk about working together again in the future, about “doing more together”. The intention of the ad was to create positive feelings around Erna Solberg, using humor. Additional intentions mentioned were to showcase local politicians, and to say that the Conservative Party is a party that listens. The overarching motive to make a film that would have positive effects on Solberg’s image came about as a perceived need “to have something” to put on social media. Salient aspects of the ad are play on stereotypes surrounding the Conservative Party and their voters, a maximalist style in terms of color and mise-en-scene, as well as a clear shift from this style to a documentary format towards the end, in which we see Solberg and other politicians making house calls. I identify three aspects that could lead to unintended interpretations. First, the way they switch away from parody cancels the narrative of Erna as all-powerful, but does not cancel the decadent and posh lifestyle of the Conservative Party. Second, that the ad makes a point of championing local

politicians whilst at the same time diminishing them in film form and narration. Third, that the ad can be perceived as condescending because it introduces a wildly magical scenario before explicitly explaining that this is not really how the world works to the viewer.

In terms of being a resource for citizenship, this ad employs a narrative of central control and listening to provide fuel for discussions about personalization in terms of the role of the good leader and the balance of proximity and eminence. Considering the focus on entertainment value and the absence of issue information, it also sparks talk about the balance between informing and entertaining. As we shall later see in the reception interviews, it also produces reactions that speak to what some citizens find to be right and proper for a Prime Minister to be doing.

4.7 The Christian Democratic Party 2015: Single-issue humor.

The ad starts with yellow, spinning animated text on a grey background²⁶. The text reads “SUNDAY OPEN”. Dramatic music plays – synthesizers and drums. Lens flares pop up around the text. A narrator with a voice resembling that of sportscasters or narrators for Hollywood action movies exclaims the goods for sale in the store: a bike, summer curtains, and a tie. Prices pop up next to the items, and the narrator uses words as “incredible” to describe both prices and goods. The camera then cuts to party leader Knut Arild Hareide facing away from the camera, with a sport coat over his shoulders. There is a rack of formal wear in the background. The narrator suggests that instead of buying all these items, you can do like this man, and buy a new suit on any other day of the week. Hareide slowly turns, and we see him in a close-up shot. He speaks: “Do like the Christian Democrats. Take the Sunday off”. He drops his sport coat to the ground, and is suddenly teleported into nature – now wearing an outdoors jacket. The music is replaced by calm, harmonic music and the sounds of birds chattering is heard. Hareide looks around in puzzlement and wonder, grinning widely before heading down a gravel path. Hareide’s voice, now presented as extra-diegetic, states a web address where one can get more information. The screen fades to yellow, and the party

²⁶ See the ad here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2abpz2kHR4>

logo is shown. The text “No to Sunday open stores – read more at krf.no/sondagsfri” is printed below. The sound of chattering birds is heard all the way until the end of the ad.



Figure 11: A tie is presented, with price (Top left). Hareide reveals himself by turning around (top right), is transported into nature (bottom left) and looks around in wonder (bottom right).

4.7.1 Production and workflow

The idea for the film is explicated as a result of the political party “wanting to make some films for this election, as well”, after having tried out the format of web film in 2007, 2009 and 2013 (Fedøy). Fedøy emphasizes that the party was strategic to a greater degree in terms of what themes they wanted to touch upon for the 2015 election. First and foremost, the idea was to make films about their “profile issues”, but the emerging debate for and against Sunday-open stores was perceived as timely by the political party: “the debate was there, very clearly, and we noticed that the public was very concerned with this”. The party thought that they had a strong ownership to the issue, and decided to make an ad on the topic. In deciding to proceed with this idea, the party put particular weight on the fact that the majority of Norwegians at the time were against Sunday-open stores, and that the government had

showed signs that testified to the coming of future proposals for a legislation that would loosen the regime of rules for store opening hours on Sundays.(Fedøy).

The Christian Democratic party is still characterized by being a small party with limited resources. Fedøy describes this as a concrete challenge in the work on the material. He believes the whole process of making the ad can serve as illustrative of how the CDP are a small party with few resources, and emphasizes their relatively low number of paid staff members dedicated to communications as one challenge in this respect:

We have four people that work with communications in the CDP, of which one is a communications manager, and one a communications advisor at the party office. Two hold seats at the Storting, like me. So there aren't a lot of people here. So we were on our heels. We should have been further ahead in the process

(Fedøy)

Fedøy proceeds to describe how constraints on time and resources led to the whole film project running out of time through several postponements, until he himself intervened and used his connections in order to speed things up a bit. A first step in this regard was contacting Anders Linding and his production agency Peiling, who did the work on the film. Linding knows Fedøy from their time at the university, where they both studied communication sciences. Linding described the process as “low budget, minimal time, short time from talking about it to doing it” (Linding).

The informants describe the production as small scale, and the dialogue between political advisors and production agency as satisfactory. Fedøy stressed that cooperating with a small agency was an advantage for a small party like CDP, because they felt that they needed somebody that would listen and actually understand their needs. This mirrors the experiences related by the informants from the Christian Democrats interviewed in connection with the 2013 film. At that time, the story of paying big agencies a lot of money in order to receive advice such as “you should change the name of your party” was put forth as particularly appalling. This is indicative of a situation in which the CDP is generally more comfortable with using in-

house resources, as well as accentuating the importance of cooperating with people that understand their distinctiveness as a political party.

Anders Linding of production agency Peiling had not previously worked with political parties prior to this production. He mentioned that this was a new type of problematics, that a whole industry would have to figure out. As for himself, he mentions that he found the party's political standpoints that they wanted to advocate in the films unproblematic, but that "if it had been another party, where I agreed less, and had to work with issues that I found problematic (...)," he would not have done the job. In this case, he felt that making "something that argues and sells a party" was something he could do with a good conscience. Here, Linding is emphasizing ideological proximity as important for his work ethic – thus, it is a good example of how political advertising still has come a relatively short way in terms of professionalization, and how the potential problem of making ads for political parties is a relatively new question for filmmakers.

4.7.2 Intention: To the point in a funny way

The overarching intention of the film as verbalized by producers was to communicate the CDP's position on Sunday opening hours, and to accentuate that if one felt the same way, this party was one's only choice on "the non-socialist side" (Fedøy). Perceived affordances of communication in social media gave the producers a lot of the criteria that the film had to meet: it was to be short, "quick to click and quick to watch (...) we tried to make a little simple film, with a little [bite]" (Fedøy). The choice to lean heavily on humor came about after reflecting both on perceptions of party leader Knut Arild Hareide and perceived challenges of coming across as a moralistic party. The former motivation stemmed from the party's consensus around their party leader as someone humorous, and someone that "loosens up the political debates" that he participates in (Fedøy). Fedøy states that party leader Hareide has become something of a "humor icon" in Norwegian politics, someone that many people find funny. Another reason for employing humor was the wish to avoid appearing as moralizing, something Fedøy claims that the CDP are always conscious of, because "we are quick to be perceived as very moralizing. We have to (...) work with that" (Fedøy). A third reason mentioned in the interviews for why one chose a

more humorous tone in the ad was that the issue itself simply was not perceived to be the most important issue for people. Although the party considered the issue of preserving Sunday as a resting day to be very important, they held the belief that most voters did not really think that this was the most serious and important of issues, and thus more open for the use of humor. Fedøy draws on identification as important in the film.

The target audience was mostly unspecified, but as most of the party's strategies, the party envisioned families, in particular families with small children. "Young, liberalistic people" were identified as a group that would probably not like the movie that much.

4.7.3 Salient aspects: Annoying ad aesthetics and formal jokes.

In addition to the humorous approach mentioned above, I identify the ad's strong focus on contrasting a very insistent type of ad aesthetic in the first part with a calmer atmosphere in the end, as well as a range of formal jokes, such as the overly conspicuous use of green screen as salient aspects of the ad.

Turning to the look and feel of the first part, Fedøy states that the purpose of this approach was to "use the aesthetics [of advertising] (...) and to provoke some stress in the start there" (Fedøy). Linding describes this as a key device in the film, in order to get "straight to the point". He terms the start as "mimicking a genre of advertising that has an aesthetic reminiscent of marketplace vendors" that he further describes as "quite pushy" (Linding). For Linding, this underscores a main message of the ad, as the annoying start would serve as a reminder that if you allow for Sunday open stores, then "you also get more buying pressure, more marketplace in the face" (Linding) as a consequence of this.

This sensation of stress is then to be relieved by the calm ending. The ending shot shows party leader Hareide out in nature, ready to go hiking. Fedøy describes this device as a reminder of what Sunday traditionally has meant for families in Norway. He posits that "many people have a good relationship to Sunday as a day off", and further elaborates:

One does not have to worry about, ahh, we should have bought some shoes, or ... now... we need to go grocery shopping, or something. When everything is closed, they don't think those thoughts – and you can breathe a little calmer, and the morning becomes easier, and perhaps you think “no, now we should go out on a hike”. And a lot of families want to spend their Sunday relaxing or doing something together (...) and it is important to give people the feeling of Sunday in the ad, too

(Fedøy)

Anders Linding supports this intended feeling of relief after the very pushy ad in the first part. In the second part, it is all about creating “good ambience” and “an instant feeling of happiness”. However, he stresses that the second part is also executed in a humorous way, and it is also to be treated as a joke of sorts. He mentions that it is “an attempt at being funny” through “overdoing it”. Centrally, he remarks that this part is intentionally not overly professionally executed: he wanted the use of green screen to be as conspicuous as the use of lense flares in the first part of the ad. Linding states their intention as making the contrast between the two parts “strikingly clear”, while being funny through “not concealing that it is a special effect, because that is completely obvious anyway”, referring to the fact that Hareide is instantly transported from a studio to the middle of the nature outside Oslo.

Both Fedøy and Linding talks about how the ad is concentrated around a single aspect of a single issue. For Linding, this is an important guiding concept, and he expresses an insistence to “keep it simple”:

There are many sides to the issue – all of those who have to work that currently have the day off, it's about buying pressure, changes in society, there are a lot of angles to it – but we just narrowed it down to one concrete little thing, an advertising trick, (...) without pretending that we are serving up the entire truth on the issue, it's just a little nudge

(Linding)

As I shall now discuss, the “concrete little thing” might be a problematic point, because it entails a very narrow focus on an issue that the producers themselves admit is not the most important issue on the political agenda in Norway. In chapter 6.1, I demonstrate how citizens rebelled against this narrow focus.

4.7.4 Insights from textual analysis

The first part of the ad is arguably explicit in the way the various element express a tone of parody. The excessive use of techniques such as lens flare is apparent if one knows what to look for, or if one has the cultural know-how to recognize the lens flare as a cliché, thereby assuming that such overblown use is ironic. However, the over-the-top ad aesthetic does not seem to be very far away from several commercial ads in Norway, for brands advertising sale – typically the kind of ad running for electronics stores, naming products and prices in a high tempo, with energetic music and an enthusiastic narrator. It could be, then, that the producers find the parody to be apparent, but that they are guided by cues that can be more subtle to the average viewer. It is possible that the production agency experienced that they made something very over the top, but that they rather made a type of ad that they would never make themselves, in all seriousness, but that nonetheless is not far removed from some ads that people can typically encounter on television.

The latter part is also not serious – as was also confirmed by admaker Linding. It is not as explicit in the way the parody is articulated through film form, and this could lead to potential problems with contrast. The use of green screen is deliberate, according to Linding. However, viewing the ad one could question if the use of green screen is blatant enough to be a clear and articulate joke in film form. It could very well be that the green screen use is a little too well executed, with the consequence that it is understood differently than intended by the producers. Thus, viewers could come to think that the producers are attempting to pull off a realistic and discreet use of the technique. It could very well be that the producers ended up making a film that is unintentionally funny in the technical sense to people with a high awareness of movie production.

Turning to Hareides acting in the second part of the ad, he clearly performs – wide eyed and expressing a kind of childlike wonder at the nature around him – before turning around to walk the gravel path. While the intention is a playful delivery, while showing Hareide going for a hike– the combination of music, acting and scenery connotes Tolkien's universe. The musical score consisting of flute, harp and obo is performed in a style that is meant to instantly convey a sense of calm and harmony,

but is slightly reminiscent of the leifmotif for the hobbits in the Lord of the Rings movies. Following this line of thought, Hareide both assumes the role of, and is somewhat reminiscent of, a hobbit – the naïve but lovable creatures that feature as unlikely heroes in stories that do indeed involve a lot of hiking in various terrains. While not at all a negative connotation, it is not what the producers intended. Furthermore, it might pose a problem for Hareide, a politician often perceived as small, frail and indeed possessing an immature and childlike physique. As we shall see in the reception interviews, the theme of Hareide’s frailty was both rampant and recurrent.

A third aspect of potential readings that differ from producer intentions is the fact that the ad is a pure ‘no-message’. Furthermore, the ad is dichotomizing shopping on Sundays and being in nature on Sundays. The ad clearly favours the latter, as the aesthetics of commercials and shopping is being ridiculed in the first part, while the joys of nature are being glorified (albeit jokingly) in the second part. This risks insulting people. While the producers were right about the fact that a lot of people agreed with the Christian Democrats on this issue, the Norwegian population has been split in this issue for quite some time (Lavik & Schjøll, 2017, p. 18). In coming out so strongly against an issue, while also ridiculing one side of it, they risk insulting a lot of people, thus making them less receptive to the message of the Christian Democrats. People may even feel that they’re being talked down to. Furthermore, some people could react to the insistence on hiking and nature as the implied healthy alternative to rampant commercialism. Some people might hate the idea of walking around on their Sunday, and would much rather prefer staying on the couch. Alternately, some people would probably truly prefer to spend their Sunday shopping. There is a potential for rebellion here, if people perceive the dichotomy as too constricting.

4.7.5 Sum-up

Summing up, the ad “Sunday-open” was produced by a small political party with limited resources. As in 2013, the party opted for a combination of in-house creative competence with a small external partner for production. The film’s intention was to showcase the Christian Democratic Party as a good option to vote for if one wanted to preserve the status of the Sunday as a non-commercial day. The method was to play

upon humor, which was perceived as a strength of the party leader, a way to avoid being moralizing, and a way to address that this perhaps was not the most important issue of the election for the voters. Besides the strong reliance on humor, salient aspects of the ad are the use of film form to make deliberate jokes on low production value, and contrasting a very pushy ad aesthetic with a jokingly presented harmony and calm in nature. The examination of the text revealed that the intended parodic form leans heavily on an assumption that the viewers have a keen eye for nuances of film production. Thus, the producers risk problems of contrast, as the ad might just be perceived as a badly made ad, rather than an intentionally badly made ad. The ad also risks insulting a large portion of the Norwegian population by dichotomizing and implicitly mocking people who would enjoy going shopping on Sundays.

Understood as a potential resource for citizenship, the ad is an interesting example of both an ad raising just one single issue, and an ad that is a clear “no to” message. Thus, it should provide fuel for discussions on the right amount of issue information. The reliance on humor further enables discussions about the balance between informing and entertaining. From the perspective of reception research, the producers’ heavy leaning on film form to make jokes and have their point come across provides a good opportunity to examine how citizens navigate film form in order to interpret, make meaning and judge persuasive appeals.

4.8 The Red Party 2015: The outsider speaks

The ad²⁷ starts by showing red text on an off-white background: “Here is the election speech we did not get to give at NRK”. Rolling piano notes continue throughout the ad. Party leader Bjørnar Moxnes steps into the picture and into focus – shot in a medium close-up. Cut to an extreme close up of Moxnes, who starts talking to the camera. He asks the spectator whether other political parties really care. Moxnes then proceeds to implore the viewer to think about the fact that other politicians have been given a lot of opportunities to do something about a rise in inequality, but they have failed. He then proceeds to outline a number of problems with rising inequality. He

²⁷ Watch the ad here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUvnQXtzBkg&>

states that the growth of what he calls “Forskjells-Norge” (Inequality Norway) is the greatest challenge that our society faces, and that the coming election is about turning the tide. Moxnes states that Election Day should mark a comeback for justice in Norwegian politics. He ends his speech by stating that it is all “up to you”, and telling the viewer to ask herself the following question: “Should I give the other parties yet another chance? Or should I vote for a challenger?” The text “VOTE FOR A CHALLENGER” is shown on screen, as Moxnes steps out of focus and out of the frame. The music increases in volume and intensity, and more instruments, such as strings, join the piano notes – giving the impression of a rising climax. The text “rødt.no” appears, before giving way to a text plaque thanking five named individuals and “the 240 others that made this film possible. We cheer for you”.



Figure 12: The party leader steps into the frame and into focus (top left). As he holds his speech, he is shot in extreme close up (top right) and medium close up (bottom left). The ending shot (bottom right) is a verbal text thanking those who contributed to the online fundraiser.

The Red Party is a very small party, with very limited resources. After being denied access to the party leader debates at the Public Service Broadcaster prior to the election, and thus also denied the traditional one minute appeal that all the party leaders get to perform at the end of the program, party secretary Aastebøl decided to

take action. Through crowdfunding at a site called *Indiegogo*, the Red Party managed to raise enough money to produce their own election appeal, that was presented in social media. The film features party leader Bjørnar Moxnes addressing the camera before a neutral background. The film initially shows the text: “This is the election speech we did not get to give at NRK²⁸”.

4.8.1 Production and workflow

Party secretary Aastebøl describes making a political ad of some sort as “being in the cards all along”, mentioning film as an efficient tool for communication, and the fact that the Red Party had made films in previous elections and the period in between elections as two main reasons for this. The press secretary explained that the practical financing from the film, done through crowdsourcing on *Indiegogo*, came about after he had “an unproductive day at the office”, in which he surfed the *Indiegogo* site instead of doing what he was supposed to be doing, and then got the idea of crowdfunding the advertisement. Aastebøl describes the concrete situation as a welcome constraint. Because the ad had its origin in the party leader not being invited to the election debates, and that he had sourced money to produce a form of election appeal, he saw this constraint as a clear order:

It was very pleasant, because often when you’re making an election film, you can do all sorts of things. There are very few limitations, at least if you have some money and there’s more than a week left. But here we had asked for money to spread something that looks like an election speech

(Aastebøl)

Aastebøl states that he experienced that the party had made a promise to those who had given them money, and that they had better deliver on precisely that. Furthermore, he talks about the “rhetoric and the narrative “ in the script as following from the Red Party’s formulated strategy for the election, which was to address rising inequality.

Usually, the Red Party uses someone they know that are apt at filmmaking or people “interested in making an effort” when making their ads. In this case, however, filmmaker André Løyning had sent a text message to party leader Bjørnar Moxnes when he heard the news of the NRK block. Having dedicated money and a skilled

²⁸ NRK is the Public Service Broadcaster in Norway.

filmmaker enabled the party to do more than usual, according to the party secretary. This was Løyning's first time doing work for a political party. The filmmaker gives idealistic reasons as an underlying motivation, and explicitly mentions an offer from another party that he turned down "which would have paid tons of money". He also stated in the interview that he is "a little principled" and that he only works with people he believes in. He terms it a difficult and expensive principle. This is quite an explicit and clear cut example of a producer stressing ideological proximity as important – and further evidence of how the field is relatively low on professionalization.

4.8.2 Intention: being an alternative

The explicated intention of the ad was to state that people should vote for the Red Party because they are different from the established parties, who do nothing to face certain challenges, such as rising inequality, presented in the ad. Rather, one should vote for a challenger to the other political parties. Establishing the role of the underdog or outsider was integral to this idea. The party secretary talks about the organization having "very conscious thoughts on exploiting the challenger position" that the party has. Furthermore, to tap into a perceived opinion among citizens that plays on a feeling of disillusionment on behalf of the established political elite:

(...) using the feeling that some people have that the other parties are quite similar ... and quite established and that things move in the same direction anyway, and point to ourselves as those who are not like that

(Aastebøl)

When asked what they wanted the audience to be left with after watching the film, Aastebøl stated that "they were to be left with the question" – referring to the ending sentences of the script: "Should I give the other parties another chance? Or should I vote for a challenger?". The main intention of this ad was to present the Red Party as a sound alternative to a palette of established political parties that are impotent or too similar. The Red Party, on the other hand, has greater agency, a different focus and different solutions – they are a challenger to the other parties.

In terms of intended audience, Aastebøl mentions that the mere choice of film online is a clear narrowing of the audience – with an explicit referral to younger

people. Furthermore, he points to the film script, and an appeal that “directs itself at those who have a kind of future in front of them”. He estimates the target audience to be between 20 and 40 years old, interested in society, members of the largest trade union, and parents with small children.

4.8.3 Salient aspects: Just an outsider, standing in front of a voter

I identify the stripped down production, and the use of critique and contrast by positioning oneself as an outsider party, as salient aspects of this ad. The ad appears relatively unassuming in its production. Party leader Bjørnar Moxnes appears in front of the camera in a quite traditional, albeit rather long, iteration of the talking head genre. The crowdfunding ended up providing the party more money for a political ad than they would have to spend usually – both in terms of production, dissemination and payment for placement in social media. Even though they had more resources than usual, a low-key production was still emphasized as important, as a costly production could compromise the authenticity of the ad, according to Aastebøl. Since the ad presents the Red Party as a challenger, it would be “very weird” (Aastebøl) to present a big film production. As a consequence, the film is shot in the offices of the Red Party. Filmmaker Løyning describes a relatively straight forward process, and lends supports to Aastebøl’s claims that the choice of a relatively stripped and “clean” production was both a result of the particular situation in which the party wanted to mimic an election speech, as well as limited resources. However, Løyning also mentions a stripped down approach as particularly beneficial for social media. He describes the format as “that little window in the browser” and that when one is to meet people in such a situation, “you can’t have much nonsense”. Aastebøl describes the choice to “keep it pretty clean” as something that the team “though might be smart”. An alternative that they mentioned during the interview was to do it in a way that mimicked the setting in the PSB studio. However, they deemed that they did not have enough money to do that in a credible manner, which would just make the whole thing embarrassing. At the same time, the producers expressed a desire to avoid “running elsewhere” with the money of the people that had given their funds to support the project. (Aastebøl). The team chose to add music to the relatively sparse production because they thought that complete silence apart from party leader Moxnes

talking would be perceived as so stripped down that it would seem unfinished. Thus, they chose to add what they describe as “dramatic”, “serious”, “film music”. The music is acknowledged as possibly “too dramatic” by Løyning and “potentially cheesy” by Aastebøl. However, they both agreed that the music added a needed feeling of both production value and a degree of somberness that they associated with the traditional, formal election speeches at the end of the last party leader debate at the PSB before Election Day.

Turning to the critique of other political parties and the explicit role of the challenger or outsider, both informants maintain that this was an intentional device from the get-go. According to Aastebøl, the Red Party were very aware of the fact that they might not be invited to the debates, and had plans to exploit that situation communicatively for some time before it was a fact. When asked about the critique, Løyning stresses what he observed to be a “rhetorical shift” in the Red Party’s communication – in which the party has chosen what he terms to be “a less naggy” approach, in which one points to possible solutions in addition to accentuating perceived problems. Party secretary Aastebøl agrees to this sentiment, and posits that this balance between problems and solutions is present in the film as well. He mentions that being positive and optimistic was an overarching principle for the party throughout the election. The informants bring attention to the ad’s totality as a contrast ad, reminiscent of a ‘get-them-sick-then-get-them-well’ (Kern, 1989) structure. In terms of positioning oneself as a challenger, Aastebøl mentions an interesting link between the film’s perceived production value and the outsider narrative, as he talks about the risk of confirming one’s outsider status by making a movie that is “too small”. He describes this as a certain dual-edge to the device, because of the danger of someone stating that it is not really weird at all that this party is on the outside of the establishment, judging from their political ad.

4.8.4 Insights from textual analysis

The Red Party wished to position themselves as an alternative, a challenger, with this ad. Within the verbal script of the election speech that Moxnes performs, however, there are some aspects that could lead to unintended or differing readings. The script comes out quite strong against the political establishment. The opening lines of the ad

go far in implying that the other political parties could have done something about the pressing problem, but that they are indifferent:

Do they really care? The other parties, I mean. Think about it. Time after time they've had the opportunity to do something about the rising inequality. Still, inequality has grown

Towards the end of the ad, Moxnes returns to this theme, as he talks about the upcoming Election Day:

It can be the day we end the feeling that things are heading in the same direction no matter what. The day we say no to Inequality-Norway. The day justice makes a comeback in Norwegian politics

The implications of these assertions are that the other political parties do not differ from each other in any meaningful way in terms of party program, or a more sinister interpretation: that the sense of things heading in the same direction are caused by the other political parties' indifference to pressing problems. Furthermore, the other political parties are guilty, either actively or passively, in contributing to rising inequality. Lastly, there is presently no justice in Norwegian politics. First of all, some viewers might take these descriptions to be overblown or unfair to the other political parties. Another possibility is that this script constitutes an appeal to people with a low sense of political efficacy. However, considering how far the claims go, it is likely to enable people's cynic dispositions just as well as to mobilize them to participate in a stagnated, almost corrupted system. Citizens might be disillusioned rather than fired up by this type of message.

A different aspect on the very negative description of the political elite is the fact that the Red Party is a very small political party. A voter watching and listening to this film might come to conclude that the establishment is unwilling or powerless, and that the Red Party is impotent to do something about it, considering their miniscule size. As the potential situation above, this could also lead to further disillusionment, and a reduction in the likelihood to participate in a system that the citizen perceive to be suspect, corrupted or dysfunctional.

One last aspect of potential slippage is the opening plaque: “This is the election speech we did not get to give at NRK” combined with the critical script. A possible reading here is that of the Red Party being a bunch of sore losers. Following this line of thinking, the Red Party could be perceived as a nagging political party that behave as if they have been wronged in some way just because they did not get airtime at the PSB. After all, there is a wide range of smaller political parties that do not get a place in the election debates. Some people could question why the Red Party should be granted that privilege. Following that mindset, a citizen might think that this was probably a sound editorial decision by the broadcaster, not a gross injustice done to the Red Party.

4.8.5 Sum-up

Summing up, the ad was made by one of the smallest political parties in Norway that still have a probable chance of representation in the Parliament (the other being the Green Party), with a very small amount of resources to spend on their election campaign material. However, in this case, the party managed to raise money from supporters, which led them to a relatively rare financial position prior to making the ad. The film itself was intended to make people vote for the party by arguing that they are a fresh alternative to a stagnated political establishment seemingly impotent or unwilling to solve the problem of rising inequality in society. The ad was executed in a talking head format, with a relatively stripped down production. This unassuming style, as well as the explicit outsider narrative, were identified as salient aspects of the ad. The textual analysis revealed that the verbal script goes far in suggesting less-than-noble intentions among other political parties, thereby appealing to a sense of cynicism. Considering that the Red Party is very small, viewers could be disillusioned rather than inspired by the message in the ad. Lastly, the Red Party is risking to be perceived as nagging by introducing the whole film by stating that they were not allowed to appear at the election debate at the PSB.

In terms of how the ad can function as a resource for citizenship, the use of camera angles invites the viewer to get up close with party leader Bjørnar Moxnes. Combined with an unassuming style, this provides a springboard to talk about

personalization and film form. The verbal script provides grounds for discussion on negativity and critique, and its role, place and legitimacy in democratic politics.

4.9 Producer perceptions of role, use and audience

I have now detailed each of the eight films in terms of circumstances of production, producer intentions and salient aspects on a case by case basis. This was one of two main aims in this chapter: that the results of which will be used in the analysis of citizens' reception of the ads. I now turn to discuss general lessons to be learned from the interviews.

I first show how examining producers' perceptions of the role of political advertising in the Norwegians context suggest that the genre is fundamentally marked by a sense of novelty and newness. The field is not quite set. This is shown both in the differing use of ads among political parties, as well as in the producers' understanding of their own role in the process.

Secondly, I discuss how further probing into this lack of an established practice reveals how producers operate in a tension between persuasive-strategic ideals, and democratic-communicative ideals in a mode of rhetorical deliberation. In such a mode, one is both oriented towards one's own goal of persuasion and winning, whilst at the same time upholding a wish to adhere to norms of democratic communication in line with ideals of a healthy public sphere. The producers are themselves acting as rhetorical citizens in the way they think about their own role, and in the way they think about and conceptualize the citizens they wish to address. The tension between persuasion and deliberation is apparent in the way producers talk about their audiences. As we shall see in reception, people are often enacting a wider specter of citizenship than the films themselves facilitate. When the films engage in a narrow manner, they are addressing a voter-consumer, rather than a voter-citizen. While voting is perhaps one of the most important acts performed by a citizen, it is at the same time only one aspect of the manifold ways in which one can be an active citizen, many of which are important in leading up to the act of voting itself. At times, the tacit

intention of producers appears to be persuading voters with a particular form of political marketing, thus appealing to a voter-consumer. This is not always the case, however, as producers also talk about ‘argumentation’, and emphasize the advertisements function for engagement and discussion among citizens as motivation for their wish to employ the format. Thus, people are being conceptualized as both voter-consumers and voter citizens, indicating an unsettled and at times fluctuating middle ground of strategic and communicative goals.

The producers as ambivalent rhetorical actors come to the foreground when examining how the genre’s status as a novelty leads to several tensions and uncertainties both articulate and implicit among the producers. As they explicate their thoughts on film as a medium and what role the political ad play in a campaign, these tensions and uncertainties become clear. They are first and foremost connected to perceptions of the ads’ rhetorical power, and the degree of professionalization of political communication in Norway. Although all producers appear fundamentally uncertain on precisely how powerful the advertisements are, producers seem to believe that they are highly effective. A “powerful weapon” in one informant’s words. The films’ ability to activate several senses, their emotional appeal and impact are frequently used as explanations for this power. However, some informants express moral qualms due to this perceived power. There is a certain sensitivity here – politicians and advertisers want to win, but not at all costs. At the same time, producers have the experience that everybody else is doing ads, and so they have to do them, too. The use is at times marked by unease. This is indicative of a landscape in part very different from what is the case in the US, where political communication is professionalized to a greater degree. Some of the Norwegian producers seem to be fearful of manipulating people as a consequence of wielding such a powerful tool. Several of the interviewed filmmakers also expressed concerns on working for a political party at all, and many wished to stress a certain ideological proximity to the party they had done work for – indicating that they are not fully professionalized, but to a greater degree motivated by more principal or idealistic reasons. Producers appear to be navigating a landscape in which they are experimental or uncertain about the format. Part of this uncertainty could also be caused by the format’s relative novelty in

Norway. This leads to unclear positions on the why and how of political advertising. Informants express that they “have to have something” – that they have to fill content into a new platform that has emerged in social media.

4.9.1 Political ads as novelty

When moving from intention with and in text to producers’ intentions in using political ads more generally, the various political parties view and conceptualize the role of political ads differently. A main difference between the big and the small parties is that the larger parties see political ads as a new format necessary for presence – they wish to be communicatively present in all media that people use, and thus meet them there. The smaller parties rather view the format as a great opportunity that has been made available to them through technological development, that they now can use to amplify their voice. The Labour Party expresses a strong wish to be present in all channels that people use. As such, they state that they have been actively experimenting with new formats as they have emerged. Furthermore, they remark that the *Taxi Stoltenberg* film, although garnering substantial attention, was a small part of a large commercial campaign (Scharning Lund). The Labour Party seem to have a holistic perspective on their communications strategy, in which political ads in film form are seen as merely one piece of a greater puzzle. This is a privileged position, since the Labour Party command enough resources so that they can afford to experiment. Commenting on the Conservative Party’s general strategy with the selected case is problematic, since it was produced and disseminated by a local branch. However, the circumstances speak to some aspects. For instance, there appears to be room for local initiatives to exist – although they are not necessarily welcomed or integrated into a greater campaign. The informants I interviewed from the Conservative Party seemed puzzled as to why the national organization did not pick up on and spread their video further. Interestingly, the airplane video is produced professionally and can appear expensive on the surface, but turned out to be not a result of a large party’s big budgets, but rather of local idealism.

For the smaller parties, the Christian Democrats and the Centre Party, there is a distinctly different attitude towards political ads in film form than in the larger Labour Party. These parties are not used to commanding such large resources, nor to getting

the same amount of media attention as the bigger parties. So for them, political ads in social media are seen more as an opportunity to punch above their weight. Talking about why political parties should make films, Sørnes from the Christian Democrats says that “social media (...) is our most important medium besides being on television, for direct contact with people, and it is not costly, it is cheaper than cinema” (Sørnes). The party secretary of the Centre Party describes “the Internet (...), social media and film services like YouTube” as full of “opportunities”. The parties seem to think that social media has the potential for democratization of the political communication, as they are able to reach larger audiences without the budgets that the big parties have. Fedøy of the Christian Democrats describes social media as “a new public, in which one meets” and talks about this arena as one of great opportunities for smaller parties. He mentions the ability for direct contact, reaching larger audiences and bypassing traditional journalistic gatekeepers as three main benefits. At the same time, some express anxiety as to the development now that it is becoming more commonplace. Party secretary Olsen of the Centre Party stated that he observed that videos on Facebook had been “in abundance” during the local election of 2015, and that “one can therefore ask oneself the question whether one’s message drowned in the masses” (Olsen, CP).

Political advertising in film form is also conceptualized as an alternative to traditional or mainstream media by the producers. First and foremost, it offers a “direct” contact with voters, by which the producers mean that they can communicate without passing through the gatekeepers that journalists and newsrooms represent. Furthermore, political ads are seen as having the potential to communicate in a different fashion than in the the journalistic genre by providing the opportunity to “put forward longer lines of reasoning” (Olsen).

The concrete strategy for how all these new possibilities are to be exploited are at times unclear, however. Some statements indicate a notion that a new platform has opened up, so now the political parties have to be present there – while at the same time being a little unsure on what they are supposed to be doing there. The Red Party describes political ads in film form to still be “playing a role a little on the side, when

linear TV is not an option” (Aastebøl, 2015). This is also true for the Labour Party, although they argue for the value of experimentation. Experimentation, however, is also a way of stating that the format and genre is not really set at this point in time. The sense is that the use of film “has escalated, and we see that it is more and more used by other actors. We’ve done it more and more”, Bernsen of the Christian Democrats states in connection with the 2013 election. This notion of “having to have something” is strongly present across interviews. The idea of film in social media seems for some parties, for instance the Conservative Party production of 2015, to represent a platform that has to be filled with content. The purpose and the role of the content does not always appear to be so clear – and is seemingly not at all times integrated into the campaign as a whole. Rather, producers often mention the need to do “something different”, that “stands out” from the humdrum of seriousness that they feel mark a regular campaign. In part, this adds to the impression of newness of political films, as well as a sensation of stunt or gimmick. Something extraordinary, and not necessarily as an integrated, everyday part of communicating the party platform and politics.

This suggests that the use of political ads in Norway are in part distinguished by being a new format, one that is not quite set yet. Producers are unsure of how to use the format, why to use the format and to what degree the format “works”. Throughout many of the interviews, this sense of “newness” is foregrounded. In a large party with considerable resources, such as the Labour Party, this is deemed ‘experimentation’. In a very small party with limited resources, the newness aspect becomes even clearer, as the party secretary for the Red Party states when talking about how they would often resort to underpaying freelancers in order to make films:

It is a constant source of bad conscience for us that parties with less money often have locked their resources to the old activities, that were invented first [laughs]. So there is always money for flyers and the things we have always done, but for the new

(Aastebøl)

As independent filmmaker Kristoffer Vincent Hansen states in connection with the 2015 ad of the Conservative Party, the use of film in 2015 was “a little confused” due

to the fact that all the agents are “wondering what is the most efficient way themselves” (Hansen, 2015). The Christian Democrat ad of 2015 experienced success among punditry and political experts in the media. As explained by film maker Linding, however, there was more the sense of sending a shot out into the dark than consciously having “laid the golden egg or having cracked the code”:

I had absolutely no expectations (...) there was no such atmosphere when we saw the finished result. It was positive and nice, but honestly, I had expected something from other parties to totally blow what we had done away and seize all the attention. Either due to a better creative team, or more resources, I don't know

(Linding)

This lends further proof to the relative lack of an established practice. When comparing these findings with typical ways to use ads in media systems more accustomed to the genre, such as the US, this is made even clearer. As Diamond & Bates (1992) has shown, the use of American televised ads usually moves through four phases or rhetorical modes: ID spots meant to establish a candidate's name in order to lay the ground for further information (Diamond & Bates, 1992, p. 297); argument spots meant to tell people what the candidate stands for, either general or specific in nature (Diamond & Bates, 1992, pp. 306-307); attack ads that criticize what the opposing candidate stands for (Diamond & Bates, 1992, p. 319) and lastly the “I see an America...” phase, in which candidates engage in more visionary and dignified appeals. There is little indication in the Norwegian context of the progression they describe.

4.9.2 Certainly powerful, uncertain effects

Turning to the producers' perception of what they are doing, and what type of communication political ads in film form actually are, answers are marked by both certainty and uncertainty. Producers are unsure of what works and why – and furthermore unsure about how to use this instrument, one that they perceive as a new addition to the repertoire. This uncertainty does not, however, reduce most producers' belief in the efficiency of their new instrument. Almost all producers are confident in the rhetorical power of the ads, describing them as “highly efficient” (Hansen). Film is deemed powerful to such an extent that the informants seemingly suffer moral qualms

or are ambivalent about the weapon they perceive themselves to be in command of. For instance, campaign manager Scharning Lund talks about moving pictures as “a very strong instrument. Incredibly strong communication” (Scharning Lund) before elaborating on how this is one of the reasons why the Labour Party is pro the TV ban on political ads. When asked why moving images work so well, informants often refer to the combination of image and sound, and the mediums potential for “associations way beyond the picture you see or the text you read” (Scharning Lund), or the ability to “create pictures in people’s head, something film is superior at” (Aastebøl). Film is pointed out to be stronger, to work more efficiently than other media, such as text. Informants give examples such as that “you can move more feelings and emotions in a film than in text and regular ads” (Beyer) or that “the emotional registry that you can play upon in a film is vastly greater” than other media, partly due to film’s ability to trigger emotion (Solvang). Film’s immediacy and ability to trigger several senses at once is also emphasized (Schøien). Solvang of the Conservative Party talks about film as the easiest way to be pedagogical for a broad audience. If the film is good, he states, then “everybody instantly understands what you’re trying to say” (Solvang). The only producer that explicitly disagrees with this notion of rhetorical power, and that even argues against it, is film maker Anders Linding. Referring back to his studies of communication theory at the university, he states that he observes a tendency to think that film is “scary” because “it works so well” – and refers to this notion as problematic. Linding argues that film is just one medium, that should not be treated very differently from other media in terms of power. The films, he says, are like “election brochures that you press play on instead” and calls them “just another mediated form from the flyer”. (Linding).

While all producers, save for Linding, appear absolutely certain of the fact that political ads in film form are highly effective, absolutely all producers are uncertain as to precisely how effective ads are. For instance, TRY creative Polmar stated that the commercial side of a Norwegian elections campaign is far from as important as the politician’s performances in debates, or the visibility that is created through political work. The ads are believed to be able to perform certain functions, though: “(...) we can move somebody towards the end [of the campaign]. We can create an atmosphere,

we can turn some voters, and we can try to get the abstaining voters out of the couch, and the floating voters that there are a hell of a lot of, but it's not like in the USA, where the commercial campaign has enormous importance" (Polmar). Anders Linding talks about the political ads as an "important arena", but is unsure of the effect these films have: "the jury's out on whether it works" (Linding).

4.9.3 Audience perceptions

Within some of the answers that express uncertainty in terms of rhetorical power, there are also some tensions present. These are connected to how the producers envision and treat their audiences:

(...) It's never easy to know how much a commercial campaign matters. If you ask the voters, they will say that it does not matter much, right? And it's natural that they say so – they would of course say that this is a decision they make for themselves, on their own accord, that they have seen the debate programs and all these things

(Scharning Lund)

Here, Scharning Lund seems to be suggesting that even though she is uncertain as to the concrete effect of a campaign, it decidedly has an effect – and it has a greater effect on people than what they are comfortable revealing themselves. Considering some of the qualms she expressed in the interview, there seems to be an implicit fear of manipulation here. She is aware that she has a powerful weapon at her command. In several interviews, there is also a notion of being involved in an arms race with these communicative weapons present. One is worried about the great effect of the tool, but everyone else employing it forces one's hand to do so as well. Other producers do not seem to view the ads as all that instrumental. Linding, talking about the films he has made for the Christian Democrats, describes them as "arguments, plain and simple", and further states that the films are supposed to "make you think about precisely those issues" (Linding). At a later point, he uses the words "rhetorical utterance, a way of arguing for one thing or the other (...)" (Linding). Thinking about ads as an instrument for enabling thinking is something quite different from an instrument of manipulation or persuasion. Here, Linding is demonstrating a clear example of conceptualizing political ads as a resource.

4.9.4 Ads as contact point

Another interesting observation can be made by contrasting the comments of a Labour Party representative and the Labour Party's ad agency when talking about the marketing aspect of their communication. The representative for the political party states:

We're not selling cars or chocolate, right? To the degree we are selling anything, we are selling values, people and meanings... that are supposed to be real, right? And these people have to speak these values, and mean it

(Scharning Lund)

The ad project manager, however, states:

We're selling Jens and the Labour Party as a brand. We want folks to watch it, remember it – like it

(Polmar)

In the former quote, Polmar is equating politics to commercial advertising. There is no consensus on this in the ad agency, however. Creative Grimstad explicitly makes the distinction that making political ads is more similar to working for an organization like UNICEF, since they are selling opinions and arguments, not products: "It's not about selling something they're supposed to buy, it's about attempting to influence views, or to strengthen them" (Grimstad). Some producers express greater worries. Independent filmmaker Hansen, for instance, is explicitly worried that political parties and politicians are "talking the same language that Microsoft and Cola speaks. That will be remembered as unfortunate" (Hansen). Elaborating upon this theme, Hansen appears worried about the consequences of the introduction of this genre of political marketing into the Norwegian public. He explains that for those making political advertising in the future, it is beneficial to not sound like a top leader for a large corporation, and he goes on to describe how politics should attempt to find a different, more humane language:

People are used to the language of marketing, and these are not goods to be sold, it is politics (...) I feel that political consultants all speak in a similar language (...) there is so much generic talk. If somebody wanted to make efficient political ads, they should think more about what people want

(Hansen).

This notion of human aspects also appear in other interviews, albeit in other forms. Many informants appear to be acutely aware of the ideal of personalization and authenticity – and touch upon aspects of the importance of forming personal, real-but-imagined bonds between politicians and people. Often, informants talk about personalized content as a bridge by which this relationship can be maintained. To give an example, Beyer talks about what gives the best response on Facebook, stating that people expect more of politicians, but that what is communicated has to be authentic. If the images are “too nice”, there is little response, but “if you have Jens Stoltenberg that has caught a crab (...), the response is massive, because catching crabs in the summer is what other people are doing. One should not be too much of a politician on Facebook” (Beyer). At times, the producer-audience bond becomes even more explicit in the interviews. Bjørn Tore Hansen talks about how the task of politics is to solve peoples everyday problems, and how in order to reach people with their politics, “we have to be where people are (...) when everybody is on Facebook, of course the Labour Party is on Facebook”. It would appear then, that personalized content – using human aspects of the politicians and party leaders – is seen as a beneficial way to build and maintain these bonds between politicians and people. As Marthe Scharning Lund formulates it:

Voters... they log off and on politics. They don't walk around being voters (...) they are moms and dads and teachers and ... CEOs, and I don't know what

(Scharning Lund)

This sensibility of reaching people where they are, but also conceptualizing the audience as something more than voters is present in some of the interviews, often in connection with talk on personalized content and affordances of social media. This type of talk is also indicative of how political ads containing personalized content offer a way to think about and around political matters through personality.

4.9.5 Discussion and conclusion

Summing up these observations, these findings indicate that the Norwegian landscape of political communication in terms of political ads is not characterized by a high degree of professionalization. One indication of this is how the producers assume

an effect – but do not have the tools or repertoires to measure said effect, leading to speculation. This differs from a professionalized milieu, often characterized by streamlining and more honed practices and techniques for campaigning (Negrine et al., 2007, p. 10). This also leads to uncertainty about how and when the ads should be used. This uncertainty also suggests that the genre of political ads in terms of format was in an early stage of development at the time these interviews were carried out. Considering the ban on televised political ads, the genre was relatively new at this point in time.

In terms of how these observations speak to my main research question, it is clear that the producers do not have a clear conception of the audience's role of pure voters or pure citizens. Rather, they explicitly and implicitly conceptualize a hybrid audience member. The producers are aware that people think for themselves and appreciate arguments, but at the same time the admakers are at times instrumental in their conceptualizations on how their ads work – and thereby think about their audiences more as voters, or even as consumers that are to buy into their political marketing. Furthermore, the inherent worry about the format's perceived rhetorical power seems to be a cause of unease and ambivalence for some producers. This indicates both that producers are not willing to win at any cost, and that the Norwegian milieu is not as professionalized as is seen in some other countries. Producers appear to think that their audiences appreciate a high degree of personalization, that they have to be entertained, and that they are quite sophisticated – depending on whom one asks.

I now turn towards the reception of these ads among groups of citizens, and further explore how political ads function as a mediated point of meeting between leaders and followers, and what sort of negotiations that occur in such meetings. The reception-part has four chapters: 1) 5.1: Balancing information and entertainment in political ads; 2) On the attack: How voters feel about going negative; 3) How voters navigate politics through personality; and 4) Breaching moments, reflexivity and film form.

Part III: Reception

5.0 Reception

5.1 Balancing information and entertainment in political ads

Information about political issues is important, but potentially boring. Celebrity ethos and entertainment is engaging, but potentially trivial. As political advertising is characterized by a fusion of both of these aspects – a genre in which “informational content is contained in an easy-to-swallow emotional coating” (Freedman et al., 2004, p. 725) – it is an excellent case for exploring how people navigate political marketing.

In this part, I will demonstrate how the genre of political advertising itself is conducive of reflections around the hybrid role of the citizen consumer. This happens through talk on and discussions around the balance between acts of informing and acts of entertaining. First and foremost, I found that my informants were deeply ambivalent to the genre, in the sense that they were fundamentally unsure about what emphasis to put on the role of entertainment and issue-information respectively. Information was deemed important, but boring. Entertainment was deemed trivial, but important for engagement. The twin need for information and participation brings an old tension in communication to the foreground: the need to balance the acts of informing and entertaining/engaging.

In the following, I briefly discuss the tension between informing and entertaining. I then present some select literature on ads with issue content and ads with image content from political advertising research, before I present the findings from my analysis of focus group interviews. Relevant sub-discussions on this that I will draw upon in order to illustrate these points, include the balance between addressing many issues and few issues within one ad, the balance between arguing in a general way and a more concrete way, as well as talk about the use of humor. I draw both upon informants’ immediate comments to concrete ads, as well as their general thoughts when asked about their own ideal advertisements. I end by discussing how my findings demonstrate how informants are enacting a rhetorical mode of citizenship

through discussing and negotiating what political communication should provide. I found informants to enact a receptive rhetorical citizenship through orienting themselves towards the virtues of inclusiveness and connection. For the most part, the informants oriented themselves towards a type of informed citizen ideal. This ideal runs throughout a range of democratic theory such as liberal, republican and deliberative conceptions (Ferree et al., 2002; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). The ideal states that as many citizens as possible should participate in democracy (through the goal of popular inclusion), and be informed about important issues, the positions of political candidates and parties, and their previous histories to mention some aspects (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018, p. 1). Although rarely content with the balance between information and entertainment, informants frequently acknowledged that the informative or entertaining aspects could be valuable to other audience members that differ in preference from themselves. This indicates an orientation towards the receptive values of connection as well as inclusiveness, through orientation towards civic affinities and civic values (Dahlgren, 2002, 2005), such as the obligation to be informed, the obligation to participate, and a sense of belonging to a community through taking the communicative needs of others into account.

5.1.1 Between image and issue, between consumer and citizen

One of the most prominent features of the ideal ‘good citizen’ is that the person is well-informed in matters of politics, and the complex issues therein (Schudson, 1998). Citizens should ideally have some knowledge about the political issues relevant to the polity, as well as knowledge about their (would be) leaders and which alternatives they may choose between. Both republican, deliberative and constructionist views of democracy stress the goal of a citizenry both active and knowledgeable (Ferree et al., 2002).

However, turning to the role of political communication in democracy, the goals of knowledgeable and active are at times engaged in an uneasy relationship. As John Dewey lamented:

“In most circles it is hard work to sustain conversation on a political theme; and once initiated, it is quickly dismissed with a yawn. Let there be introduced the topic of the mechanism and accomplishment of various makes of motor cars or the respective merits of actresses, and the dialogue goes on at a lively pace”
(Dewey, 1927, p. 139).

For Dewey, people are seemingly too eager to act as consumers discussing motor cars and celebrities, rather than acting as citizens discussing politics. Moreover, as several studies indicate, informed citizens stay informed and the unengaged remain unengaged and often uninformed. Prior (2007) has elaborated how a high media choice environment could create information gaps between the politically interested and the disinterested. People interested in politics could choose to expose themselves to precisely the sort of information that normative ideals call for, whilst whole other groups might opt out of seeking political information altogether, turning their attention to entertainment formats that does not feature politics. Aalberg, Blekesaune and Elvestad (2013) have come to similar, if somewhat more modest, conclusions for the European context. Turning to the role of political communication, then, a balance between informative and entertaining aspects is needed in order to reach the goal of popular inclusion.

Having to balance the acts of informing and engaging or entertaining is of course not a new communicative phenomena. As we recall from chapter 2.1.2, this tension runs throughout the texts of the rhetorical tradition. For example, this can be said of Aristotles’ distinction between the three types of proof: ethos and pathos (the emotional dimensions), and logos (the rational dimension) (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 14), or Quintilian’s description of disposition in *Institutio Oratoria*, maintaining that one important role of a good introduction (exordium) is getting the audience’s attention. Or the thoughts on elocutio, the various styles suited for different rhetorical purposes, such as the “dry and meagre” low style (*genus subtile*) that is suitable for informing (*docere*), the middle style (*genus medium*) suited for entertaining (*delectare*), or the high style (*genus grande*) suitable for the truly moving moments (*movere*) (Andersen, 1995).

This tension between information and engagement has been discussed in a wide array of sub-fields in communication science. In journalism, there is the discussion of the distinction between ‘hard news’ about subjects such as the doings of political actors or the economy, and ‘soft news’ about subjects such as the doings of celebrities or human interest stories (Reinemann et al., 2012). Scholars have problematized the strict division between the two considerations at a number of occasions. van Zoonen (2005) has discussed the relationship between politics and popular culture, and argued that pop-cultural products that have traditionally been dismissed as irrelevant entertainment can function as sources for political learning and participation.

In political communication research, discussions on citizenship ideals are another case in point. The ideal of the informed citizen dictates that people act as rational voters, and that they make their choice based on policy issues (See for instance Berelson et al., 1954). This ideal citizen is, as Ytre-Arne and Moe (2018, p. 228) point out: “outrageously unrealistic”. An increasing amount of scholars are now attuned to more realistic demands for citizen, following Michael Schudson’s intervention into what he perceived as the unrealistic and incredibly burdensome ideal of the informed citizen. Schudson proposed the ideal of the monitorial citizen (Schudson, 1998), who surveys the media landscape and reacts when necessary, rather than being continuously engaged in information gathering. As Richard Dagger states, people need not be political junkies (1997, p. 150) to be good citizens. However, *some* information and engagement is still required of citizens in order to participate in democratic societies in a meaningful way. This leads us to the difficult balancing act between entertaining elements and informative elements. As Schudson points out in his critique of a strict division between the citizen and the consumer:

“(…) politics is time-consuming, alternately boring and scary, often contentious, often remote from the present and the concrete, and often makes people feel ineffectual, not empowered. Politics raises difficult and complex matters that make one feel stupid” (Schudson, 2007, p. 238)

Thus, following that the (important) activity of politics is boring, and that it can put people off, or that for a citizen with limited time and resources in everyday life it can be tempting to zone out of politics completely, aspects of celebrity ethos/image content and entertaining aspects can be a way to draw people in, to get people engaged, to mobilize (van Zoonen, 2005). The logic behind this thinking is reminiscent of the ethos of Public Service Broadcasters such as the BBC or NRK, in which one uses metaphors such as “medicine in the jam” or “chocolate covered broccoli”²⁹ in order to signify that the balance between the important and the entertaining is that of giving people something that they might not like, but need (medicine, broccoli) through packaging it in something people both like and want (jam, chocolate). In this scenario, information and participation are twin goals, which pull in somewhat opposite directions. Too much information leads to demobilization and too much entertainment leads to lack of information. As such, the ideal of the good citizen, who needs to be both informed and to actually show up in the booth on Election Day, is in need of different resources to fulfill her role. If the balance between these resources is skewed, the citizen risks ending up demobilized or disinformed.

Scholars examining various formats of news and current affairs television have attempted to bring nuance to the dichotomy of information and entertainment through introducing the two different notions of hedonism and eudaimonism (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2017). Hedonism is understood as the “commonplace notion of entertainment as fun and pleasureable” (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2017, p. 145), eudaimonism is understood as thought provoking sensations that are experienced as meaningful or moving (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2017, p. 145; See also Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Investigating both general interest and more hard-core interview shows, Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer found their informants to get pleasure from understanding complex issues (2017, p. 159).

²⁹ This metaphor was used as headline and guiding idea by NRK employee Øyvind Lund, speaking at a conference hosted by the NRK, about how to reach people with public service broadcasting. See <https://www.nrk.no/oppdrag/hva-na-nrk-1.12266678>

5.1.1.1 Image and issue in political ads

The tension outlined above also manifests in political ads, mainly through the distinction between issue ads and image ads. In one extreme end, we find a pure image appeal ad. It is all about either entertainment (through humor or other means), presentation of a personality or personal traits (he or she is a good person, a funny person, look at the party leader in this unusual situation, et cetera), or just creating an ad that people like because it brings them some sort of pleasure. The established logic in advertising circles dictates that some of this “liking” then can be transferred to the brand (political party or politician) in question – since they are the ones that brought the viewer some positive emotions (Andersen, 2004; Hughes, 2018). Note that I conceptualize “entertainment” under the umbrella of “image”, following precisely the logic mentioned above. Employing entertainment as an advertising strategy³⁰ is often precisely meant to increase the “brand liking” or “image” of a political party or a candidate, similar to commercial ads. These types of ads typically contain minimal or no “hard” political information on standpoints, issues, or more substantial arguments, speaking from a view of democracy that urges citizens to be informed.

In the other end of the extreme, we find an advertisement rich in policy information, argument, issues or all of these three. Often manifested through the talking-head-format, these types of ads typically prefer a verbal mode of delivery – presenting a more traditional form of argumentation and claims for the viewer. The pure issue-ad is, in a simplified phrase, more concerned with content than form. There are typically no or few special effects, interesting editing techniques, or other elements of film form and style to make the experience more entertaining or interesting for the viewer.

Finding the balance between the dimensions of image and issue is a challenge that the producers of political ads face, and that the audiences of political ads must negotiate and make judgements upon. Scholars of political advertising and political communication have been exploring this balance rather extensively, following worries

³⁰ See also Sanders (2004) for a discussion on how advertisers are required to employ various entertaining strategies in order to get attention in the landscape of television advertising.

that citizens cast their votes based on perceived trivialities, such as candidates' images or who brought the most entertaining campaign (Kaid, 2004, p. 160).

As to the worries of trivialization and the dominance of image-information, a convincing amount of research has demonstrated that political advertising, regardless of medium, is for the most part issue focused (Kaid, 2004, p. 161). That said, the quality of said issues may vary considerably. Kaid argues that even though the majority of ads are found worthy of being placed in the large category of issue ads, this does not necessarily mean that the ads are "(...) providing substantial arguments or explaining complex policy issues" (Kaid, 2004, p. 162). Indeed, several studies have pointed out that ads are often vague and lacking in policy positioning or specific information (See Kaid, 2004, p. 162 for an overview).

Another important point emerging from the research is that the lines between image ads and issue ads are more blurred than it may seem. Indeed, the distinction between image ads and issue ads is at times insufficient. This is partly due to researchers claiming a rising difficulty in discerning between issue-information and image-information in ads (Kaid, 2004, p. 162). Another reason is the fact that a seemingly 'pure' talking head ad, a genre demonstrated to be associated with issue heavy ads (Shyles, 1984), often involves the party leader in the main role. Thus, the ad is also communicating a whole range of information, conscious or not, about the candidate. In reception, the blurring of these lines becomes even clearer. In fact, while it is possible to keep a nice and rather tidy overview of ads based on the production interviews and textual analysis, such as I have done in Table 6, this proves very difficult when turning to the focus group interviews. In my material, for instance, both the 2013 Christian Democrat film and the 2015 Labour Party film are versions of talking head ads featuring the party leader. These films do produce a lot of talk about their image and personalities. Furthermore, ads that do not contain any issue-information also generate a lot of talk about the absence of issues. As such, image heavy ads produce talk about image and issue, and issue heavy ads produce talk about issue and image.

Considering the above mentioned points, it is more productive to conceptualize the dimensions of image and issue as dimensions that very often will be present simultaneously, but that one aspect may dominate a specific ad. Freedman et al argue that this hybrid is a hallmark of the genre of political ads, as it frequently “(...) conveys information in an efficient, easily digestible way” (Freedman et al., 2004, p. 725) through combining informational and entertaining elements. Exploring British Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs), Scammell & Langer claim that the balance between the two elements of information and entertainment are skewed, by stating that political ads are “(...) boring at best, off-putting at worst” (Scammell & Langer, 2006b, p. 765). They argue that commercial advertising has pursued audience pleasure and entertainment at the expense of information, whilst political advertising is still intimately tied to information (Scammell & Langer, 2006b, p. 781). Consequently, the authors urge political parties and politicians to make better use of ads, by making them more entertaining. As we shall shortly see, my informants might disagree with this suggestion.

5.1.2 The image-issue balance as a theme

My main finding is the deep ambivalence that my informants met the genre of political ads, as well as elements of image-information and issue-information, with. Informants were in part contradicting themselves from ad to ad. After reviewing and analyzing the informants’ utterances on specific ads, and across different ads, I noticed that they seemed to be articulating a tension between image and issue content. Thus, the informants were highly ambivalent to what the ‘correct’ amount of issue and entertainment content should be. When using the term “ambivalence” in the following, I am referring to an ambivalence in reception, informants expressing “mixed or contradictory feelings” (Hagen, 1992, p. 146) in a viewing situation. For the most part, ambivalence became apparent in my material when I examined informant groups’ answers across films. Not only did informants give contradictory judgements – information was deemed positive in one moment and negative in another, for instance

– but they also expressed contradictory feelings towards what they seemed to reach for as an ideal ad. After scrutinizing the data, attempting to clarify whether these ambivalences were due to troubles in communication in the interview situation, or the result of a real ambivalence in the interviewees (Kvale, 1983, p. 177), I came to the conclusion that the latter was the fact of the matter.

The informants were unsure, and attempted to negotiate or articulate some form of balance between the two considerations, something they frequently found difficult. The way people were negotiating and exploring a balance between these two considerations, points towards examples of enactment of receptive rhetorical citizenship. Mainly, this manifested through the articulation and thematization of democratic affinities (Dahlgren, 2002). Informants were talking about what political communication should provide, and how it should look and function in society. Importantly, they did so with the premise of popular inclusion as a goal, not merely in their own self-interest. As such, they oriented towards the receptive virtues of inclusiveness and connection.

All of the screened films produced talk around and about the image-issue balance, but for different reasons. Some because they were perceived to be insufficient in terms of information, others because of a perceived excess of information. Entertainment was at times so present as to call attention to itself in a less than positive manner, and at other times informants were somewhat bored, wanting more entertainment. I took this to be an indication that the informants were attempting to articulate some sort of norm or ideal that would satisfy both their citizen and their consumer identities. As my analysis will show, however, articulating a precise line in the sand seemed difficult. It appears as if informants don't quite know what would be best or what they want. Ads that are low in issue content are perceived to be shallow, but entertaining. Ads that are high in issue content are judged to be informative, but boring. Table 7 below shows the frequencies of the various sub-themes that I have categorized as talk under the umbrella of image-issue.

Table 7: Themes and frequencies for talk on image-issue

| Theme | Sub-theme | No- of references | No. of occurrence in groups (n=16) |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Image VS issue | | 288 | 16 |
| | Balance | 120 | 16 |
| | Humor | 124 | 13 |
| | Concrete VS general issues | 25 | 9 |
| | Single VS several issues | 19 | 8 |
| For full list of sub-themes, see appendix B. | | | |

The films that were perceived as issue heavy were *Hareide explains* from the Christian Democrats, *Our Norway* from the Labour Party, and *Vote for a Challenger* from the Red Party. The ads perceived as image heavy were for the most part *Taxi Stoltenberg* from the Labour Party, *Pilots* and “Somewhere in Norway” from the Conservative Party and *Sunday open* from the Christian Democrats. The 2013 Centre Party films were considered low on issue, but not perceived to be full of image or entertainment appeal either. While most groups were in accordance, there were some differences. For instance, whereas most groups considered *Hareide explains* to contain far too many issues, the senior group considered it to be just right, and appreciated it as the best film in the selection, an opinion shared by none of the other groups. As we shall see throughout this chapter, the senior group differs somewhat from the rest of the groups, both in that they have other preferences in terms of film language and that they seem

to have slightly other ideals for degrees of proximity and personalization, as well as other ideals for the role of issues. I will now present each theme, before I discuss how they speak to my overall research interest.

5.1.3 The ambivalence of image-issue balance.

Informants talked a lot about the proportions between entertainment/fun and argument/hardcore issue information in the ads. Most of these comments were statements that placed an ad in a category. For instance, making note that “this had a lot of information” (M2, Art students) or that “this had little information” (W1, Hairdressers).

Ads perceived to be low on information and high on entertainment were described by the informants using both positive and negative words. The former are talked about as “unpolitical and cool” (M2, Right leaning), “fun to watch” (W1, Social sciences), “entertaining” (W2, Left leaning), “cozy and nice film” (W4, Dancers), “humoristic” and “funny” (M1, Social sciences). The latter are described as, “simplification” (M3, Seniors), “not serious” (M4, Private business school), “lacking substance” (W2, Law), “more of a show” (W3, Law), “too simple” (M2, Art students), “silly” (M2, Social sciences), “shallow” (M2, Dancers), or given remarks such as “the content was empty” (M2, Seniors) or “(...)superficial, no core, no major issues (W2, Teachers).

The same goes for ads perceived to be issue heavy and low on entertainment. When talked about in a positive manner, informants used words such as “serious” (M2, Left leaning), “concrete and enlightening” (M4, Seniors), “informative”, (W1, Seniors), “suitably informative” (W1, Humanities), or given comments such as “I liked it because it had a lot of content, in a way” (W4, Hairdressers). When talked about in a more negative manner, informants employed phrases such as “boring” (W1, Law), “heavy and boring” (M2, Right leaning), “monotonous” (M1, Private business school), “not very exciting” (W4, Nurses), “bland” (M1, Law), “long and tedious” (M1, Social sciences), or given comments such as “A lot of politics. Not a funny film” (W2, Left

leaning), and “(...) I listen to political speeches every day. But this was like... meech [making unimpressed sound]” (M1, Social sciences).

While informants were rarely content with the balance between issue and entertainment, there were moments during reception when some informants seemed to be pleased. For instance, after viewing the 2015 Labour Party ad, one of the art students responded: “Charming animations. It’s supposed to sound somewhat analogous to pencil sounds, and it is simplified – but at the same time not too simplified” (M1, Art students). Another example was a right leaning voter commenting on *Taxi Stoltenberg* as “a smart way to engage people, for those who possibly are less interested in politics” (W1, Right leaning). In both examples, the informants acknowledge the presence and possible uses of entertainment and image-information. Such moments were rare, however. More common was a state of dissatisfaction. Often, this would be expressed through the informant commenting on the particular aspect she or he felt was too low or too high, and elaborating around it. For instance, one of the senior informants was not pleased by the same *Taxi Stunt* as the right leaning voter above: “It’s a simplification of politics, they are making politics something funny, something kindergarten-like. (...) it contributes to a state in which politics is not serious at all” (M3, Seniors). A right leaning voter reacted to the amount of issues presented in the Hareide 2013 ad in a way that might make John Dewey nod his head: “Too long and a little too political. I’m sitting here yawning” (M1, Right leaning). One of the nurse students commented that she felt she did not learn anything from a particular ad, thus expressing a wish for more information about issues. A law student commented on the same ad, remarking that she felt that “they didn’t really say so much, it was more of a show” (W3, Law).

Some comments indicate that informants thought that this perceived balance was not necessarily easy to achieve, or that there is a certain tradeoff between information and engagement that has to be made when making an ad. One woman in the group of art students commented that she found a high presence of “knowledge” better, but also stated that “at the same time, getting people’s attention is difficult” (W1, Art students). One of the upper secondary school pupils, commenting

specifically on the 2013 Christian Democrat ad before comparing it to the other ads she had watched, said that it appeared as if Hareide was “stressing to include everything he stands for, , and ... the other ads don’t have any politics, so it seems like they are struggling to achieve a balance” (W6, Pupils).

A recurring notion across groups seemed to be puzzlement as to what would be the ‘optimal’ balance between issue and image, or between entertainment and information. Informants expressing satisfaction on an appropriate amount of each element was rare, and did not occur at all in most groups. In the 2013 sample, the relative extremes of the image-heavy *Taxi Stoltenberg* and the issue-heavy *Hareide explains* provide an interesting example of how informants negotiated these tensions. Commenting on the image-issue balance of *Taxi Stoltenberg*, one participant explicitly wanted more issue information, but was met with an interesting counterargument:

M5: Even though he attempts to show that he is a nice guy, this is not very relevant. I think there could be a little more focus on the politics itself, like, not just that he is nice. I think it is better that they come out with what they stand for, and what they want to do.

M3: Well, most people won’t bother. We are too lazy. To see a film where he starts with a political agenda and tells everything he wants to do. We won’t bother! When you show a film with the prime minister driving and laughing, then we bother watching him! That is precisely what this plays on, it catches the attention of people who actually don’t care normally.

(Mechanics)

This quote points to a tension that seemed to be active among my informants when facing the ads. A high level of image orientation or entertainment was deemed two-sided. Informants wanted more issue information when there is little, and often less when there is much – but at the same time they emphasized the positive and negative virtues of both issue information and entertainment. Information was recognized as important, but at the same time dismissed as boring. Entertainment was brushed of as shallow, but at the same time deemed important for engagement. Informants displayed ambivalence to both issue and image/entertainment – and seemed unsure of how much emphasis to put on each aspect.

A typical comment was to note that *Taxi Stoltenberg* was mostly about something other than political information, and some groups even mentioned that it was about something else than politics entirely. The majority of groups were positive or neutral to this fact. The senior group was negative, finding it lacking in political information. The teachers were slightly critical, but ambiguous as a group. The mechanics were split, some accepted the balance and found it entertaining, whilst others displayed a strategic or cynical attitude towards such films, used words such as “stunt” (M2, Mechanics), “show” (M5, Mechanics), and “popularity stunt” (M3, Mechanics), and found it to be a blatant attempt to better the image of the candidate, lacking in substance. The majority of informants, however, found the film to be enjoyable, either noting that it was “mostly for fun” (W1, Hairdressers), noting that there was not much issue information, or explicitly stating that some more information would not hurt:

W4: It’s like a way of showcasing politics. We did not get so much of that really, like political positions, information, it was very...

[longer pause]

W4: It was very nice. Like a feel-good video.

W1: I would have liked to hear more of the political, before I would say that I would vote for him

(Dancers)

All informant groups remarked that the Christian Democrats’ film contained a large degree of political information and argumentation. The evaluation of these observations varied, both across and within groups. The senior group was unanimously positive to the amount of issues, using words such as “concrete”, “illuminating” and “informative”. Other groups were either largely negative – either because it presented too many issues, it was found to be boring and repetitive, or simply not to their taste – ‘not for them’, or not speaking to them. Interestingly, in some instances, the perceived sheer amount of issues in the ad would prompt informants to become skeptical, turning to phrases such as “politicians always promise us a lot of things, but they never deliver” (W2, Dancers) – or simply noting, as one woman did: “He promised a lot” (W4, Dancers). In some cases, informants would proceed along this line of thinking,

into a more cynical stance – in which they displayed disbelief and disillusionment of politics and politicians. All focus groups, except the elderly, were quite negative to the ad. As such, a lot of informants mentioned the high amount of issue information as a positive factor, after being highly critical, stating that it was boring. As one of the teachers put it: “(…) But in contrary to the other [films], it is... it actually presents politics... [[other informants say “yep” and “mhm”]] (M2, Teachers). The most negative group was the young soon-to-be voters. They were not amused:

W4: I felt that he tried to squeeze in a lot of information, just to say it all, like...

W1: This ad is boring crap

(Pupils)

Turning to the 2015 films, a similar pattern of ambivalence emerges when contrasting the responses to the Labour Party and Red Party ads (high in issue and argumentation) and the Christian Democrat and Conservative Party ads (high in entertainment value). The former films are often commented upon as somewhat long and boring, and the others as insufficient or even useless, or unfitting.

Three relevant sub-discussions on the balance between image and issue focus became apparent in analysis. These were the question of the balance between general and more concrete argumentation, the balance between addressing many issues and a few select ones – or even a single issue – and lastly, discussion of the role of humor.

5.1.4 Single VS several issues

Turning to the first, the balance between few and many issues – talk about this was mainly sparked by the 2015 Christian Democrat film, which we recall was a clear cut example of a film presenting only *refutatio* argumentation on one specific issue, namely that of Sunday opening hours for convenience stores. All eight 2015 focus groups made note of this, with various reactions. While this ad was the only one that addressed one single issue, some of the other ads – such as the 2013 Christian Democrat ad – were perceived to contain too many issues. As such, some of the answers detailed above provide an interesting contrast to the answers informants gave when the ad only presented one single issue.

One main objection among informants concerned precisely the factors mentioned in the production study of this film, that it was one issue, perhaps not the most important issue – and that it might leave people feeling badmouthed if they actually liked Sunday shopping. The producers thought that “young, liberalistic people” perhaps would not like the ad so much. It turns out that he might very well be correct. One of the business students objected to the content in the ad, remarking that Sunday open stores were just perfect for someone like him: “to go shopping on a Sunday is great when you’re hungover and just regardless” (M1, Elite business school). Another informant stated that he thought it was a little “sad” that this was supposed to make him vote for the Christian Democrats. When asked about this, he stated:

M2: Well, when addressing political issues. If you compare with the other films, The Christian Democrats, they’re all about Sunday open. Yes, do you know anything more about the party? Eeeeh, no. So that’s the problem

(Elite business school)

This quote is a typical example of an informant finding the single-issue focus lacking. A woman in the same group stated that “they must have other core issues than Sunday open stores” (W2, Elite business school). This reaction was also common among other informant groups. Typical statements would be “it’s too narrow for me, just focusing on Sundays” (Law, W1), “I’m against Sunday open stores, but it felt like that was the only thing they stood for (...) I need to know more, and I did not get to know anything more” (W1, Natural sciences).

Some groups, however, appreciated the fact that the film only addressed one issue. The group of humanities students appreciated the message in the ad, giving explanations such as “I don’t want to work on Sundays, so I just feel it’s appealing to me at once” (W2, Humanities). In the following discussion, one informant explicitly praised the solution of focusing on a single issue, stating that it was “fun”, and that he experienced their point as coming across really well (M1, Humanities).

Informants also reacted to the combination of a single issue with what they perceived to be less important issue. One of the art students, for instance, got caught up in the closing appeal to “read more” about the issue at the website of the party:

M3: I’m sitting here, a self-proclaimed lazy person, who does not want to explore any more about what the video is informing me about. Why... Why Sunday open stores should exist or not, I really don’t want to visit a website to look at some topic I really don’t care about. It’s like. Why should I visit that website? I don’t care about this in a way. Of course, I would care if all Sunday open stores closed and I would sit here hungry on a Sunday, but it’s not something I think about enough that I bother caring

(Art students)

In the above quote, the informant elaborates on how he does not really care very much about the issue of Sunday opening hours. One interpretation of his dismissal is that the informant is in the mode of voter-consumer. He judges the content of the ad to be irrelevant to him, although he does admit that he might think it relevant if he were to go hungry. Another interpretation is that the ad is perceived to be so trivial and unimportant that the informant simply rejects it. Whatever the reason, he was not alone in the sentiment of disliking the ad. Several informants across groups expressed a kind of disappointment following the ad, as they seemingly had expected something more, or perhaps different issues altogether. As one of the nursing students stated, “I think that this is a non-issue (...) You know what, if that is their big issue they want to fight for here in the world, with all what’s out there, I’m not sold” (M1, Nurses). Here, we see a more explicit disappointment following an expectation of being informed by more substantial issues. This is an example of an orientation more towards the receptive virtue of connection, and the orientation of the voter-citizen, because she was expecting, and in part demanding, more substantial information, problematizing a perceived lack of substance. Thus, the informant was enacting a rhetorical mode of citizenship through adhering to the civic value of wanting to be informed. Several other informants shared this sentiment. Apparently, a *refutatio* ad focusing on an issue not deemed very important was too narrow for many informants, including the nursing student above.

5.1.5 Concrete VS general issues

There was little disagreement about a second subdiscussion, pertaining to the balance of presenting more general arguments versus being more concrete in one's argumentation. Here, most informants wanted the political parties to be more concrete. Commenting on the Red Party ad, one of the business students remarked that he felt it was too vague, or "woolly", in his own words:

It's not very, how to say it, it's not very tangible, what he brings forth. He's coming with a lot of general stuff, and you can't write down any points on what he wants to happen. It's very general. It's like, he wants to make Norway better. But like, in what way?

(M2, Elite business school)

These types of statements were recurrent among all informant groups. Taken together, they add up to a wish for the articulation of concrete measures and plans of action. Informants would often use words such as "vague" or "general" when talking about this, or express a wish for "something more concrete" (W1, Private business school). However, several informants did acknowledge the possible difficulty of including concrete measures. I will return to this point below when discussing informants' thoughts on their ideal ads.

Often, the wish for more concrete measures was triggered by problem definitions given in the ad. As one informant stated after watching the 2015 Labour Party ad *Our Norway*:

When he mentions tax breaks, for instance, he only mentions that it is a non-ideal situation, but he does not say in what way he is to improve the situation, or how he could imagine lowering the electricity bills, as he talked about, or creating jobs. Jonas Gahr Støre is presenting a lot of problems, without presenting that many solutions

(M1, Humanities).

While we do recall that Støre argues both for and against issues in the ad, the above informant is seemingly discontent because of lacking detail in Støre's *refutatio* argumentation, and is perhaps articulating a wish for more *probatio* argumentation. At times, informants seem to have trouble grasping what the political parties actually want to do. They are at times left with the impression that the parties would like to do

it “differently” – or “different from the problems presented herein”, but deem this to be unsatisfactory as it is lacking in detail and arguments that they can assess. In response to the ad’s formulation of “different”, informants are asking “different how?”. I take this as a display of information-seeking behavior, indicative of an orientation towards the receptive virtue of connection.

5.1.6 Humor

The third sub-discussion concerned humor. The humorous ads produced both positive and negative comments, as well as some comments that indicated uncertainty about the use of humor. There were also several discussions on the use and place of humor in political ads, as well as some talk originating in a perceived unintended humor, frequently called *awkward* by many informants. Both the Centre Party and The Christian Democrat ad of 2013 produced several instances of such comments. For example, one of the teachers stated the following:

I was surprised at how much we laughed in the start (...) we laughed much more at this than we did at the others, and the two first were supposed to be funny. This is not meant to be funny, but this was the one we laughed the hardest at

(M1, Teachers)

In addition to “awkward” (W2, Natural sciences), informants would use words like “involuntarily funny” (W4, Law) or “tragicomic” (W1, Law) to describe such moments. I take these to be clear indications that the ads in some way fail to connect with the informants at some level, thereby producing laughter.

Regarding positive comments on humor, many were simple and appreciative statements, such as this comment for the Conservative Party airplane ad, *Pilots*:

“I liked this a lot. I don’t quite know how to explain it, but I liked it (...) There was humor in it. They had humor in their views on issues

(M1, Mechanics)

At other times, informants would talk about how humor could provide a welcome relief from hardcore political issues: “I think people become a little fed up with political ads and various messages in the election – heavy political issues that people

are fed up with after a while” (W1, Right Leaning). This inclination, that humor could be a welcome break, came up in other groups as well. One informant in the group of law students commented on the Christian Democrat ad that “they should get credit for doing something new at least, and from that party I think it was a little fresh. A fresh ad” (W3, Law). One of the art students remarked “that they have used humor in the first place, I find positive” (M1, Art students). Humor also frequently described as “fun”, informants remark that self-deprecating humor and self-irony is generally positive, and that humor can be a smart device.

Turning to negative comments on humor, most of these were comments made after an informant failed to find a humorous attempt funny. For instance, the group of business students was not impressed with the 2015 Conservative Party ad *Somewhere in Norway*. After a series of dismissive comments, I attempted to probe for reasons for their dislike:

W2: I think that bit in the beginning, it’s just too silly

W1: I’m sitting here wondering what’s going on, I don’t get it.

W2: They’re trying to, I don’t know if they’re trying to be funny, or if they’re trying to...

M1: Crap attempt at humor. Or irony. Or sarcasm. Or...

W2: Yes. [laughs]

M1: It was just devoid of talent

W2: Mhm.

(Private business school)

Judging from the example above, one main cause of negative comments on humor was simply poorly executed humor. As one of the informants in the group of science students said it, “nothing is worse than bad comedy” (M1, Natural sciences). Similar responses were typically signified by informants expressing that the whole endeavor created an “awkward” situation (a word used frequently).

However, while many of the negative comments on humor indeed reflect a dislike on part of the informants due to a certain type of humor not connecting, the

picture is more complex. Many of the negative comments seem to be triggered by a sense of disappointment connected to genre, or rather informants' expectations of what they should get out of a political ad. When discussing why they did not like the ad following the initial reaction shown above, an informant in the group of business students made the following remark:

M4: I had higher expectations, really. It started in a very frivolous manner, and I expected it to switch over to a more specific, what they wanted to convey, but when they switched, I was still not convinced, and I had expected more from a party like the Conservative Party.

MHI: What did you expect?

M4: I expected something more serious and proper, that in a proper manner explained their plans regarding what they wanted to do, but this ad I did not get anything out of.

(Private business school)

Examining the quote above brings attention to two aspects of negative reactions to humor. First, the informant is discontent with the use of humor at the expense of the useful information or more concrete plans of action that he expects. Secondly, he connects some of this disappointment towards his perception of the political party. For this informant, the initial ethos (McCroskey, 2001) of the Conservative Party warranted something other than humor and vague plans. Reactions of this kind were not uncommon after informants had watched the Conservative Party ad *Somewhere in Norway* and the Christian Democrat ad *Sunday open* of 2015. The reaction of disappointment at humor displacing issue information is a clear indication of the informants orienting towards the receptive virtue of connection. This was a recurring theme in my material. Informants would react negatively to the humor, and then express a wish for issue information, typically stating that they “got nothing out of this” (W1, Law) or that “they’re not saying anything about what is to happen” (W1, Nurses). The second aspect, the notion that humor is unfitting either for the genre or for a political party or politician, is indicative of an aptum breach, which I will elaborate in chapter 4 of the present part.

While positive and negative reactions to humor were about equally frequent among my informants, there are also moments in which informants talk about the potential role of humor for people other than themselves. When doing so, they mirror the findings mentioned above, mentioning that humor can be useful to engage the uninterested voter. Commenting on the *Taxi Stoltenberg* ad, one of the left leaning voters with a high interest in political matters comments: “We could watch the debate and think that was just swell (...) but not all youths are as interested in politics as us. I think humor is a good device to reach younger people” (M1, Left leaning). Here, the informant is thinking about humor’s potential beneficial effects for a third person. Thus, he is orienting towards the receptive virtue of inclusiveness by taking into account the communicative needs of others. Granted, not all informants mentioned positive effects. For instance, one of the mechanics appreciated the humor of *Taxi Stoltenberg*, but mentioned that “Most people will laugh, and then think perhaps the Labour Party were not all that bad after all. There are many weird things one can do to manipulate people (...)” (M6, Mechanics). This informant is clearly more cynical, or skeptical. He also recognizes humor as a smart device, but seems more suspicious to humor’s possibility for persuasion and distraction, rather than engaging people.

Ideal ads and the balance between information and entertainment

Moving from informants’ immediate reactions to the screened ads and to their general thoughts on political advertising and their ‘dream’ ad, further underscores the points made above. Indeed, the answers bring further attention to the difficulty of reconciling the need for information and the need for engagement and entertainment. For instance, one of the business students in the private business school wished for something that is “simple, but at the same time informative” (M2, Private business school). Another informant shares this wish:

M4: My dream ad has to be quite informative, so it is easy to comprehend. I would like it to aim at the developments they would like to argue, and I would like some of ...of course now this is turning into a huge commercial, but that they address elderly care (...)

(Private business school)

In the middle of listing his preferences, the informant acknowledges that the ad will be “huge”, thus pointing to the fact that combining the two considerations is not necessarily an easy task. In the group of humanities students, one informant expressed a wish that ads were less focused on image, but also comments on the amount of ads, stating a wish for more ads, or at least more issues within ads:

M1: I think I would want less leader focus. And I would do it like some of them do, talk about the party program and the central issues, because the Labour Party film, it's quite alright, because it is a good introduction to the party's core principles, and that's all fine and well, but perhaps one could go quicker through issues, and they do, but very generally, whilst CDP is very concrete, but just to have a I would rather see that one had a little more in a way...

(Humanities)

The informant seems to be articulating a wish for a sort of overview. He was not alone in this desire, as several other informants gave similar accounts. Some explicitly expressed that they wanted a form of digest of a party's main issues: “I would like to have their main issues, their main arguments, their most important issues” (W2, Elite business school). However, we also recall that when they were presented with such ads, like for instance the 2015 Labour Party ad and the 2013 CDP ad, they tended to find it tedious. This type of contradiction further underscores the fundamental ambivalence many of my informants expressed when thinking and talking about the balance between image and issue content.

We also recall that informants tended to recognize entertainment as important for the unengaged, or those less interested in politics. This attitude is clearly present in the following quote from a student of the humanities, when asked about political ads in general:

W1: I think that political ads are quite fun to watch. It is just enough on the informative side in some of them in a short amount of time, so when there is a problem with those who just sit on the couch instead of going voting, then I think it can have an influence in a way. They see a ninety second clip and think like: I would like to know more about this. Maybe it could appeal to them.

(Humanities)

The informant above is seemingly talking on behalf of someone else, less interested in politics than herself. Furthermore, we notice that she has confidence in the fact that this imagined other would seek even more information, after having their interest sparked by the ad. However, considering that the informants clearly expressed a yearning for more image and entertainment content when watching issue-heavy ads, one could argue that this “unengaged person” is a construct – and that the informants are using this construct as a way to state what they themselves think about entertainment. Judging from their various replies – most informants seem to appreciate entertainment to some extent when it is present – and to indirectly yearn for it when it is absent, by pointing out that an issue-heavy ad is slow or boring. For some informant groups, however, none of the ads were considered particularly entertaining at all, such as in the group of hairdressers:

W1: I mostly just watch funny stuff. So, no, this is not something I would stop to watch, but some people might.

W3: Those who care about politics, they would probably want to watch.

(Hairdressers)

All in all, informants were not totally in agreement about the role of entertainment when asked to formulate their ideal ad. On the note of humor, for example, some expressed disdain for the use of this device, wishing that the political parties would “take people more seriously” (W2, Natural science) and rather “(...) win through knowledge and sound values rather than humor (...)” (W1, Natural sciences.)

Others, however, would rather the parties entertain them:

I would prefer the funny and less informative variety, rather than long party programs being broadcast, I would prefer shorter snippets, and they could at least draw attention to politics. And political parties

(W2, Left leaning)

In the above quote, we notice the informant acknowledging entertainment as important for attention around politics – she would rather people be drawn in by entertainment than scared off by being bored with long party programs. The group of pupils agreed to this – they talked about videos generally as an “okay way to become engaged in

other things” (W2, Pupils), and that one could use humor to engage people. They were positive to film in general, and would prefer to get information that way over talking to someone at an election booth, but the films would have to be interesting or contain humor. In the discussion, however, some of the informants stated that they would prefer talking to someone so that she could question them about issues at the same time.

Frequently, informants were unsure or in disagreement about what their dream ads would be like. The business student realizing his ideal ad would be “huge” is a case in point. Another informant expressed a wish for more dramatizations, and that the political parties would actually visualize how their wanted change would look in the world (M2, Private business school). A third informant stated a preference for “man of the people” ads, but at the same time wanted it to be clear what the political party wanted, what they would like to change and what they wanted to strengthen. He warned against negative ads, but stated that “It’s fine as long as they are able to communicate what their party wants in a realistic manner” (M3, Private business school). Two other informants expressed that they would like a kind of overview or digest of a party’s core issues (W1, W2, Private business school).

Informants were often split on whether they wanted more issue focus, more actual issues, or thought films would be best for entertaining and engaging the unengaged. Ultimately, informants’ answers to what they think about political ads in general and their formulations of an ideal ad underscore the lingering ambivalence towards the correct balance of image and issue content, and the specific function that these elements were supposed to perform.

To sum up, I have shown how informants were fundamentally ambivalent to the correct balance between image and issue information, as well as unsure about the role of each aspect. Furthermore, I have shown how informants tended to want more concrete plans of action from the ads, judging many of the appeals to be too vague or general. Informants were also unsure about the correct amount of issues to be included into one ad. While a high number of issues could lead to reactions of disbelief, and the impression that the politician or party is promising too much, focus on a single issue

was deemed too narrow. Turning to the role of entertainment, the ads use of humor provided an interesting entry point to further probe this theme. Informants both appreciated and disliked the use of humor, and their talk on humor supports the talk on the role of image versus issue content in general. Some informants perceived humor to be unnecessary, unserious and taking up space that could be used for important issues. Other informants perceived humor to be a good device for engaging the less politically interested. I now turn to discuss what these findings imply for my overarching research interest.

5.1.7 Discussion

In this chapter, I have explored informants' thoughts on image and issue content. These two types of content have said to be a characteristic of political ads as a genre, as they frequently combine some sort of issue information with visuals, emotional elements and other entertaining devices that produce a text that is "easy-to-swallow" (Freedman et al., 2004, p. 725). The combination of, and indeed tension between, image and issue content is inherent in the genre of political ads. My focus groups showed that the genre of political ads, with its combination of such elements, can be conducive of reflections on the dual role of citizen and consumer. This happens mainly through informants explicit and implicit articulations of their approval and disapproval of the informational content usually associated with the citizen, and the entertaining content usually associated with the consumer. I have shown how informants were ambivalent to issue content, image content and unsure about what the correct balance between these two elements should ideally be.

My most substantial finding was the ambivalence that informants met the genre of political ads with. This was true both for their general comments on the various films and in their elaborations on the image-issue-balance and use of humor. Interestingly, informants' talk about the importance of entertaining aspects for the engagement of those less interested in politics, as well as some respondents indicating the benefits of political ads for a politically uninterested and demobilized "third

person” (Davison, 1983), resonate in part with the three effects on information, engagement and differential effects that Freedman et al indeed find moderate effects of (2004, p. 734) in their study: The first assuming that people will be able to learn something about candidates and issues from watching ads. The second dictating that political ads, in combining information and emotional content, will lead to people being more interested, involved and thus more likely to participate by voting on election day (Freedman et al., 2004, p. 725). The third assuming that these beneficial effects on information and engagement will be greatest among those least informed and interested from the outset (Freedman et al., 2004, p. 726). However, the informant groups that on paper were assumed to have the lowest interest in politics, such as the hairdressers, did not appear to think that the ads were meant for them at all. In some instances, such as the Conservative Party airplane ad, they had some difficulties decoding the references to the Labour Party and politics in general in order to make the intended metaphor connect. The group stated that the ads they had watched probably were meant for people interested in politics. Turning to the high-interest groups, these experienced the mentioned metaphor to be completely obvious, but at the same time did not appear to endorse the ads fully. Referencing the entertaining and ‘easily digestible’ aspects of the ads, they stated that the films were probably good for the less engaged. As such, the group with an assumed low political efficacy judged the films to be legitimate, but not for them due to a perceived high informational content. The group with an assumed high political efficacy judged the films to be legitimate, but not for them due to a perceived high entertainment content.

That informants were so rarely content could offer a lesson for producers of political ads, and also address the debate raised by amongst others Scammell and Langer (2006), who stated that producers should pursue entertaining aspects to a greater degree. As my study demonstrates, this is not necessarily a fruitful avenue as informants did not find purely entertaining ads particularly useful. Rather, pursuing the aha-experiences mentioned by Kormelink & Meijer (2017, p. 159) could be an interesting venue. If following such a logic, producers of political ads could pursue a logic of explanation and overview, rather than attempting to either inform and argue about their issues or entertain. Another possibility could then be to attempt to explain

‘how the world works’ from the vantage point of a particular political party. Given informants’ wishes for overview and contrast, political parties may very well want to do this whilst contrasting their political understandings with that of other parties. While it is entirely possible that such endeavors are best left in the hands of public journalism, political ads made with a logic of eudaimonism could be a way to inform and captivate simultaneously, thus strengthening the genres potential to function as a resource for citizens.

Many informants stated that the ads were vague. When talking about this, informants would frequently utter wishes for additional detail, concrete policy proposals or plans of action. This points to an important distinction in the debate on issue content. As pointed out by Kaid (2004, p. 162), political ads have a tendency to be issue-focused when examining and comparing a large number of ads, does not necessitate that the ads are providing information that is substantial, or argumentation that can help explain a particular policy position. Considering that ads carry the potential for learning (Freedman et al., 2004), the genre’s status as a resource for citizens could be lessened if ads are too vague or not explicit enough. Interestingly, informants would at times point out the presence of *refutatio* argumentation before expressing a wish for concrete plans of action and solutions. Informants wanted a greater detail in *probatio* argumentation than what the ads presently studied could offer. However, while it may very well be that the advertisements can be called vague, some of them still have the potential to teach the viewer something about issue positions of the political party in question. Here, it is important to discern between ads with no information about any issue position, such as the 2013 Labour Party and Conservative Party ads, and ads with substantial position information that could be criticized for lack of detail, such as the 2015 Labour Party ad. While some informants did at times find the ads to be lacking, the ads did set afoot the and articulation of a perceived norm for political communication: that details are good. Or that it is not sufficient to describe the problems with the status quo, but that one must make one’s own case clear as well. This tension between *refutatio* and *probatio* will also be discussed in the following chapter on people’s perception of negative valence in the ads.

Turning to the question of how political ads can function as a resource for citizenship, I argue that the present analysis documents how the genre enables people to enact a type of rhetorical citizenship at two levels. First, at the level of political talk and discussion on the role and quality of a type of political communication specifically, and political communication in society generally. This is here understood as ‘civic discussion’ (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 22), talk among citizens. Second, through orienting themselves towards receptive virtues such as inclusiveness and connection.

To the first point, I argue that the way informants talk about and discuss the role of political ads and ads’ internal balance and composition, qualify as a type of political talk in which people in some sense and at some level “(...) formulate and respond to declarative views of what the world is and what it should be like” (Schudson, 1997, p. 300). Granted, the fact that informants are gathered to discuss the ads is a result of the researcher’s actions, and much of the answers were shaped by my choice of films and interview guide (as I have discussed in my methods chapter). However, as I have been interested in exploring the potential of political ads, and not the actual media use at a representative level, the present material is testament to the potential of political ads to be conducive of discussions around what political communication should be like, and in extension, what is important for citizens. Considering how I assembled the groups to consist of existing social networks, and to be supposedly homogenous, the discussions within them can be viewed as a type of homogenous conversation, in Schudson’s terms, a type of friendly testing in which people test their opinions and ideas (Schudson, 1997, p. 302). In my material, we observe informants testing and articulating their ideas of what information and entertainment entails for the role of citizen, and their ideas about what ‘good’ political communication ought to do for its recipients. Thus, my voters frequently displayed the orientation of the citizen-voter.

This brings us to the level of affinities and values. I found my informants to orient themselves towards the receptive virtue of connection. The informants, through their articulation of the twin need of information and engagement, expressed a felt obligation to be informed and to the importance of participation through voting. Looking at informants answers, they clearly pay heed to a variety of the ideals of ‘the

good citizen'. This is interesting in light of how the ads are conducive of reflections on the hybrid role of citizen consumer, or as I conceptualize it in the present project, the voter-consumer and the voter-citizen. Schudson speculates that one route to productively discern between the citizen and the consumer modality is to examine the range of people one is including as affected by one's action. Consumer choice affects oneself and typically a small circle around oneself. Citizen choices potentially affect a much larger circle of people, extending at least to the entire polity of which one is a member (Schudson, 2007). Thus as a citizen, one is taking more people into account. One way that my informants displayed of taking others into account, was when they talked about the communicative needs of others when judging the films issue and image content. A 'pure' consumer reaction could be hypothesized as a straight rejection due to preference. But that was not the typical pattern. Rather, the pattern would initially showcase dislike for reasons having to do with too much entertainment, too many issues and so on – but then move on to speculation as to who this media text *could* be useful for. Often, informants would conclude, implicitly, that it was good that ads of a certain kind exist, because they could have uses for other people, which could need them in *their* citizenship. I interpret this as an orientation towards the virtue of inclusiveness. Through taking the needs of others into account, informants are in part acting as voter-citizens, and expressing a kind of *civic affinity*, as formulated by Dahlgren, a sense among citizens that they “belong to the same social and political entities” and have to deal with each other and relate to each other despite differences (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 21).

The informants watched, discussed and passed practical judgement. Lisa Villadsen has examined how discussions in the public can shed light upon how (elite) people act when “(...) explicating and negotiating the communicative norms for public deliberation” (Villadsen, 2012, p. 169). The citizens in my focus group engage in a similar practice, yet in a much less formal and less public setting. Thus, my examination serves as an example of how citizens also formulate, explore and negotiate communicative norms in their talk amongst themselves.

While the above mentioned behavior could very well be signs that people are enacting a normatively praiseworthy (following democratic ideals) form of rhetorical citizenship, it is important to mention that this activity was not all that informants were up to. Some did not articulate preferences. Furthermore, one can discuss how conscious or intentional the negotiations of communicative norms are, considering that informants' ambivalence appear often as a result of self-contradictions between different ads. It could simply be that people really don't know what they want or like, and that their responses mirror this. These are important caveats. However, the ambivalence, paired with informants' considerations of their ideal ads show that they for the most part treat the form and content of the ads as dealing with a greater polity than their immediate surroundings. Through appreciating both the importance of the informed voter and the engaged voter, many informants are taking into account a greater amount of people than themselves, and thus seem to have a genuine orientation towards matters of public concern, a type of democratic orientation or democratic sensibility that need not be the case. I argue that this is an example of people enacting receptive rhetorical citizenship through orienting themselves towards the virtues of inclusiveness and connection. In this case, it led to negotiations of the correct balance between issue-information and image-information, and in extension the tensions present in the ideal of an informed and an engaged citizenry. In chapter 5.3, I will discuss these findings in light of the following examinations of how people experienced personalized content, and in 5.4 how people would switch between different modes of reception (that I argue can shed light upon how people employ their civic knowledge understood as communicative skills), and the subject for the following chapter: how people experienced negativity in political ads.

5.2 On the attack - How voters feel about going negative

In this part, I argue that so-called negative content, often considered a problem for democracy (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995), at times works as a provocation that leads to reflections and negotiations on the place of critique in political communication. Understood as a potential resource for rhetorical citizenship, negativity in political ads can spark conversations and negotiations on norms of political communication.

My most striking finding is that informants, through articulating preferences of a balance between presentations of problems and presentations of solutions, are attempting to discern between useful and non-useful negativity. I find that the ads containing negative valence spark discussion on the balance between problem presentation and the presentation of solutions, and that informants seem to be articulating a wish for a different balance – with emphasis on solutions. Informants appear at times to be stating that they do not appreciate negativity on its own, and that this is less useful to them than negativity paired with proposals of concrete alternative plans of action. This in part mirrors the desire for more *probatio*-argumentation that I described in the previous chapter on the balance between image and issue. It is also an indication of an orientation towards the receptive virtue of connection.

Negative content sparked both neutral and critical comments. Mainly, the critical comments appear as articulations of a topos present in Norwegian culture, that of putting one's own house in order before fixing the house of others. Informants also discussed when critique was warranted and not, thus expressing uncertainty towards negativity. Importantly, this does not indicate that informants are calling for all-positive ads. As we shall see, adverse reactions to pure advocacy ads show that informants do indeed appreciate and accept negativity, but not any kind of negativity. Informants displayed a nuanced view of negativity in society, and were open to its uses while expressing skepticism to other aspects of the phenomenon. These include negativity on its own, without accompanying solutions. Considering the emphasis that rhetorical scholarship puts on the importance of managing conflict and dissensus (Kock & Villadsen, 2017), this nuanced view is an indication of people acting as

rhetorical citizens. They are not shying away from negativity and conflict, and not consuming it uncritically. Informants point both to the uses and the dangers of negativity. The degree of negativity in the examined films for the most part seemed unproblematic for citizens. In some cases, however, responses indicate how negative political ads can pose a problem, as some informants responded with comments that indicate a disillusioned state or a loss of political efficacy, known from previous research on political ads in other contexts (Lau et al., 2007).

In the following, I briefly discuss the role of negativity and conflict in democracy. I then present literature on the scholarly research on negativity in political advertising before I present the findings from my analysis of the focus group interviews. I end by discussing how informant replies speak to various attitudes on negativity, and implications for political ads as resource for citizenship.

5.2.1 On negativity, attack and conflict

Political commentators, pundits and politicians themselves are mostly in agreement about negativity in American politics, writes Geer (2006). Negativity is seen as something bad, it is believed to be increasing, and it could be the cause of many current problems of democracy, such as decreasing voter turnout, polarization, loss of faith in politics and politicians, voter cynicism, and so on. There is, in Geer's words, a lot of "negativity about negativity". As I will elaborate, this way of conceptualizing negative political communication and campaigning, therein negative political advertising, has been popular for some time among scholars. However, there have been several important interventions in the field- Some (Jamieson, 2001) argue that the concept of 'negativity' lacks nuance, and that additional concepts are needed. Others (Geer, 2006; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991; Mattes & Redlawsk, 2014; Richardson Jr, 2008) make the 'positive case' for negative political advertising, arguing in various ways how negativity not only is a necessity in democratic societies, but can even be beneficial to them. A central line in this argument is seeing conflict as both unavoidable and productive in democracy. If one accepts the general claim that

society, politics and indeed democracy are social arenas that are full of disagreement, one generally agrees that some amount of ‘negativity’ in political communication is a natural side product. If a democratic society is to find ways in which people can live together despite of disagreement and differing views and priorities, criticism and contrast is needed. Greer writes:

Campaigns are not feel-good exercises; they are pitched battles for control of the government. The stakes are often high and the competition is usually fierce. The real issue should be whether or not candidates present the information in campaigns that is useful to voters. The tone of that information should be a secondary issue, at best.” (Geer, 2006, p. 3).

Politicians have different solutions and plans for society, and thus often criticize, attack or slander the opponent. However, if critique and attack is supposed to be an everyday facet of democratic political communication, it seems to be causing disproportionate amounts of worry and outrage in citizens and media evaluations of negativity. Furthermore, campaign consultants and professional political operatives often report thinking that ‘going negative’ carries a specific weight – as it is believed to be very effective. Both academic and journalistic inquiries have shown that one of the main reasons for the widespread use of negative campaigning is politicians’ and consultants’ strong belief in these effects: professional communicators think ‘going’ negative works – that it is a highly effective and powerful weapon.

Regardless of practitioner and journalistic belief (See Perloff & Kinsey, 1992) in the power of negativity, studies in psychology and political communication suggest that a negative tone has distinct effects compared to positive messages. Often placed under the umbrella term ‘negativity bias’ or ‘negativity effect’, studies show that negative information can have a stronger influence on evaluations than positive information, and that it can lead to stronger responses – particularly when it comes to attention, salience and decision making (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). In other words, negative information is frequently more attention grabbing and more memorable than positive information.

For instance, from the field of communication sciences, Lau (1985) found negative information to be more influential than positive information in the context of

evaluations of presidential candidates. Meffert et al (2006) found that media users were in part driven by negativity bias when selecting headlines, which simulated running campaign coverage. Soroka (2006) found the negativity bias at play in both media content and public opinion when it came to positive and negative information in news about the economy. Daignault, Soroka & Giasson (2013) found negative televised election ads to command more attention and contribute to more physiological activation than positive or mixed ads. Turning to the side of media users, Trussler & Soroka (2014) demonstrated news consumers' preference for negative news content³¹.

Psychologists explain this by stating that new negative information triggers the fear-awareness system in the brain, in contrast to positive information that leads to activation of the brain's 'enthusiasm system' (Brader, 2006). While the latter informs the brain to 'stay the course', as there is no perceived threat, error or anything wrong with the current situation, the former activates information seeking and increases situational awareness in response to a perceived wrong or threat. Thus, negativity is believed to be particularly efficient in shifting votes, because it might make people reevaluate their old beliefs, such as their political party preference.

Soroka (2014) has attempted to explain the societal functions of negativity for democratic societies following the large amount of research on the negativity bias that I have alluded to above. Drawing on evidence and examples from the fields of psychology, economics, physiology and neurology, biology, anthropology and the realm of politics, he shows how the so-called negativity bias, "(...) the propensity to react more strongly to negative information than to positive information" (2014, p. xiv), is present in a whole range of human affairs. In the context of politics and political communication, Soroka argues that negativity is institutionalized. Tracing our propensity for negativity from brain to social actor to institution, he argues for the possibility that humans focused on negativity have created institutions that focus on, and thus monitor negativity (Soroka, 2014, p. 30). In this view, the negativity bias can

³¹ Many of these findings are mirrored in the field of social psychology. For instance, Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer & Vohs (2001) has suggested "bad is stronger than good" as a general principle, drawing evidence from a range of areas of research, amongst other information processing, memory and impression formation. See also Ito, Larsen, Smith & Cacioppo (1998) on evaluation and Rozin & Royzman (2001) for a further arguments towards a general negativity bias.

be useful because it allows society to do a form of error-monitoring, looking for flaws in the system and bringing attention to them so that they might potentially be corrected. Soroka extends this line of thinking to both representative democracy and the media. In the case of the former, he argues that political institutions have in large part been designed to highlight the negative and ignore the positive, through surrounding the group-in-power with extensive systems of checks and balances. While the sitting governments in a representative democracy will (for the most part) produce positive information, “all other institutions/individuals/parties/groups involved in governance produce predominantly negative information” (Soroka, 2014, p. 31). In the case of the latter, the media, Soroka points to the media’s ideal role of the fourth estate, or public “watch dog”, holding power to account on behalf of the people (Sjøvaag, 2010). This is a monitorial function, in which the fourth estate watches the three other estates for errors, and gives public attention to these errors.

Following the thoughts outlined above, negativity is a potentially useful resource. It is a way in which we orient ourselves in the world, something that guides our attention and enables thinking about political matters. This view of the negative as an important tool for monitoring and correcting error resonates in part with a rhetorical view of dissensus, which sees it as unavoidable and potentially productive. Indeed, rhetorical scholars interested in citizenship place certain types of conflict, or dissensus, at the core of what it means to be a citizen. Kock and Villadsen point out that a rhetorical approach is often interested precisely in how people “can live together productively under conditions of *dissensus*” (Kock & Villadsen, 2017, p. 573f, italics in original), a condition they conceptualize as intrinsic to democracy (Kock & Villadsen, 2017, p. 576).

In this view dissensus, disagreement and conflict are not obstacles to be overcome, but rather the mode in which one must aim to coexist as citizens in a democracy: the differences and disagreements between people and groups will continue to exist, and thus society has a need to navigate this legitimate form of dissensus (Kock, 2007) in pursuit of the good life. Connecting this to rhetorical citizenship and ideals for citizens, we can assume that the ‘good’ rhetorical citizen is

not conflict shy. Instead of turning away from potentially polarized discourse in the public, she consumes it. Kock and Villadsen follow this line of thinking, arguing that “the perhaps most important contribution rhetoric can make to the study of civic life is (...) tolerance of disagreement and flux” (2017, p. 574)). That said, not all types of media content is necessarily useful for citizens. While negativity is *potentially* useful, this is not always the case. As Soroka (2014) points out, there may be both negative and positive effects of negativity in the public. For instance, studies have found political ads containing crass personal attacks to have a demobilizing function (Kahn & Kenney, 1999). Essential for the rhetorical citizen, then, is the ability to discern between useful and non-useful negativity, as well as displaying a certain tolerance towards negative content in political rhetoric. In order to show how negativity in political ads has the potential to be both useful and non-useful, I will now give an account of relevant research on the topic.

5.2.1.1 Negativity in political advertising research

Negative political advertising has received bountiful attention from scholars of political communication. This can be explained by factors such as its widespread use, worries about detrimental effects, and perhaps also the fact that negative information can be very attention-grabbing. Most of the research has to some extent focused on the assumed detrimental effects. The question of whether negative ads mobilize or demobilize voters has stood at the forefront, but there has also been discussions of definition. Writing their history of negative TV advertising from the very first attack spot in 1952 up until their present day, Johnson-Cartee and Copeland states that “Negative political advertising has certainly come of age, yet academicians are still wrestling with problems of definition, operationalization, effectiveness and societal impact” (1991, p. 7). One of their main points is that negativity has been a factor in the American political climate for a very long time, and was not something that gained momentum with the coming of television advertising. However, their point on academic differences was reinforced four years later, by the work ‘Going negative: How attack ads shrink and polarize the electorate’ (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995), and the academic discussion that ensued. In ‘Going negative’, the authors present experimental evidence for the claim that negative or attack advertising can prevent

people from voting (1995, p. 9). They also claim that negative ads are used as a strategic voter suppressant aimed at the part of the American electorate that are not strongly partisan. They further claim that the use of negative attack ads both thus shrink *and* polarize the electorate. Voters without strong party affiliations end up demobilized, staying home on Election Day – and the people with strong ties to their political party are reinforced in their belief. These claims of a detrimental ‘negative spiral’ for democracy brought the question of the effects of negative ads to the forefront of many studies. Several studies have found, contrary to Ansolabehere & Iyengar, that negative advertising does not demobilize (Brooks, 2006; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Wattenberg & Briens, 1999), and that tone does not necessarily matter (Finkel & Geer, 1998). There are also studies that have found negative ads to have a slight mobilizing effect (Finkel & Geer, 1998; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Kahn & Kenney, 1999). There is even a study that in part disproves the findings of Ansolabehere & Iyengar by using their own dataset. Brooks does precisely this, and reaches the opposite conclusion of the original work: negative ads do not demobilize (Brooks, 2006, p. 694). Seemingly, the results of these studies point in directions that are at times contradictory. An explanation for this problem can be found in Johnson-Cartee and Copeland’s concern for disagreements on definitions and operationalization in the research. Kathleen Hall Jamieson has addressed this problem, explicitly criticizing ‘Going negative’:

“[Going negative] makes no distinction between ads that contain both advocacy and attack, and those that simply attack. It also doesn’t test to determine whether subjects in its experiments thought the ads being viewed were truthful or deceptive. Without those distinctions and ones provided by viewer impressions, it is difficult to know what is being argued given the proclamation in the book’s subtitle: *How political advertisements shrink and polarize the electorate (...)*” (Jamieson, 2001, p. 989).

Similar concerns have been voiced by Kahn & Kenney, who in their study of negative ads put greater emphasis on discerning between types of negative messages in order to add nuance to the picture: “Negative messages vary in content and tone, and voters respond to this variation” (Kahn & Kenney, 1999, p. 887). They distinguish between critical messages that can actually mobilize if they are perceived to be relevant and put forth in a proper way. The opposite is irrelevant messages that are put forth in an

inproper way. Such messages can actually demobilize – particularly if they are perceived to be ‘mudslinging’ (Kahn & Kenney, 1999, p. 887). Both of these messages would be treated as ‘negative’ in many studies, which raises the potential problem of losing crucial nuances. Jamieson has touched upon this critique, stating that ‘negative’ as a broad category is problematic: “(...) academics, pundits, and reporters tend to conflate ads that feature one-sided attack, contrast ads that contain attack, ad hominem attack ads, and ads featuring attacks that deceive (...) [this use] combines types of discourse that are actually distinct” (Jamieson, 2001, p. 97). Richardson Jr. (2008) notes the same problem by stating that ‘negativity’ has “become an umbrella under which a gaggle of quite distinguishable attributes have been gathered”. Jamieson (2001) proposes an alternative to the negative-positive dichotomy by introducing three categories: advocacy ads, contrast ads and attack ads.

These interventions matter, in particular because it is important to discern between Norwegian attack ads, and the US case. I will use Jamieson’s distinction between advocacy, contrast and attack. However, a look at the Norwegian case warrants bringing forth the distinction between “soft sell” and “hard sell” attack ads. This is a distinction that relates to film form. Soft-sell ads employ humor, bright colors and often perform their critique through satire or ridicule. The pop cultural genres the ads play upon are often sketch comedy or satire. Hard sell ads often employ dystopic colors, scary music and a particular color palette. The pop cultural genres the ads play upon are more often horror films or thrillers (Richardson Jr, 2008). What makes an ad ‘negative’, or an ‘attack ad’ is that it contains, explicitly or implicitly, criticism or attack. In so doing, I am not excluding ads that have ‘happy’ formal qualities, but are still scathing attacks on a political opponent³². More importantly, I do not exclude toned-down attacks – a strategy that seems to be the norm in Norwegian political advertising. These ads bear little resemblance to the often dystopic scenarios of American attack ads. Even though one can argue that the American case is better than its reputation (Geer, 2006), there are few examples to be found in Norway of ads telling people that “a candidate will free criminals to roam the streets or pursue

³² This differs from the approach of for instance Belt (2017), who treats formal qualities such as style and format as a defining quality for what makes an ad negative.

policies that will wreck our children's future (...) (Geer, 2006, p. 137). The ads in my data material are to be considered 'soft' by any measure of the word – they are soft sell attacks, using humor, or containing a rather undramatic critique when compared to USA. As we recall, rather than presenting someone as “Dangerous”³³, there is talk about the country “heading in the wrong direction”, as was the case with the ad *Our Norway* produced for the Labour Party for the 2015 campaign.

There is dissensus in the scholarly community regarding the effects of negative ads. It seems that some negative ads can have some effects, be they mobilizing or demobilizing, on some people at certain times. Exactly how is probably contextual, and there are few strict general rules to be found. Having performed two large meta-analyses of studies of negative political advertising, Lau et al can bring some overview to the situation (Lau et al., 1999; Lau et al., 2007). Analyzing 111 studies, Lau et al emphasize that negative campaigning does not work the way a lot of political operatives, politicians and pundits think it does. They find no evidence for the fact that negative political ads are efficient in winning or shifting votes: “There is no consistent evidence in the research literature that negative political campaigning ‘works’ in achieving the electoral results that attackers desire” (Lau et al., 2007, p. 1185). Attack ads can reduce the ethos of the attack person, but the ethos of the attacking party suffers about as much – resulting in a net effect of zero. This is a valuable overview, but in single cases such as the present study, one should not expect such a neat result. In their meta-study, Lau et al also find the overall mean effect of mobilization or demobilization to be zero. However, they do find evidence for some systemic effects that can be worrisome, but also relevant for my analysis. These include lower trust in government, a reduced belief in what one's vote and political participation actually amounts to, and “possibly a darker public mood” (Lau et al., 2007, p. 1186).

Contrast or comparative ads, containing both advocacy and attack, is a type of ad found to be effective among undecided voters (Clark & Fine, 2012), and found to be able to increase voters' involvement (Pinkleton, 1998). In my material, this type of

³³ Such as presidential candidate John McCain did in the 2008 presidential election. See the ad here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJEKRIBDv6Q>

ad appears to be what informants would prefer. It is also a type of ad that can stimulate learning, because it can be informative for differences between political parties. Because several of the ads I have shown to my informants are types of contrast ads, the discussion around them can be informative. What type of contrast ads do voters actually like, and is it possible to conceptualize a balance between problem presentation and solution presentation in them?

5.2.2 Negativity as a theme

I now turn to my empirical findings produced by my thematic analysis of the interview data gathered from the focus groups.

In my data material, there were three films in particular that cued talk on negativity, conflict and the role of political attack and criticism. These were the 2013 soft attack ad by the Conservative Party, the 2015 Labour Party film and the 2015 Red Party film. Additionally, the Christian Democrat films from 2013 sparked two comments pertaining to negativity. I have discussed and showed in the previous chapter how these three films produce an attack or a criticism, be it implicitly and with humor, as is the case for the Conservative Party's *Pilots* ad, explicitly but indirect, as was the case for the Labour Party – or more directly against a more general “all other politicians”, as was the case for the Red Party. The Christian Democrat ad from 2013 were in two instances considered to contain an attack against the reigning school policy.

Informants addressed negativity and conflict in four different ways, which constitute the four sub-themes that make up the theme of negativity. These four sub-themes are talk about the balance between problem presentations and solutions, neutral (or mildly appreciative) comments on negativity and attack, critical comments on negativity and attack, and lastly, uncertainty around negativity, be it a specific instance in and ad or more generally.

As we see by Figure 8 below, all focus groups across elections talked about negativity to some degree. The prevalence of the individual themes varied. The most

present topics of discussion were on the balance between problems and solutions, critical comments and neutral or appreciative comments. A relatively high number of groups partook in discussions where uncertainty towards critique presented.

Table 8: Themes and frequencies for talk on negativity

| Theme | Sub-theme | No- of references | No. of occurrence in groups (n=16) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Negativity VS positivity | | 136 | 16 |
| | Problems VS solutions | 55 | 16 |
| | Critical comments | 32 | 11 |
| | Neutral comments | 31 | 12 |
| | Uncertainty | 14 | 10 |

For full list of sub-themes, see appendix B.

5.2.3 The balance between problems and solutions

A large portion of the informants’ answers coded under the sub-theme of talk on and around the correct balance between criticism and advocacy. The participants in the focus groups addressed both specific ads and the question of this balance in more general terms. Many problematized some aspects of this balance. Usually, this took the

shape of informants pointing out what they perceived as a high amount of problems being presented and explicitly uttered a desire for more solutions. However, several informants also accepted the problem-solution balance in some cases, such as the following example from the focus group of non-elite business students:

MHI: What do you think of this?

W1: It is like, it starts out by stating what is the problem, and then what solution he wants to present, or, that the Labour party wants to present

W1: Focus on unemployment, focus on equality for children, no matter the parent's income

M1: It is a typical political film, really. Presents everything that is wrong first, and then, a little more about how they are to correct this and the solution. Very typical.

(Private business school)

In the quote above, the informant is in a descriptive mode, reacting neither positively nor negatively to the presentation of problem definitions, rather talking about it as “typical”. More common when talking about such content, however, was a sense that the ad failed to live up to a balance between the problem presentation and proposed solutions. One example is one of the humanities students, commenting on the Labour Party ad of 2015:

M1: When he mentions tax relief, he just mentions that... the situation is not ideal, but he does not say in which way one is to improve the situation, or how to lower the power bill that he talked about, or to create jobs. So, Jonas Gahr Støre brings forth more problems than he presents solutions

(Humanities)

As we observe, the informant above is disappointed because he perceives the amount of problem definitions to be outweighing the solutions. As we recall from production, party leader Støre does indeed propose some solutions. However, it appears as if the solutions presented were not concrete enough for this particular informant, leading to a sense of dissatisfaction³⁴. Frequently, this notion of an imbalance led informants to

³⁴ An alternative explanation could be that the negative information was more memorable for the informant, as per Goldstein & Freedman's (2004, p. 729) suggestion that the negative information in contrast ads tends to overshadow the positive information.

explicitly wish more solutions than were present. In the group of social science students, one informant noted that there was criticism present in the Labour Party ad of 2015. An informant made note of a perceived negative tone, which he perceived as Støre “telling someone off”. After the informants themselves identified the negative valence, I asked them about what they thought about communicating in that way:

W2: Yes, ehm, I mean it is fine that they show what they are critical towards, but, they could have angled it a little differently, and rather told us what they think should be done

M1: I think I personally prefer that they present a problem, but then I would really like the solution to the problem, as a highly educated person, I would prefer to hear a problem and the solution. It’s ok to present a problem if it’s the first time one is presenting a problem, to not have a solution, but one should at least have some idea about what the solution is

(Social sciences)

In the quote above we see both informants explicitly state that they think criticism is acceptable. However, they both desire more than mere criticism. This is a clear example of informants accepting the possible beneficial functions of negativity in political communication, but attempting to discern between useful and non-useful negativity. Interestingly, many informants seem to be articulating a wish for so-called “contrast” ads, containing both criticisms of an opponent and advocacy for the ad sponsor (Jamieson, 2001: 99). If we are to take these quotes at face value, they seem to indicate that the ideal contrast ad should have a one-to-one ratio of problem presentation and solutions. However, not all informants seem to think this. Some informants finding an ad lacking in solutions were met with counter arguments from informants reading the ad slightly differently, as they were, in the words of one informant, “reading between the lines” for advocacy:

W2: There were just problems that need handling

W3: That are to be fixed

W1: Not much of we stand for this and that and this

W3: Yes, it was not so apparent that this was about the Labour Party, except that you know, you know that he [Støre] is in it (...)

M1: I feel that if you read a little between the lines, you get the party's core values, perhaps. But it is not clear enough, I agree to that.

(Natural sciences)

Discussion broke out in several groups about such reading between the lines when discussing the Labour Party ad. After one informant came out as very critical toward the ad because she felt it did not tell her what the Labour Party actually meant about issues, another informant defended the ad:

W1: Well, that's true, because I have no clue as to what they really stand for, but I felt like, school, and like, not privatization, that that was very central to the Labour Party. Pointing out the negative to bring forward what they've already had, that things were better before, the public sector, and the relatively high taxes that we've always had, that that was the best, that we should preserve that

W2: But, in a way, critique, does that always indicate that you mean the opposite?

W1: No, no – not necessarily, but, that's what they're getting at, at least that's what I'm left with

(Law)

The two quotes above are interesting because they in part speak to informant perceptions of useful and non-useful negativity. While some informants appear to think that an implicit course of action, that is read by informants as some variety of “we want to lead the country differently from the party we're criticizing now” is sufficient, this is not always the case. For many informants, this type of “differently somehow” leads informants to demand: “different how?” For these informants, the amount of information is insufficient and the argument is perceived to be too vague. This is a clear example of informants discerning between useful and non-useful negativity.

Informants talking about a perceived imbalance between problems and solutions indicate one end of the spectrum of response. However, a quick glance towards another part of the data material sheds light upon what happens if there is a perceived imbalance between problem presentation and solutions, with an overweight of solutions, or even a high amount of positivity present in the ad. Some of these comments indicate that even though the informants were skeptical to negativity, having no negativity at all can give the impression of having no edge, being naïve or

even not realistic. In other words, happy messages of advocacy are not necessarily the way to go. For instance, consider the young, right leaning group's comments on the Christian Democrat ad of 2013:

W2: It was very very very cute. He could have varied it a little, by not having everything perfect and positive, maybe he could have shown some darker sides of society and said that we need to do something about this

W1: Mhm. Because, many of the issues he voices are very easy to agree with. And that can be good for them, because everybody agrees that safety is good, and that values should be appreciated, and think a lot about, but he does not talk about challenges we face. And that concerns us. The things that are [not good]

(Right leaning)

Here, we can observe explicit desires of more negativity, problem definitions, or "challenges", as worded by one informant. In some instances, the pure advocacy approach of the Christian Democrat film of 2013 led to a less plausible message.

Commenting on the same film as the quote above, some informants are lead to a state of disbelief:

W4: Everything is going to be better.

W2: Yes.

W4: And that's kind of...

W2: We know they can't do it.

(Dancers)

While few informants explicitly desire negativity, comments such as the ones shown above indicate a tension between the dimensions of advocacy and critique. Examining how some ads are perceived to be, in terms of valence, "too much" or even "too positive" further underscore this. Too much negativity is perceived as useless, and too much positivity is perceived as naïveté.

These observations can speak to the debate on contrast ads. My data material indicates that voters seem to appreciate them, and that they are motivated to learn from them. However, they are often disappointed in the learning potential if the ads are not concrete enough in their solutions, or found to be presenting an insufficient amount of solutions.

In some instances, the perceived imbalance between problems and solutions seemed to send the informants into a mode reminiscent of disillusionment when there was an exaggerated focus on problems. For instance, the group of seniors was not very happy with the 2013 Conservative Party ad *Pilots*, in part because they perceived it to solely criticize and not engage in advocacy. When asked about how the ad could have been made differently, one informant proposed introducing issue-based conflict through presenting a series of election promises compared to what a government actually got done. After some reflection on this, the woman who initially launched the idea seemed to become somewhat resigned:

W1: They could pit it up against each other to show it clearly. But I guess when they're out of the government again, we will see the exact same thing. The Conservative Party – those who rule today – we will see everything they promised, and what they achieved, or rather a long list of what they did not achieve

(Seniors).

Here, the informant is articulating a notion that it does not really matter who is in power. This notion is recurring in several interviews. Some informants were even more explicit. Several vocalized that in life and in politics, it is always easier to point out other people's errors, but harder to do better oneself, a version of the "put your own house in order" topos. However, as with the lady in the above-mentioned quote, it seemed to lead to a state of disenchantment. Consider the following quote from one of the business students:

M1: I feel that this is all the [political] parties. It is very easy to point out the wrongs, and then how it should be fixed, and then we come to real life, there is an election and that kind of stuff, and then it is all the same, makes almost no difference who is in control, because it will be the same all the way. That's how I feel. We, as regular people might not sense the largest of changes.

(Private business school)

The observations above can be a little worrisome when connecting them to the literature on negative campaigning. We recall that one potentially detrimental systemic effect of negativity was a reduced political efficacy (Lau et al., 2007). The quotes above seem to come from people who don't really believe that their vote or their political participation will matter much in the end – since they perceive all parties to

be the same. This could be true, or could be reasoned without negativity in the mix. But in this case, it seems like viewing the negative content placed them in a mood in which they became less likely to believe in the problem solving potential of politics and the political system. It would seem as if politicians' pointing out each other's problems has the unintended consequence of accentuating and foregrounding the limits of political agency. Voters see that the parties have a good grasp of problematic aspects, and a fair amount of solutions, too – but they also perceive no change in the status quo when governments shift. Arguably, this could be a common feeling of living in a consensus democracy, where societal change can appear grindingly slow to constituents and politicians alike. However, one should not dismiss the potentially harmful effect that a negative tone has in *emphasizing* this lack of political power and agency, as it could lead to a less enthusiastic mood for politics. One informant, commenting on the Labour Party ad, touches nicely upon what creates enthusiasm and what does not:

M2: This often happens with political videos, that it is a little too much about what everybody else thinks, and not what the party itself thinks. To take a phrase from football., you are not supposed to hate all other teams, you're supposed to love your own, right? (...)"

(Private business school)

Loving a team is showing enthusiasm, but constant critique can be rather dispiriting – at least in this football metaphor. Interestingly, in this case, the informant expressed his general view on negativity, and then proceeded to appreciate the contrasting critique in the ad he had just seen: “this one (...) looks a little at the differences, and that's fine because that's what you're supposed to. So I pretty much liked it.” (M2, Private business school). The informant perceived the criticism, or negativity, as legitimate.

I argue that the findings discussed above are testament to how informants enacted rhetorical citizenship through passing practical judgement on useful and non-useful negativity. In doing so, the informants attempted to find information that was useful, thus showing an orientation towards the receptive virtue of connection. In terms of how political advertising can function as a resource for citizenship beyond

acting as a springboard for discussion on the themes outlined above, I argue that the findings above show how negativity in political ads can act as a cognitive provocation that can both be useful and non-useful to citizens. Lastly, we have seen indications of a type of negativity that could have adverse effects on rhetorical citizens through demobilization or loss of efficacy.

Importantly, however, not all comments perceived negativity to be acceptable or useful. In the following, I turn to critical and neutral comments on negativity. In doing so, I aim to further tease out the nuances of how my informants made sense of the negative content in the ads they were presented with.

5.2.4 Talk about negativity: Critical comments and neutral comments.

Further examining how informants talked about negativity in both critical and more neutral terms can further the sense of how people navigated negativity, and what types of communicative norms that are at play when they do so. What I call “critical comments” refer to comments that are explicitly critical to an attack or a perceived tone in an ad. Such critical comments had various manifestations. A typical reaction was for an informant to identify the perceived negative content, and accordingly verbalize their disapproval or disdain for it. Reacting to the 2013 Conservative Party ad, one of the ship mechanics exemplifies this type of response:

M7: This is a completely different ad than the last one. Here, they did not try to build themselves up at all, here they only attacked the ones around them. It was actually a directly negative ad. They mix humor into it, so that we are supposed to start laughing at those who might do things a little slowly. That’s what they did. They tried to ridicule those in power at the moment. Done. The Conservative Party.

MHI: What do you think about that?

M7: It tells me nothing about what the Conservative Party wants. For me, it’s a very meaningless ad.

MHI: What does the ad say about the Conservative Party?

M4: It says that they are not afraid to step on some toes to get their message across, for example.

(Mechanics)

The comments above mirror the wish for *probatio* argumentation that is recurring in the whole theme of talk about negativity, although in a more critical tone.

Interestingly, however, they seem to indicate a ‘boomerang’ or ‘backlash’ effect (Garramone, 1984), in which an attack in an ad leads to more negative feelings towards the sponsor than the target. Other comments and conversations seem to indicate a different kind of unintended consequence – as several informants stated that they felt disappointed in the ad sponsor after seeing the ad and who was behind it. After watching the same ad that the mechanics discussed above, one of the teachers experienced this type of feeling:

W1: I feel that it, this probably has to do with me, but, I feel that The Conservative Party stands for something else, something more proper than to do it in this way... So when their logo appears in the end I think: oh, it should not be that logo that popped up, it should be another party

MHI: You don’t associate...

W1: No, I don’t associate them with that way of doing communication.

W2: What should it have been instead, you think?

W1: The first thing that came to mind was the Progress Party all the way. That’s what I thought. I thought this belongs to the Progress Party.

(Teachers)

The Progress Party, which is a hybrid between a right-wing populist party and a conservative party (Jungar & Jupskås, 2014), is known for a fiercer tone of political rhetoric, particularly since they spent four decades out of power as a protest party before entering a coalition government in 2013. Here, we see a lack of fit between a perceived tone and the informant’s expectations for a particular political party. Other indications of backlash reactions were also present in the material, such as the group of dancers talking about the Conservative Party film of 2013 as an “ironic film” (M1) in the sense that “(...) it is very negative towards the others, without talking about their own [solutions] – and as time has shown, what they promise does not happen” (M1,

dancers). In other words, the Conservative Party are just as bad as the party they are criticizing in this informant's eyes. Another example of backlash is when one informant in the group of law students thought that the combination of critique and underdog positioning in the Red Party ad made the party seem rather insulted and stuck up:

W2: They seem offended. As a party. 'We were not allowed in, we're on the outside' and that, that's a shame, but concentrate on your policies instead, don't ... peck on the others. They come off as insulted, and I don't trust the large changes that they wish to do

(Law)

As we recall from production, this was mentioned as a potential problem for the ad by both producers and in the textual analysis. Other critical reactions to the negative content took less the shape of a principled stand against "that way of doing communication" in general and related more to interpersonal norms. These reactions were typically in the realm of "this is not ok", the informants often drawing parallels to everyday life. Discussing similarities and differences between the Stoltenberg Taxi ad and the Conservative Party airplane ad, the group of dancers emphasized the negative content as a key difference:

W3: The conservative partys film is funny at the expense of others.

W4: Yes, that's precisely what I'm saying, right, there is a negative tone there, instead of

W2: Instead of building up, it is breaking down.

M1: If this is their approach for marketing, it's one of two things. Either they are pieces of shit that just don't like others, and that's it. Or it is because they don't have too much positive stuff to say about themselves, maybe they have low self-esteem, and that's why they are attacking others instead of talking well about themselves.

(Dancers)

The male informant's review is quite critical, almost scathing. He further elaborated his thoughts on this form of ridicule, making a comparison between the political arena and a more personal lifeworld:

M1: It appeals to those who think this type of humor is funny. For my part, when it's at the expense of others, it's not bullying, but [if I am to do it] I know them. And we're comfortable with each other, and that is something else entirely.

(Dancers)

This statement indicates a distinction between the public and the private realm. The informant is comfortable with bickering and teasing among friends – but he seems to perceive making fun of an opponent in public to be crossing some boundary. The senior group has a similar discussion. Commenting on the very same Conservative Party ad, one informant states that the critique presented in the ad is similar to mudslinging:

M5: And then this is undermining, because in a way you are throwing mud at your colleagues.

W2: Yes

M5: You try to step on your colleagues because you want to do better yourself

M1: Everybody does that!

M5: Well, do they? At a place of work?

M1: No, politicians.

M5: Well, politicians do it, but not at a place of work

W1: Mudslinging. But politics is a lot of mudslinging, whether it is in this country or in the USA or in other countries, too.

M3: MY conclusion is that The Conservative Party does not gather votes with this one.

(Seniors)

Similar to the public/private distinction above, these informants seem to disagree slightly on what criteria apply where. Mudslinging among colleagues is not ok – but there is disagreement on what politicians can or should do. The informant W1 seems somewhat disenchanted, as she states that a lot of politics is mudslinging. The introduction of everyday interpersonal criteria for judging negativity seems to suggest that critique is allowed only between confidants. This is a view not in line with the scholarship on rhetorical dissensus, but at the same time appears to be a view that is

present among some of my informants. The takeaway point here is that informants are critical for different reasons. Some are critical because they are dissatisfied with the amount of *probatio* argumentation they are presented with, because the ad is dominated by *refutatio* argumentation. Others are critical because they employ interpersonal norms in the evaluation of political communication. I will address this difference in the discussion, as one could argue that the former is an example of an orientation towards enacting citizenship that is in line with norms of rhetoric, whilst the latter is not, because it conflates the ideals of sociable conversation with ideals of political debate.

I now turn to the second category of talk about negativity, neutral comments. When referring to “neutral comments”, I mean both comments that are merely pointing out that critique is present seemingly without appreciating or dismissing it – as well as comments that are seemingly appreciative of the critique. Comments in this category often identify an attack or some criticism, but does not appear to mind its presence. One example is the young, left-leaning voters talking about the Conservative Party ad from 2013:

M1: This is the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. And there is an attack, indirectly.

W1: Indirect, yes

M1: Yes, to indirectly state that you are done, you are not finding new solutions, and you are almost doing harm

(Left leaning)

At a later point in the conversation, the informants even mention that the ad could have gone further – and they give comments that indicate that they both really did not mind the criticism and that they really perceive this as a very soft blow:

W2: I think this was a pretty nice film. They could have done worse. They could have presented the Labour Party in a much worse way. They did it in a kind of a cozy way, I think.

MHI: How so?

W2: Well, this man was not exactly a charm bomb, but at the same time he was not improper either, he was goofy, and simple, and straight forward, and

dishonest, but still, I think they could have done it in a lot of ways that would have been worse. There are examples from other countries that are much more cut-throat

(Left leaning)

Here, the informants are discerning between different types of negativity and critique, and in effect different types of political ads. The discussion resonates with the distinction in the scholarly research between soft-sell attack ads and hard-sell attack ads (Swint, 1998), of which I only examined examples of the former. As seen in table 8, the amount of comments that do not problematize or criticize the presence of critique are approximately equal in number to the number of comments criticizing a perceived negative valence. This impression extends to the greater data material. Here, it appears as if negativity is not treated as a big problem among informants. The most common reaction is a non-reaction. Criticism is perceived as a legitimate move, and is not problematized further, if even mentioned.

5.2.5 Uncertainty towards negativity

A last aspect that needs to be mentioned, and that emerged as salient in analysis, was that in some instances focus group participants seemed unsure about whether a type of criticism was acceptable or not – both in specific and in general terms. The discussion ranged from formal qualities, to specific critique, to discussing the role and place of critique more generally. For instance, the Conservative Party ad produced some reflections on the formal qualities of a soft-sell ad. We recall that this genre often uses humor, ridicule and elements gathered from comedy and sketch formats (Richardson Jr, 2008). In the following, the high school teachers discuss the tone and form of the ad:

W1: It is completely different than the other one, because that one plays on positive attributes of Jens Stoltenberg, while here they play upon negative traits of the sitting government

M2: But they are critical in a very humoristic way, are they not?

M1: It is a funny commercial.

M2: I think it was really funny.

W1: I don't think it was funny at all.

MHI: Say a little more about that, why did you not find it funny?

W1: Well because I don't think the acting is great, and I don't think I appreciate this type of ad, where one mocks others

(Teachers)

Here, the two male informants seemingly accept the negative tone in the ad, because of the funny and positive mood created by the satirical form. The female informant, however, is not appreciative of the tone and critique, even though it is a soft-sell. She takes a principled stand against "this type of ad". At a later point in the interview, two of the informants revisit this theme in their discussion:

M2: But at the same time, this type of irony is a bit cowardly. I like it, I think it is funny, and I think it is good satire. But at the same time, the one that is satirical has the advantage that he does not have to say anything meaningful himself. One can in a way just throw out crap. What you really stand for yourself, what kind of proposals for change you actually have, that does not have to be placed on the table, because you are making a fool of the opposition instead.

W2: I completely agree. And by the way, she does not do anything! She just... this will take two hours, but actually it's four and she just says ooooh. She is passive! [informants laugh] And then she does nothing about it. She could just – [makes a swishing sound] finished by taking control herself and pushed him out

(Teachers)

Here, we see one informant still appreciating the entertainment value of the ad, but at the same time criticizing the genre – pointing out that the sponsor is not able to present their own policy. Furthermore, the female informant points to a possible unintended consequence: the female pilot as incompetent and insufficient because she does not show any decisiveness and agency – merely accepting the status quo, presenting no real alternative or even change. In M2's statement, however, we clearly see the topos of putting one's own house in order before the house of others'. He states that it is easy to criticize, but perhaps harder to be constructive. This notion was recurrent in many interviews, through for instance formulations such as "it is easier to tear down than to build up".

One recurring topic that informants would draw upon in order to discuss or negotiate whether an attack was acceptable or not, was references to “American tendencies”, and frequently in the 2015 focus groups: Donald Trump. Trump had at the time of the interviews been noted in Norway for his aggressive tone in the Republican primary elections. Informants also used America as a contrast. One example is the quote from the left leaning voters finding the Conservative Party ad to be a mild attack, which I have already quoted above. We recall one informant stating that “there are examples from other countries that are much more cut-throat at the opponent (...)” (W2, Left Leaning). One example of this pattern is when one of the students in private business school commented on the Red Party ad, employing Donald Trump as a proxy for criticism:

M4: I got a Donald Trump feeling when he started. Like a Make America Great Again feeling. Only in a very calm and more proper way, that is. But when he first started, when he first says that the country is headed in the wrong direction the first thing that came to mind was Donald Trump. So I am just relating to his positioning

(Private business school)

In the above quote, the informant is saying that party leader Moxnes both does and does not do as Trump. He “does like Trump” in the sense that he criticizes, but at the same time, he does not do like Trump because the informant perceives Moxnes’ critique to be more “calm and proper” manner. I take this to be an example of an informant discerning between acceptable and unacceptable criticism, using the reference to Donald Trump as a device to do so. A variety of this stance is common when informants mention Trump: that what they have been watching is “not quite like that” – but somewhat milder. In one informants’ words: “It is not quite an American situation” (W3, Nurses). As such, informants seem to be sensitive to the nuances between the typical (or stereotypical) hard-sell American attack ad, and the soft-sell type of criticism more dominant in the Norwegian sample.

Summing up, I found three films to be conducive of talk about negativity, critique and the balance between attack and advocacy in my material. These were the soft-attack ad *Pilots* of the Conservative Party in 2013, and the contrast ads *Our*

Norway and *Vote for a challenger* from the Labour Party and the Red Party in 2015. The talk mainly revolved around the topics of problem-solution balance, talk about negativity and accompanying critical, neutral or appreciative comments, and lastly comments that appeared to be negotiating whether a particular type of critique was warranted and appropriate or not. I now turn to my discussion of how these results both speak to political ads as a potential resource for citizenship, as well as discussing how my informants to a certain degree were able to pass judgement on what they thought was useful and non-useful negativity. In several instances, informants reacted not to the presence of critique or attack per se, but rather to the perceived lack of follow up. In the cases that informants did react critically to negativity in itself, there are at times indications of collision between norms of pleasant, sociable conversation and norms of more politically oriented discussion (Schudson, 1997).

5.2.6 Discussion

In this chapter, I have explored informants' thoughts on the balance between attack and advocacy through an inquiry into their discussion around negative content in political ads. As we saw in the theoretical introduction to this chapter, much of the research on negative political advertising is effects based. The present chapter has attempted to nuance and further build our understanding of such ads by exploring how voters react to them. In this case, I examined citizens' reactions to advertisements that are 'soft' – presenting a form of critique through humor, in an indirect way – or explicitly in a milder manner than most US examples.

I found that informants, when addressing negativity, talked about the balance between the presentation of problems and the presentation of solutions, or the balance between attack and advocacy. Importantly, many informants displayed reactions similar to those presented in the previous chapter when talking about issue information, namely a wish for more concrete information, plans of action, or *probatio* argumentation. In the context of negativity, this manifested as a wish for more *solutions* to the problems presented, and preferably concrete and detailed solutions. Seemingly, informants verbalized a desire for a type of contrast ad, in which the

balance between problem presentation and solutions was not overly skewed. Informants treated negativity as less useful when occurring alone. This resonates in part with the findings of Pinkleton et al (2002), who discovered that voters evaluated negative ads as less useful in terms of decision making. Informants reacting in this manner discerned between different types of negativity, the productive or useful, and the less productive or less useful.

Thus, informants acted as rhetorical citizens through verbalizing a desire for something more than just negativity or just attack. Rather they wanted the negativity *and* something else – something that could give them an impression of where the attacking candidate would like to head in terms of political direction, or how said candidate or party would propose to solve the problems presented in the ad. Here, informants are seemingly attempting to orient themselves, to get an overview of political issues. I take this to be a clear orientation towards the receptive virtue of connection. At the same time, this is in part a demonstration of a refined view of negativity in democratic politics. Informants for the most part showed tolerance towards negativity, but reacted to a perceived imbalance between problems and solutions. In fact, the reactions towards pure advocacy ads suggested they were “too positive”, and instances of informants explicitly wanting more problem definitions than they were presented with, are testament to informants’ relative appreciation of critique.

The most common reaction to negative content was modes of appreciation, neutral comments or, most frequently, not mentioning it at all, thereby not problematizing it. However, this was not always the case. A lot of informants did, as detailed above, also react critically. They did so for a variety of reasons. Through examining the sub-theme of uncertainty around a perceived attack, some informants appeared to evaluate the ads using norms from everyday life, rather than norms of political discussion. In doing so, the informants answers correspond in part to the ideals of sociable conversation, as for instance formulated by Schudson (1997). Schudson, in his essay on political talk, divides between the sociable and the problem-solving conversation. A key defining trait of sociable conversation is that “(...)

conversation is oriented to the pleasure of interacting with others in conversation itself (...)” (Schudson, 1997, p. 300), while problem-solving conversation revolves around precisely the identification and possible solutions to societal issues and problems. The former is oriented towards the private sphere to a greater degree than the latter, which orients more to a mode of publicness. The former is ideally comfortable, whilst the latter can be experienced as difficult and uncomfortable, as it entails confrontation and conflict. The type of informant reaction that I have mentioned above is indicative of a mode in which one seeks to avoid uncomfortable feelings that conflict can produce. This could indicate an orientation towards the voter-consumer and the private sphere, a mode which prevents a fuller enactment of rhetorical citizenship, because one is rejecting the unpleasant content, and seemingly not willing to further treat the negative information. More dramatic than a slight blurring of interpersonal norms and ideals of political debate, however, are the reactions that point to a sense of disillusionment, or a loss of efficacy. Here, we can catch a glimpse of the possible detrimental consequences of negativity. If negativity produces, or is used as argument to support, a position in which all politicians are the same, politics does not matter, and a citizen’s vote does not matter – then this is indeed a problem. In this scenario, negativity becomes not a cognitive provocation that sparks discussion and talk, but rather an argument in support of disconnecting from the political realm. These types of responses were few and often far between. However, considering the ‘soft’ nature of the ads the respondents were presented with, there might be cause for some concern. If future political ads in the Norwegian context were to take on a harder form of criticism, it is not unlikely that some people would experience a darkened public mood, or other adverse effects.

Turning to how political advertisements can function as resources for citizenship, I argue that in the context of negativity they may do so through negativity’s ability to work as a cognitive provocation. As we have seen, many informants turn to a mode reminiscent of problem-solving after being provoked in this way. The way informants seek additional information, and request additional information are in part testament to this. Furthermore, looking at how the ads enabled informants to enact a rhetorical type of citizenship, not only did the negative content in

the ads lead to talk about communicative norms in general – such as when and how it is acceptable to ‘go negative’, but it also revealed informants’ relative tolerance of attack and critique, and their sensibilities towards useful and non-useful negativity. Many of the critical comments towards negativity could be explained by factors of social desirability bias in the research situation (Mattes & Redlawsk, 2014). Negative ads have a bad reputation among people (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989), and marking one’s disdain for such communication could be a feasible way to go for an informant wanting to put their best foot forward, or as part of performing a respectable persona in front of one’s peers and a university researcher. However, the critical comments could also be indicative of informants evaluating the content of the ads through norms of interpersonal behavior and sociability. It is possible that this adherence to everyday norms leads citizens slightly away from enacting a rhetorical type of citizenship, in which conflict and negativity is seen as natural and potentially useful. I now turn to a domain in which the ideals of the everyday and the political intertwine even further, to the point of almost complete blurring. In the next chapter, I will present my findings on personalized content, and how informants use everyday categories of personality as a route towards their thinking about politics.

5.3 How voters navigate politics through personality³⁵

Contemporary political communication is rife with ethos-appeals, not necessarily only those arguing for a candidate's competence or track record, but also those appeals that attempt to say something about who the politician is as a person. As the thesis of personalization of political communication dictates, individual politicians have become more important (Garzia, 2011, p. 698; Karvonen, 2010, p. 4). As a consequence, leaders increasingly communicate their political personae to voters, who in turn are found to increasingly assess and judge aspects of personality in their assessments of their would-be-leaders (Karvonen, 2010, p. 3). The following chapter is an inquiry into how these tensions play out through political advertising.

I will demonstrate how political ads function as a resource for citizenship by enabling discussion around and judgement on what constitutes a good political leader. The ads serve as a resource for negotiating trust and credibility, both in terms of reactions to concrete aspects of ads, as well as more general explorations of leadership. In the following, I show how my informants are at times enacting a receptive rhetorical citizenship through articulating and questioning norms of political leadership, and testing these norms in unison. This type of questioning is indicative of an orientation towards the receptive virtue of openness. Furthermore, informants displayed orientations towards the receptive norm of literacy through their seeming awareness of the constructedness and contingency of the ideals they employed in evaluating leaders

In the following, I show how citizens, through navigating a sense of sociability through the two dimensions of authenticity and ordinariness, employ personality traits as a route towards thinking about political matters. After showing how sociability, authenticity and of-the-people-ness interact to construct the paradoxical ideal of 'the authentic, ordinary leader', I go on to discuss how informant negotiations foreground the ways in which political ads can function as a resource by providing a symbolic meeting point between the political elite and the citizenry. The reception of the

³⁵ Parts of this chapter build on an extensively revised and expanded version of Iversen (2018).

political ads becomes a site in which citizens negotiate their relationships to and attitudes towards politicians and pass judgement on their trustworthiness using cues found in the films. By showing how informants employ interpersonal cues from everyday social interaction in order to pass judgement on political candidates, I provide new knowledge to the study of personalized political advertising. What this examination offers is a more fine-grained look at the cultural ideals that are at work in citizen evaluations of image-ads and personalized content.

Analyzing the focus group data, I found two recurring themes among informants' judgement of the politicians and the ads: the ideal of being of the people, or 'ordinariness', and the ideal of 'being oneself', or 'authenticity'. Straddling both of these dimensions was an emphasis on the utmost importance of social skills and coming across as a human and pleasant character, or 'sociability'. These concepts guide the following theoretical inquiry and the ensuing analysis. I will also discuss how informants talked about a number of tensions that arise between leaders and followers, when the political elite attempt to communicate a symbolic proximity to the people.

In the following, I introduce some central thoughts from the literature on the personalization of politics. I then discuss this issue in light of the genre of political ads, before moving to the findings from my focus group interviews. I end the chapter by discussing how my findings demonstrate the ways in which my informants enacted receptive rhetorical citizenship. I argue that they did so through orienting towards the norm of openness through articulating norms and ideals of political leadership, participating in a form of testing or questioning of these norms in unison. Moreover, displaying the virtue of literacy by showing an awareness of construction around the norms used to evaluate the politicians.

5.3.1 The personalization of political communication

The "personalization of politics" or, more specifically, the personalization of political communication has been identified as a salient, even defining trend of contemporary western democracies (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014, p. 154). Scholars have described the

development at a more general level as the growing importance of, and emphasis on, political leaders in democratic societies (McAllister, 2007, p. 2). Furthermore, how personalization concerns “the role of individual politicians and of politicians as individuals in determining how people view politics and how they express their political preferences” (Karvonen, 2010, p. 1f).

The personalization of politics is a major concept in current research on political communication, and thus entails multiple meanings, research strands and topical interests. In broad terms, the personalization of politics is often treated (Garzia, 2011, p. 698) as a sub concept of a larger movement in modernity, the individualization of society (Bauman, 2001) – signifying a shift from a society with greater preference for collective organization in a number of areas of life, to a society, which to a greater degree revolves around individuals. According to the personalization thesis, political parties have become less important and individual political leaders more so. What this entails for the domain of politics is a shift both in voters and among the political elite. Voters have become more oriented towards individual politicians at the expense of political parties and organizations – and some also claim: at the expense of ideology (Walter, 2015, p. 3).

As Karvonen’s definition above suggests, personalization is not only voter-driven. Political parties are also increasingly focusing on personalized communication, and foregrounding their star-politicians. There is both a supply-side and a demand-side aspect to personalized political communication. While the personalization of politics is an expansive field of research (See Adam & Maier, 2010; Karvonen, 2010; van Aelst et al., 2012 for three overviews), the idea of forming personal bonds between politicians and the people is hardly new. Ethos, the credibility of the speaker was originally conceptualized as an emotional dimension (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 15), and has been a core trait in rhetorical studies ever since Aristotle presented it as one of three forms of evidence in political speeches. Though the personalization of politics may be “as old and ubiquitous as politics itself” (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014, p. 154), scholars agree that key drivers such as the growth of the media society as well as modernization and individualization intensify this

development. Much of the more recent literature on personalization points to Weber's work on authority when discussing dimensions of charisma and credibility, in particular Weber's (1958) concept of charismatic leadership.

If we apply Weber's charismatic leadership to the context of contemporary media society, a source of charismatic authority is found in politicians' private and personal life. Fueled by technological developments of electronic media (Meyrowitz, 1985), and media logic favouring a focus on the individual person (Altheide & Snow, 1991), politicians' personal qualities have been brought to the forefront – with expectations for politicians to appear as sociable, particularly towards ordinary citizens. Hjarvard (2013) identifies a politician's ability to mime interpersonal communication, the everyday conversation, as key for success. Following this ideal, politicians should be at ease in a form of confessional mode, as well as able to reflect on their own emotions (Langer, 2010, p. 68). This means individual traits of personality have become an important part of the performance of the political persona. An important part of modern political authority is constructed through politicians' personal identities (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 67). Understood through Meyrowitz' reconceptualization of Goffman's theatre model of social interaction (Meyrowitz, 1985), the media shows a preference for social interaction in the middle region, which is a mix of the intimate private sphere (backstage) and the public persona (front stage) (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 67).

5.3.1.1 Image and person in political advertising research

The image-oriented ad is a well-established genre in the literature on political advertising (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006). Image ads can argue that a particular candidate is especially well suited because she has a good track record, or they can be more about establishing a particular name, creating salience before arguing issues (Diamond & Bates, 1992, p. 297). Alternately, the ads can attempt to showcase, argue or present characteristics of the politician as a person – or introduce elements from the politician's private sphere. American presidential candidates frequently attempt both.

One example is “The Man from Hope” in which then presidential candidate Bill Clinton told the story of a young man from Hope, Arkansas. Aptly described by Westen, the ad does not concern itself with policy. Rather, its aim was “(...) creating a set of positive associations (...) and narrative about the Man from Hope – framed from start to finish, in terms of hope and the American dream” (Westen, 2007, p. 5). An example from the UK is “Kinnock the Movie” (Scammell & Langer, 2006a, p. 74), in which Labour Party Leader Neil Kinnock was to be presented as humble, down to earth and of the people. Elebash (1984) and Smith (2001) provide further examples of image-building in political ads in the UK context. Importantly, these types of ads are ethos-appeals, but do not necessarily emphasize a candidate’s competence or track record, or using rhetorical terms: the sender’s phronesis (wisdom). Rather, the dimensions of *arête* (moral virtue), and in particular *evnoia* (good will) come to the foreground.

Examining differences between image and issue ads in US elections from 1952 to 2000, Johnston and Kaid discovered that image ads were more used to portray candidates in a positive light, leaving most of the attack ads to the issue-category. Importantly, they also found evidence that the categories of image ad and issue ad are not mutually exclusive (2002, p. 298). Indeed, they state that even though a particular ad might be dominated by issue appeals, “(...) one third of those issue ads still contained some attempt to define or redefine the image of the candidate” (Johnston & Kaid, 2002, p. 298). In other words, we can assume that people evaluate image-aspects every time the candidate is present. This resonates well with my material. One example of this is the 2015 Labour Party ad. While heavy in argumentation, it still features the party leader as the narrator and main character – leading informants to talk about his personal qualities.

The majority of research on image content employs the method of quantitative content analysis or is experimental in nature (See Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2006; Kaid, 2012; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006; van Steenburg, 2015 for overviews), investigating the various effects of image (and issue) ads on factors such as learning, opinion, engagement and so on. Consequently, we know less about *how* central concepts such

as authenticity work as an *evaluative* concept (Enli, 2015; van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 396), and of actual citizen evaluations of i.e. authenticity (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018, p. 3).

What the present study can contribute with is a more in-depth look at how voters navigate personalized image-content, allowing a more fine-grained understanding of how the phenomenon plays out in the Norwegian political context.

5.3.2 Three dimensions of personalization: Authenticity and ordinariness through sociability.

Van Aelst et al (2012) distinguish between two forms of personalization: individualization and privatization. The former describes the tendency for individual politicians or political actors to receive more attention on behalf of political parties and organizations, and the latter entails a shift from the politician as a public role, to an emphasis on the politician as a private individual. In the following, I am concerned with dimensions of privatization. Specifically, following Van Aelst et al's further distinctions, I examine how people perceive politicians' personal characteristics. This is a result of my data sample, as none of the films in my material draw upon the politicians' private lives in a significant way that would warrant an analysis of aspects of personal narratives. Rather, I concentrate on how politicians are perceived as persons through their behavior on-screen.

The literature is divided on the question of which dimensions of personal characteristics are relevant (van Aelst et al., 2012, p. 212). In the following, I aim to shed light on how voters navigate personalized political communication through three ideals for the modern politician: that of ordinariness, that of authenticity and that of sociability. As such, I touch upon dimensions highlighted as important by other scholars, albeit under different names such as reliability and morality (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2010), character and relations to others (Reinemann & Wilke, 2007), as well as aspects of leadership appeal such as communicative skills, warmth, likeability, and personal appearance (Garzia, 2011, p. 700; Miller & Miller, 1976), or charisma and one-of-us-appeal (Hansen & Kock, 2003)

As we will see in the following analysis, these ideals are at times in conflict, and at other times are the products of paradoxes and contradictions. Ambivalence is a keyword for informants' answers when it comes to their practical judgements of the ads and the politicians featured in them. Several scholars have made note of the inherent contradictions in various ideals for the modern, 'middle-region'-politician. Stanyer and Wring write that the modern candidate "(...) must now bridge the perhaps irreconcilable positions that in order to appeal to the public they must try to appear humble and in touch yet also charismatic if not extraordinary" (Stanyer & Wring, 2004, p. 8). Political sociologist Jean Paul Daloz understands this bridging process to be a sort of tense co-existence between proximity and eminence, a legitimizing process often marked by ambiguity (Daloz, 2009, p. 286). He (Daloz, 2007, 2009) further claims that these dimensions co-exist in a continuous tension – between the humble and the extraordinary, in which different aspects of a politicians' presentation carry different parts of the workload. One can imagine the political candidate eminently arriving at the political rally in a helicopter, but then enacting closeness through refusing to use the podium, stepping down to speak to the crowd at their level (Daloz, 2009, p. 290). This aspect of simultaneousness is central to this idea. As Coleman writes,

Being seen as both genuine and inspirational entails appearing to be not only someone who is extraordinary enough to represent others, but also ordinary enough to be representative of others. In short, politicians must come across as being both captains and team members at the same time (Coleman, 2011, p. 51).

The following is an examination of how this balancing act plays out through the medium of political advertising, and how voters navigate these tensions in their judgements of political personalities, and of politicians' personal characteristics. Following the observation that citizens to a larger degree than before evaluate their potential leaders as persons (Garzia, 2011, p. 698), I examine how they do so by evaluating sociability through the two dimensions of ordinariness and authenticity. Following the understanding of ethos as the credibility of the speaker, I treat these two dimensions as possible cues and moderators of trust. Following the premise of the

symbolic gap and power imbalance between politicians and people, perceived proximity can be seen as an antecedent to trust in politicians. Understood as cues, these dimensions can be seen as operating with the following logic: If a person is symbolically proximate, that person is better equipped to understand the problems and challenges of that voter. As such, authenticity, ordinariness and sociability may function as “information shortcuts” (Popkin, 1995) for voters when they attempt to ascertain the credibility or trustworthiness of a politician.

Sociability – coming across as human and agreeable

A core aspect of personalization that was present in my material was how informants talked about the personal characteristics of politicians, and how some politicians were found to come across as human, or as nice and agreeable people. This ideal of sociability appears to act in tandem with either authenticity or of-the-people-ness (or both) in my material. The literature on personalization has described that politicians are expected to be sociable, particularly towards ordinary citizens. Mastering and displaying middle-region-behavior is central to contemporary politicians (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 67). However, it is also important on the demand-side, among voters – who appear to appreciate this type of telegenic quality.

Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) discusses former US president Ronald Reagan as an illustrative turning point in the development of electronic media and its impact on political rhetoric, stating that Reagan’s reputation as ‘master communicator’ was misleading. Rather, Reagan was an expert at expression, Meyrowitz claims. This enabled the former president to at times utterly fail in his communication, but still be forgiven because he managed to come across as a nice, sympathetic person. Meyrowitz remarks:

Presidents and presidential hopefuls are judged by the same standards, those of “good television”: are they lively and humorous; do they look friendly and alert; are their facial expressions pleasant to watch; can they offer off-the-cuff remarks without much thinking, pausing, or stumbling over words; and do they

shape their words and expressions to the requirements of the camera and microphone rather to those of the crowd (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 304)

Anders Johansen describes how the advent of radio and the microphone had precisely this effect on the type of talk that became the ideal, referring to early studies by the BBC (Johansen, 2002, p. 186). The new ideal was to cultivate a style marked by informality, intimacy, familiarity and a relaxed state (Johansen, 2002, p. 186). A degree of casualness is praised, containing aspects of everyday speaking situations: “What were once deemed formal errors (...) interruptions, slips-of-the-tongue, derailments, grammatical imperfections, slang and dialect are today not only widely tolerated, but straightforwardly appreciated” (Johansen, 2002, p. 187)³⁶. As Jamieson (1988) has shown, American political speeches have also moved towards a conversational ideal with the advent of mass media. As Hjarvard points out, the ideal of everyday conversation is particularly visible in softer formats, such as the talk show. Here, politicians are “(...) expected to address political issues (if at all) in a way that does not interfere with the sociable quality of the program” (2013, p. 70).

Importantly, this shift in focus of presentation also carries on to citizen and voter behavior. Following Karvonen (2010, p. 3), people’s political preference may be formed on the basis of their view of individual politicians, and people’s political choices may follow their evaluations of politicians as individuals. In my material, I found the ideal of the sociable leader to co-occur with two other particular ideals: that of ordinariness, or of-the-people-ness, and authenticity: the ability to come across as in touch with one-self, as a true individual.

Ordinariness: the charisma of conspicuous modesty

Through political communication in general and through political ads specifically, politicians present themselves, and voters interpret and react to this presentation. A central tension in this symbolic encounter is that of representation, democracy and power. As Daloz states, political leaders work symbolically, through the performance of their political personae, in order to earn legitimacy. A central theme in Daloz’ work

³⁶ Please note that all direct quotations from Johansen (2011) are my own translations from Norwegian to English.

is the ambivalence of proximity and eminence (or closeness and distance) between democratically elected leaders and the citizens of contemporary democracies. This tension is in large part born out of representative democracy’s design. While politicians have a dominant position when in power, they are themselves being dominated by voters through the electoral process (Daloz, 2009, p. 287)). Daloz argues that leaders build legitimacy by both bridging and maintaining the perceived gap between politicians and the people, resulting in a tension between proximity and eminence. He provides some general dimensions in which eminence and proximity can be enacted.

Table 9: Dimensions of proximity and eminence. From Daloz (2009, p. 286; 288).

| Types of proximity | Top-down rhetoric of legitimation | Types of eminence | Manifestations |
|----------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|
| Sharing a crucial identity | I am <i>one of</i> you | Social eminence | Renown; social success; access to other (strategic) elites and ability to deal with them |
| Social proximity | I am <i>like</i> you | Competence | Oratorical skills, technical knowledge, etc. |
| Geographical proximity | I am <i>among</i> you; I live here; I am present | | |
| Patronizing proximity | I am above you but I can put the resources I command at your disposal; I am <i>with</i> you | Exemplarity | Incarnation of respected values |
| Concrete proximity | I am available; I am listening to you | Substance | Redistribution, generosity, philanthropy |
| | | Outward signs of superiority | Personal ostentation and public display; capacity to represent a collectivity or institution in an impressive way; decorum |
| Modest proximity | I do not pretend to stand out above you | | |

As table 9 shows, these facets of closeness and distance can be enacted through a variety of dimensions such as objects (clothing, prestige goods), manners, behavior and so on. A very important point in this regard is the specificity of local political cultures. Daloz claims that in Scandinavia, and particularly in Norway, emphasis is put on so-called conspicuous modesty, as opposed to conspicuous consumption (Daloz, 2007, p. 171), as the Nordic case shows a “deliberate *avoidance* of ostentation» (Daloz, 2007, p. 174). An important ideal in this regard is that one should not stand out as a politician, but appear to be one of the people. Building on this concept, Krogstad and Storvik (2007) point to what they call the “ordinary human charisma”. Understood through Weber, this is a type of anti-authoritative charisma located within the frameworks of the Norwegian cultural repertoire: “It is as an ordinary man or woman a politician gains appeal and status as a political hero in the Norwegian society” (Krogstad & Storvik, 2007, p. 214). Kjeldsen and Johansen (2011) argue that the more

general trend of “ordinary guy” rhetoric present in western political communication has been taken a step further in Scandinavia. The politician should not only be perceived as authentic (a concept I will elucidate below), but also ‘as we are’ – resulting in the ideal of “not just one’s true self, but as we are” (Johansen, 1999; Kjeldsen, 2008b; Kjeldsen & Johansen, 2011).

Demonstrating a form of egalitarianism seems as an important part of Scandinavian ideals. Kjeldsen (2008b) found that Danish political print ads displayed recurring themes presenting the politician as an insignificant figure – not as a leader elevated above people in general, but rather as an ordinary person on the same level as everybody else (Kjeldsen, 2008b, p. 146f). For political leaders in Norway, it is essential not to be too distant, not to be high and mighty, but rather to appear as “one of us”. According to Daloz, the Norwegian political elite aims to perform a folksy persona, in which signs of social inequality must be dampened (Daloz, 2007, p. 173). Krogstad and Storvik state that equality is a basic defining motive in Norway, and that it is “(...) important not to be too filled with oneself, to appear modest and low key – at the same time as one is leading” (Krogstad & Storvik, 2007). However, as Johansen (2002) states, the modern Norwegian politician should not only be as the people are, but come across as truly himself – as a true individual, leading us to the second ideal highly at work among my informants: authenticity.

Authenticity – to be one’s true self, and to be true to one’s self

While the section above described the impetus to showcase closeness to the people in terms of social and cultural distance in a careful balancing act between proximity and eminence, authenticity concerns an individual’s ability to come across as “being one self” and “being true to one self”. The authentic individual appears as a true individual in contact with her inner emotions and motivations, whilst at the same time acting upon and on behalf of those inner qualities rather than outside influence. As Guignon writes on the concept:

The basic assumption built into the ideal of authenticity is that, lying within each individual, there is a deep, “true self” – the “Real Me” – in distinction from all that is not really me. This real, inner self contains the constellation of

feelings, needs, desires, capacities, aptitudes, dispositions, and creative abilities that make the person a unique individual (Guignon, 2004, p. 3).

Importantly, I treat authenticity as a performance, not as a character trait. As Tolson states, ‘being yourself’ is a type of public performance, but a performance which, crucially, is not perceived as ‘acting’ (Tolson, 2001, p. 445). Within media and communication studies, scholars have examined how celebrities perform “a mediated identity which might be perceived as ‘authentic’” (Tolson, 2001, p. 443), how television programs attempt to construct the “authentic layperson”, or the voice of the people in specific programs (Thornborrow, 2001) or how elements of media production, genre and expectations in various forms of mediated communication work to make, break or create ambivalent states towards what audiences perceive as ‘real’ and ‘fictitious’ (Enli, 2015). In this project, I am interested in how authenticity as a construct is at work among people when they evaluate politicians.

In this regard it is also important to state that authenticity is an evaluative (van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 396) and normative (Enli, 2015) term. This entails that being authentic for the most part is considered a positive quality. Being authentic is being “real” as opposed to “fake”, being in contact with one’s inner self rather than acting on outside influence, acting in a spontaneous manner rather than planning one’s behavior in advance, and being perceived as acting as an individual with a stable, centered self – rather than playing a role of acting on behalf of a collective that is not oneself.

Guignon (2004), largely following Trilling’s (1972) historical account of the idea of authenticity, attempts to characterize some defining notions of authenticity by outlining some binary oppositions that capture some of the tensions that the concept activates. I have organized these binary opposites in the table below.

Table 10: Binary oppositions of authenticity, from Guignon (2004)

| Authentic - inner | Inauthentic -outer |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Private | Public |
| Spontaneous | Calculated |
| Deep | Superficial |
| Spiritual | Materialistic |
| Organic | Mechanic |
| Genuine | Fake |
| True | Illusory |
| Original | Simulation |
| Individual | Collective |

The most central dichotomy that we need to understand authenticity as a concept, as indicated by its top position in bold in the table above, is that of inner/outer:

It seems natural to us to suppose what, with respect to the self, what is inner is what is true, genuine, pure and original, whereas what is outer is a mere shadow, something derived, adulterated and peripheral (...) the concept of authenticity is defined by privileging the inner over the outer (...) the inner/outer opposition is clearly valorized: the inner is regarded as higher or more real than the outer. Our outer avowals can be called “authentic” only to the extent that they honestly and fully “express” the inner (Guignon, 2004, p. 43).

While the idea of the stable self does not necessarily make sense from a sociological standpoint, my aim in the following is not to criticize the concept per se. The point is to examine authenticity as an evaluative concept (van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 392) at work among citizens. To ask, not how authentic a politician or a presentation is, but rather, as van Leeuwen suggests: “Who takes this as authentic and who does not?”, and furthermore to ask on which basis people make these judgements (van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 396).

Treating authenticity as an evaluative concept that is actively at work among people, it is important to emphasize that while the authentic is praised, the inauthentic is equally scorned (Guignon, 2004, p. 81). Indeed, one reason that authenticity is an appreciated ideal could be that authenticity is interconnected with other virtues such as honesty, courage, consistency and self-reflexivity (Guignon, 2008, p. 287). After all, in order to be authentic one needs to have knowledge of oneself, and have the honesty and courage to present oneself without reservation. As such, authenticity becomes a cue for a specific set of character traits that resonate well with attractive traits in politicians, such as trustworthiness and integrity.

Turning to the realm of politics, what comes to the foreground is authenticity's adherence to the "romantic belief that what people say spontaneously is more truthful than what they say after preparation and planning" (van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 394). Anders Johansen locates a core tenet of authenticity in the necessity of 'meaning what one says' in order to be perceived as credible. The danger for the politicians lies in the fact that while they may be speaking truthfully about themselves, this 'self' can be perceived as something other than their inner self. This could lead the audience to question whether politicians actually mean what they say, or whether they are "thinking and feeling like a central board or a program committee" (Johansen, 2002, p. 71). Authenticity is thus not a matter of deception, but rather speaks to *coherence* between presentation and the pictured 'inner' self.

Summing up, I have introduced two dimensions which my informants frequently used when they evaluated the politicians they watched on-screen: 1) the one-of-us-appeal, a politician's ability to come across as folksy, down to earth and "of the people" – a combination of Daloz' conception of social and modest proximity: I am like you, and I don't pretend to stand out above you. 2) Authenticity, a politician's ability to come across as a true and singular individual in contact with his or her inner emotions: I am true to my inner convictions, and I am expressing them in a way that is authentic. Lastly, the dimension that permeates the two mentioned above – that of a 'human' charisma or telegenic qualities, aspects of a politician's interpersonal skills, or

ability to come across as a pleasant individual who can interact with normal people: I am a person, or even: I am human. Taken together, these three dimensions make up quite the ideal for the modern Norwegian politician: Not only himself, but as we are – and able to move among us in ways that are not socially awkward or seem contrived. The true individual, coming across as human and sociable, and as-us, while at the same time being a politician and a potential leader. This is what is at the core of the paradoxical and contradictory Norwegian ideal of “authentic ordinary leadership”. Interestingly, as we shall see in the analysis, citizens appear to be comfortable with some of these paradoxes – resulting in an active *and* contradictory ideal of “authentic ordinary leadership”

5.3.3 Personalization as a theme

In the following, I present the analytical themes and sub-themes of informants’ experiences of close-mediated contact with politicians in a political landscape that praises the personal, the intimate, the authentic and the ‘down to earth’. A politician who not only displays middle-region behavior and is at ease in conversation with ordinary citizens, but also one that is himself, and of-the-people. I start by describing how the focus group participants talked about proximity and distance, as understood by Daloz. Then, I move to their experience (or non-experience) of authenticity. Lastly, I draw upon responses of a more general character, which speaks to the theme of leader-follower tensions. Together, I show how the ads have the potential to function as a resource through allowing negotiations of norms and ideals about politicians at a more general plane, and for judgements on trustworthiness at the level of concrete ads.

As I have previously mentioned, the personalization-theme was the most dominant by far in my data material. This is also the main reason that I have given it extra emphasis in terms of chapter length and theoretical framework. While elements of personalization were prominent in almost all the films, some films to a greater degree initiated conversations about specific sub-themes. *Taxi Stoltenberg* and Hareide’s 2013 ad led to a great deal of talk about proximity and distance, and authenticity. For the most part, the Stoltenberg ad was well received, whereas

Hareide’s advert was not (with certain exceptions, as will be discussed below). The Conservative Party ad and The Centre Party ad from 2013 had a low image-content, and consequently led to little talk about politicians’ personalities (except for some comments on party leader Navarsete’s personality, as she appeared in a still image ad the end of an ad). However, these ads did lead to some talk about on leader-follower relations.

All ads in the 2015 material featured a party leader. Consequently, all ads sparked conversations on proximity/distance and authenticity. The Labour Party ad and the Red Party ad were specifically directed towards the believability of the individual politicians who were (intensely) in focus. The Conservative Party ad led to general thoughts on the distance/proximity of politicians, but also gave some interesting responses on clothing and concrete proximity, as the ad shows politicians walking ‘among the people’ doing house calls. The core narrative of the ad also contrasts a “high and mighty” oligarch to a more down-to-earth person. The humorous Christian Democrat ad mostly sparked comments on Hareide’s personality and character traits. It also sparked critical comments concerning being talked down to and looked down upon due to the clear (and in the informants’ view moralizing) standpoint “no to Sunday shopping” and some general comments on leadership.

Table 11: Themes and frequencies for talk on personalization

| Theme | Sub-theme | No- of references | No. of occurrence in groups (n=16) |
|------------------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Personalization | | 394 | 16 |
| | Ordinariness | 169 | 16 |
| | Authenticity | 129 | 16 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|----|
| Leader-follower- relations | 165 | 16 |
|-------------------------------|-----|----|

For full list of sub-themes, see appendix B.

As mentioned before, the notion of sociability straddles the two concepts of ordinariness and authenticity in my material. The most common comments on positive traits of sociability and conversational ideals related to likeability and agreeability – how the politician in question seemed to function in a social setting. Informants used words such as “positive” (W1, Hairdressers), “nice” (M5, Seniors), “buddy” (W4, Dancers), “kind” (M1, Humanities), “agreeable” (W1, Social sciences), “cozy” (W1, Art students), “amicable” (W5, Hairdressers), “jovial” (M1, Law), “humorous” (W1, Right leaning), “a mother-in-law’s dream” (W4, Nurses), “likeable” (M4, Private business school), “a good guy” (W2, Humanities), “warm” (M1, Art students), “sympathetic” (M3, Elite business School), “pleasant” (W1, Social sciences) and “good” (W4, Nurses) when describing what they viewed as positive character traits and positive on-screen behavior. Another recurring word used in a positive sense by informants was “human”.

As I will later discuss, this type of charisma is not one-sidedly considered as good, following the logic of the need for balance between proximity and eminence. Interpersonal agreeability lacking eminence showed to produce perceptions of political *impotence*.

5.3.4 Ordinariness and the of-the-people-appeal

The theme of ordinariness manifested through three sub-themes: comments indicating informants’ experience of closeness to a politician, comments indicating informants’

experience of distance to a politician, and comments concerning the balance of closeness and distance.

Turning to informant experience of proximity, I found that informants produced clear articulations that indicated that the tension between proximity and eminence, between closeness and distance to political leaders was an active part of their evaluations of what they saw. It also became apparent that the most dominant and preferred proxy for talking about this theme was to discuss how “of the people” or not a politician was. As we recall, a certain folksiness or ability to appear as “a common man” is also emphasized in the literature on personalization.

When concretely addressing it during interviews, the most common utterances coded under the sub-theme of proximity and distance were expressions that indicated an experience of closeness to a politician. Informants talked about their sensations of proximity mainly by describing politicians as being “human”, “on our level” or sometimes explicitly claiming that they felt close to the politician. The most common way of expressing this was through talking about the politician as “of the people” or being like common people. What constituted “of the people” varied slightly. Some informants emphasized the ability to communicate, or talk, with all kinds of people:

MHI: What did you see here?

W1: I saw a prime minister that was a little more of the people. I saw a side of him that was a little different from what one has seen before

MHI: What makes you say that he is of the people?

W1: That he is of the people? Well he places himself in situations in which he meets all kinds of people. He is very good at talking to everyone

(Right leaning on *Taxi Stoltenberg*)

Other informants use words such as “folksy” (W4, Nurses) and “average Joe” (M1, Right leaning) to describe their feelings, or stated that the politician in question appeared as “one of us” (M1, Dancers). Other informants to a greater degree accentuated the politician’s understanding of them, or of larger groups of people as central to the “of the people”-category. After having watched the 2015 film with

Labour Party leader Jonas Gahr Støre, an informant is asked how she thought Støre appeared in the ad:

W4: Very much of the people, and – as someone the people would love perhaps. Easy to like – he looks very kind and good.

MHI: Is there something particular you mean by “of the people”?

W4: He tries to appear as one of the workers , or one of the middle-class. He understands all those issues about Kindergarten, and all of that.

(Nurses on *Our Norway*).

In other words, Støre is perceived to have a good grasp of the problems of the common people. Another way in which my informants expressed sensations of proximity was to describe politicians as “human”. For many informants, there seemed to be a distinction between being human and being a politician. For example, one of the hairdressers stated that she perceived Stoltenberg to be “discussing politics, but... as an ordinary person”. Another frequent way to talk about proximity were statements indicating that the politicians were perceived to be ‘at our level’. Interestingly, the words the informants used often implicitly referred to a spatial hierarchy of up/down. Politicians being “down to earth” (M1, Nurses; W1; Dancers), or coming down to the people, “descending” (W1, Teachers) were frequently mentioned. Talking about what intentions the Labour Party might have for airing the *Taxi Stoltenberg* ad, one informant elaborated:

M3: Through sitting in a position of power during large parts of the time after the Second World War, The Labour Party has **achieved an elevated status**, in the sense that it is not very accessible, they have just stayed a little long in the corridors of power. And this, making the party accessible again, not only making it of the people, but **bringing it down** to a level that reaches the people. That they’re not just **sitting on their high horse**

(Teachers on *Taxi Stoltenberg*, my emphasis)

While the informant above commented at the level of political party and the Labour Party as a major institution in Norwegian politics, some informants touched upon aspects that I have made note of in the textual analysis, such as the theme of the ruler assuming a disguise and (con)descending to be among the common folk:

MHI: How does this ad attempt to make people vote for the Labour Party?

M5: Party of the people.

M6: He goes from being president I almost said, to go down to be among the people, the working class. Everybody knows you don't make the most money by being a taxi driver, it is not exactly a profession everybody strives after. That he now enters.

M7: Presence. To show that he is there for the people and, can go down to their level, if you can put it like that.

(Mechanics on *Taxi Stoltenberg*)

Overall, the informants that talked about closeness and proximity (explicitly or implicitly) seemed to appreciate a certain degree of proximity. When talking about why closeness could be a good thing, informants would emphasize that closeness signifies that one is not 'too far up'. Several informants talked about how people in general, or celebrities in particular, become 'high and mighty' when reaching a certain status, and thereby not in connection with, or caring about ordinary people. As one informant stated:

W4: I love to see the mighty come down from their pedestal. Those who try too hard all the time – I am really smart, and I rule with an iron fist all the time, nobody likes that!

(Dancers)

Informants across all groups mentioned Norway as a distinct case in terms of having a short distance between politicians and the people. Informants frequently contrasted Norwegian political culture to other countries in order to illustrate this, and to emphasize something they experienced to be particular to Norway. However, the group of senior informants, while expressing a general appreciation of the perceived short distance between voters and politicians, experienced the Stoltenberg ad to be too close for comfort – and reacted in an almost binary opposite way than what the producers intended. They verbalized a notion that Stoltenberg was too proximate. While some senior informants thought that the Stoltenberg taxi video would be fun for immigrants to watch since they probably came from cultures where the distance between rulers and followers was greater, others expressed their dismay at the almost extreme proximity seen in the taxi video. One informant said she would not at all talk

to Stoltenberg in that taxi and another that this was silly and even potentially dangerous – after all – where were the security guards? Some of these quotes indicate the desire for a certain degree of distance between leaders and citizens as well.

For some informants, the sensation of proximity was not at all indicative of an uncritical stance. Indeed, some answers indicate that a sense of proximity and a certain amount of critical distance can go hand in hand. After watching, and seemingly appreciating, the *Taxi Stoltenberg* video, the group of teachers had the following exchange:

W1: It's about him as a person. And about getting him down to something I'm getting the impression that he is supposed to come down to a popular level.

M3: I have the same...

W1: That we're supposed to become fond of him, not as a leader, but as a person.

M3: That he can communicate with the plebs.

(Teachers)

Here, we observe informants shifting from a transparent and appreciative mode, to a more mediated mode oriented toward producer intention (Michelle, 2007), which is shown in the quote. Taking a step back, W1 accentuates the intent of the ad – distancing her from this intention slightly. The use of the word 'plebs' (as well as the informant's sarcastic tone of delivery when uttering it) indicates a type of skepticism or disbelief. It moderates the celebratory aspects of Stoltenberg's folksiness in the ad, as it accentuates rather than blurs the distinction between mass and elite, between voters and politicians. This is one of many examples in the material of informants commuting between various modes of reception, and it shows how appreciating an ideal or a particular argument or idea in an ad does not necessitate an uncritical stance towards the material. I will explore this further in chapter 4.

Turning to the opposite reaction, informant answers indicating a reduced sense of proximity, or explicit distance to a pictured politician were also frequent. How informants accounted for this sensation varied. Cues ranged from reacting to information given in conversation, body language, tone of voice, clothing, behavior

and manners. Watching the Stoltenberg advertisement for instance, the right-leaning voters noted that Stoltenberg at one point in the film mentions that he has not driven a car for the last 8 years. This shocked some of the informants. One of them stated, while shaking his head, that this seemed as far away from common folk and as “out of touch” (M1, Right leaning) as it is possible to get. An informant reacting to Hareide’s body language in *Hareide explains* produced the following exchange:

W3: He is not of the people, he is not the kind of guy that stands up and just...

W2: But we is well liked by many

M2: But he seems very done up. His neck is very high up, in way, the way he’s talking...

(Dancers)

Although one informant (W2) defends him, here, Hareide’s body language becomes a cue for talking about him as not of the people for two other informants. All in all, Hareide’s ad did produce a lot of talk about distance. Some informants felt talked down to, because they found the ad *Hareide explains* to be so repetitive that they felt underestimated. In many groups, there was a shared sensation that Hareide did not fit in – as one informant put it: “he is just placed there” (W2, Teachers). Hareide was viewed as an anomaly, which was contrary to what the producers intended. These reactions also underscore the fact that Hareide was not perceived to be ‘of the people’. When the attempt at bringing him in concrete proximity to ‘ordinary people’ failed, this only served to illuminate that he was not part of them, and not proximate.

Clothing was a frequent prompt for expressing a perceived distance. Hareide’s use of a sport coat in all situations was particularly salient in this regard. Another example is taken from the 2015 Conservative ad. We recall that the second part of the ad showed a down-to-earth scenario, with Prime Minister Erna Solberg walking around a residential neighborhood with Fabian Stang, then mayor of Oslo, walking next to her. One informant notices a particular piece of clothing he is wearing, or rather, the way he is wearing it:

W1: I really reacted to that sweater he had on his shoulders, I mean wow... It’s like a like a little petit-bourgeois thing. I mean this is like a parody of the

conservatives, a pastel sweater on the shoulders. I thought: wow. I reacted to that. It's not random. I almost could not concentrate on anything other than that sweater

[talks at length about other aspects]

And this about them entering someone's house. I'm thinking: no. I would not let Erna in. What is this? Slo-mo-walking down the street and then into my house? No! Not so personal. It felt fake to me.

M3: Particularly with a camera crew behind you, then you close the door immediately

W1: And this sweater over the shoulders, leave it outside, man

M1: He was going to a cruise perhaps, since he was wearing that sweater.

(Art students)

In the part that was intended to feature a down to earth scenario, presenting the politicians the way they really are, not as mighty rulers, but as ordinary folk that can be at ease approaching someone's door and being invited in. The sweater, commonly associated with sailing and a life of wealth and leisure, creates an unintentional association back into the parody, or at least a mental shortcut back to the stereotypes that the ad initially activated. It becomes a trigger for rejection in this case, made manifest by informants talking about shutting the door on the politicians instead of letting them in. The sweater was mentioned by other groups as well:

W1: A nice film, and not very elitist, because of self-deprecation. The only thing was that guy Stang, who I found a little misplaced. But perhaps I'm prejudiced against those types of jackets over the shoulder. I felt that made him less of the people

MHI: What was it about that jacket?

W1: I feel that it's posh in a way

(Social sciences)

Even among informants who were chiefly positive towards the ad, the sweater worn in this particular way sends a signal that created a dissonance between the presented closeness and the garment, which signals eminence and wealth. Overall, many informants across groups used clothing as a way of navigating proximity and distance.

The art students went on to discuss the role of clothing after discussing Stang's knitted sweater. One informant stated that the second part of the conservative party ad "felt like an expedition (...) which to me emphasizes the distance between them [the politicians] and people" (W2, Art students). – Another informant mockingly stated that this was probably why he wore the sweater: "We're going on a long trip, it could be cold" (W1, Art students), and then proceeded to speculate that the people in charge of costumes in the ad had probably banned all ties from the film. When asked why ties were so significant to her, she replied:

W1: It's that distancing again... the bureaucracy and...

W2: Formality

W1: Yes, I mean this is about people (...) [Ties] are associated with authority, but think that at soon as a politician wears a suit and a tie, one is a symbol, one is no longer human. One is a symbol for what one is saying

W2: The business man

(Art Students)

This discussion on the role of particular types of clothing is also interesting in light of the many reactions to Hareide's sport coat in all situations. The main takeaway in these examples is a perceived imbalance between signs of proximity and signs of elite ostentation (Daloz, 2007, 2009). In both the Hareide segment and the second part of the Conservative Party film, the intention was to display proximity. However, objects of clothing here signal distance, eminence or ostentation. The result is a dissonance, in part ruining the impression of closeness to ordinary people. The effect may very well be, as some informants have suggested, that one sees the symbol of power rather than the human behind the politician.

Other cues for distance were the tone of politicians and tone understood more broadly, in terms of presentation. In the group of teachers, one informant reacted negatively to the way in which the Stoltenberg ad positions him as a leader in a suit, in front of the state residence, having just visited the King of Norway (as he says in the ad). The informant perceived this narrative device, along with Stoltenberg's tone of voice, as condescending. He felt talked down to (M3, Teachers). This resonates with

negative connotations of eminence, rather than a sense of closeness and reduced distance.

A politician's initial ethos was also important in determining whether informants read the ads in terms the politicians being distant from the people. The conservative party ad from 2015, *Somewhere in Norway*, made fun of stereotypical ideas about the party, at first presenting prime minister Solberg as a mighty leader, surrounded by luxury goods, before showing her walking about in a normal neighborhood, knocking on doors. While producers intended this to be a contrast, some informants read this differently. After watching the ad, the business students discuss the ad's meaning:

W2: In the end she is actually at ground level I almost said, and they're showing that she is actually among the people.

MHI: What do you think?

W1: I really felt she fit that role [in the beginning] a little too well, so...

[W2 laughs]

W1: No I don't think that was so good, it looked a little natural

MHI: What do you mean?

W1: She's sitting there, and the camera is shooting from a frog perspective. You are looking up at her, she is looking down at you...

(Private business students)

In other words, the initial stereotypical caricature hit too close to home for this informant, and her answers indicate that she believed the caricature more than what the producers would like to propose as the "real situation". The informant's language is consistent with experiencing a distance towards the prime minister, and she also employs the up/down-hierarchical metaphor to describe the relations she experienced. Here, she articulates an aspect of film form often associated with power imbalance (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004; Kaid & Johnston, 2001) in order to verbalize her impressions.

The third sub-theme concerns discussions about the concepts of closeness and distance. Informants both implicitly and explicitly articulated the need for proximity, as well as the tension between proximity and eminence. For instance, one of the right-leaning informants stated that he found Stoltenberg's taxi stunt brilliant. When asked why, he claimed:

M3: Because the world is full of prejudices [against politicians]. If somebody sees some nice people, they think that these are nice people, and they forget that they are politicians – they forget whether it's the Labour Party or the Progress Party or whatever. Jens [Stoltenberg] is a really nice, really charismatic guy – not all politicians are, but he is. (...) If you are politically interested and in disagreement, then you are. But it is because you don't like his politics. He is a very nice guy.

W1: He's very of the people. And he removes a little of the picture one has of the political elite here, and the rest of society here

(Right leaning).

Here, ventures into personalized communication alleviates prejudices against politicians for one informant. In this way, showing the person can help bridge a perceived gap between politicians and the people, a gap which the informant seems to deem highly present out among citizens. The function of personalized politics, then, is to act to alleviate tensions in ruler-follower relations.

However, most informants, either explicitly or implicitly, suggested that ruler-follower-relations cannot all be warmth and closeness. A certain level of eminence is needed too. The tension between eminence and proximity made itself present for the dimension of charm and human aspects. At times, informants called out behavior that was perceived to be 'too much' or even 'too nice'. This seemed to lead to an impression of a politician lacking a certain required edge, or the impression that a politician was 'harmless', or someone who would not make the best of the power bestowed upon them. Christian Democratic party leader Knut Arild Hareide frequently triggered this type of response. Informants often considered him very likeable and nice, but they also saw him as toothless. After watching Hareide play soccer with some children, one of the mechanics comments:

M7: I understand why he plays for the kids' team

[informants laugh]

M2: I feel bad for him, poor thing. He's promising so much.

(Mechanics)

In other words, the politician's promises are regarded as naïve or even impotent – as he is not at all perceived as a politician who can get things done. Rather, he is seen as a careful idealist, who will probably end up getting hurt out in the real world. The feeling evoked here is frequently pity, or a condescending form of sympathy.

MHI: What is he like, would you say?

W4: He looks a little frightened

(Hairdressers)

Only rarely did informants push back on this notion:

W1: I'm feeling prejudice when I'm watching him, if you consider him as a little frail in a way, then he's not really who I'm thinking has the most impact.

M1: It's a little culturally conditioned what kind of people we like and don't like. Like in Hollywood, male action heroes are often quite similar – they often have short brown hair or semi-long, a good physique and are relatively tall. Also not fully bearded, just a little bit of beard. Many people fit into that description, and it is a little bit of the same. People who are wise looking, and then one might look a little unhealthy if one is fat for instance. So, if one does not look very tough, maybe one is not tough enough to make tough decisions or good at making decisions if one is little and frail? Maybe? These things could be something one is thinking about unconsciously.

W2: I'm thinking ok, he's making it though... he is the leader for a party, in spite of being cute and frail and having a light voice, he's making it. But I don't know how much policy he has brought forth either

(Humanities)

The informant M1 above shows reflexivity on behalf of categories used to evaluate “leaders”, but also demonstrates an interesting explication on some of the very workings of how personalized politics and personalized political communication can become a way of thinking about matters of politics through personality. Informant W2, however, nuances the initial reception of Hareide as a poor leader by introducing the fact that he actually is a leader for his party. The informants went on to suggest other ideals for a leader – such as a foxlike character, that was indeed small and nimble – but

also cunning. The group of dancers also explored alternative ideals for Hareide, with one informant stating that after all, although he might be whining he at least does not quit whining (W2, Dancers). Another informant supported this point, and stated that he could appreciate Hareide's role as a kind of guard dog, adding: "(...) a tiny guard dog" (M1, Dancers). Thus, the focus once again reverts back to Hareide's physical qualities.

This treatment of Hareide was frequently connected to physical aspect, such as Hareides body, posture or voice. He was repeatedly described as "frail" (M1, Private business school), "naggy" (W1, Humanities), "weak" (M3, Elite business school), or that he was like 'a deer in the headlights'. A surprising number of focus groups, 14 out of 16, referred implicitly or explicitly to a parody of Hareide, which was first aired in 2005, and which has been recirculated through YouTube³⁷ since then. In the parody, Hareide is portrayed precisely as weak, sensitive and essentially not up to facing the challenges of the world. This parody was actively invoked by participants when discussing how they viewed Hareide:

W1: I feel he's been parodied too many times, I can only see the parody version, so I'm not taking him seriously.

[W2 laughs]

MHI: You're not taking it seriously because of the parody. What was that like again?

W1: It's like he's a baby, a little helpless and...

M1: There's a wind outside and he can't keep on his feet and stuff [laughs]

MHI: Anyone else thinking about this?

M1: I am also of that persuasion. Very wimpy, very light careful voice, and, that's what I associate with CDP too. CDP, that's him. And then I'm thinking of his voice, and suddenly everything disappears into parody

(Private business students)

Crucially, Hareide is at times perceived to be lacking eminence of a particular kind – namely the ability to wield power. This falls under Daloz' conception of competence as well as a type of social eminence, including the ability to deal with other elites

³⁷ One of the sketches, for reference: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wa0_YwYoEXY

(Daloz, 2007, p. 288). While Hareide in this case perhaps displayed too little eminence in proportion to his agreeableness, there were other instances in which informants desired distance, but for reasons of respect and a sense of authority rather than suspicion of political impotence. An explicit example is the senior group, which I briefly alluded to earlier. Commenting on the Stoltenberg Taxi video, one of the senior informants reflected on why she did not appreciate the type of behavior displayed in the ad:

W1: Perhaps we lose our desire. To vote for him.

[Longer thinking-pause]

Because after all there is supposed to be a certain distance. Between, for instance at a school, between the principal and the pupils. Or perhaps they would lose the respect

(Seniors)

The above quote points toward an important underlying tension in informants' answers. While most talked about closeness as a positive aspect, implicitly, they seemed to indicate that one did not want too much closeness. There appeared to be a wish for balance – or in Daloz's (2009) terms, a required level of eminence. An informant's thoughts on the difference between bosses and leaders in connection with the Stoltenberg ad can help illustrate some of this crucial point:

M2: I feel like he, in a way, does not appear as a boss for society, but more as a leader for society

[other informants nod their heads; some say "yes"]

M2: Puts himself as a part of society itself.

(Dancers)

This informant had a positive conception of a leader. Following this, leaders and leadership are seen as attractive and wanted – but only if the leader is perceived as legitimate, as the informant's boss/leader distinction seems to suggest. At the same time a leader is conceptually a person with more power and status than the rest of the population. Simply by virtue of his/her role, the leader is eminent. However, unlike

most bosses, a leader is chosen through an election. Talking about the Conservative Party ad from 2015, one informant touches upon this inherent tension:

W2: She is very much like a ruler. And, it is from up above and down, and not at my level. And I would like a politician that is at another level from me and that can govern and rule Norway, but at the same time I want her to take responsibility for the things that I care about, and here she mentioned nothing about which issues she stands for, only that she rules

(Nurses)

While almost all informant groups talked about the importance of being close to the people, such quotes indicate the need for *both* proximity and eminence, as argued by Daloz (2007, 2009). Informants also made quite a bit of references to other cultures and other political systems – indicating a certain sensibility, or an awareness of the distinctness of Scandinavia. This could be said to be both a sort of homage to cultural ideals in Norway, and sometimes a description of an empirical difference in culture and systems:

M1: I don't think Barack Obama would get into a cab and drive

W2: But their rules for security are so incredibly strict

[Informants laugh]

M1: Nobody would get into a cab to harm Jens Stoltenberg. It does not cross your mind in Norway.

W4: I don't think he [Obama] would mind doing it. I think he would like it, but I don't think the system there would join in on such an...

M1: Arrangement.

(Dancers)

Informant M1's answers indicate that he cherishes the Norwegian ideal of openness. His position is a bit naïve, considering both the terror attacks against the Labour Party in 2011, and what actually went on behind the scenes of the film. We recall that the stunt almost did not come into fruition because the Norwegian Secret Service thought this would be a huge security risk, and that they ended up surrounding the cab with undercover agents. However, the film does play upon precisely this Scandinavian love

of egalitarianism, down-to-earthiness and openness. The fact that M1 responds to this simply shows that this is a highly active ideal that some people really appreciate, whether Norwegian society really is very open or not. W4's answers point to systemic differences between the two countries. Note that she does not, in contrast to M1, think that there is very much difference between Obama and Stoltenberg in terms of willingness to move among common people – but points to differences in system to explain why this would not happen in the US. Other informants explicitly pointed out that other countries have other ideals. One of the teachers stated that while Norway is particular in the sense that politicians are supposed to be folksy, in Great Britain and in Germany, one wants “formality”.

Summing up, informants experienced both a reduced and increased sense of proximity when facing the ads. In their discussions, many informants celebrated the ideal of the proximate human politician, in line with Norwegian egalitarian ideals, whilst condemning the high and mighty, snobbish types. However, as became apparent in the analysis, this was not necessarily the case. As it turns out, my informants also appreciated and at times even requested eminence. Sometimes, this request was explicit – but the most remarkable instance was never articulated: The case of eminence in *Taxi Stoltenberg*. I will discuss this at the end of this chapter, when I flesh out the ideals that informants seemed to articulate in more detail.

Crucially, my findings speak to many of the insights provided by Daloz concerning the need for balance between proximity and eminence, even in a Nordic country which cultivates conspicuous modesty to an extent that warrants Norway being categorized amongst so-called “extreme cases” (Daloz, 2009, p. 293). In order to succeed, Norwegian politicians must be able to enact eminent dimensions, however dampened and unarticulated these should be.

Coming across as “of the people” seemed important to my informants, and appeared to be an ideal they appreciated. A lot of what “of the people” meant to the informants seemingly had to do with how well the politicians acted as “common folk”, and understood the problems and challenges of ordinary people. Informants typically appreciated qualities that are emphasized in the literature on personalized politics, such

as the ability to talk to the common people in a conversational and relaxed manner. Informants also expressed the importance of being seen as “human” – appearing as a person rather than appearing in the role of the politician. This brings us to the second road to proximity: being perceived as “authentic”.

5.3.5 Authenticity

The films that sparked the *most* talk about authenticity were the films *Taxi Stoltenberg* and the Christian Democrat *Hareide explains* in the 2013 material, and the ad from the Labour Party, *Our Norway*, and the Red Party, *Vote for a challenger*, in the 2015 material. For that reason, many of the examples below will refer to these films. There were some exceptions, which I will mention when relevant. The authenticity-theme mainly manifests through three distinct sub-themes: Experiences of an unscripted, conversational and natural politician, experiences of a scripted and fake politician, and talk about politicians’ self-presentation, both for specific ads and in general.

When experiencing a politician as authentic, informants would use words like “intimate” (W1, Art students), “like a normal person” (W2, Law), “human” (M3, Elite business school) and “unadorned” (W3, Nurses). A very important factor here seemed to be some sort of admission of error, or imperfection. This resonates with the binary of organic versus mechanic, in which the organic is seen as a trait associated with the authentic, as per table 10 above. Several informants placed emphasis on a scene in the taxi in which Stoltenberg recommends that a passenger votes for a party other than his own, based on the passenger’s views. Another scene shows Stoltenberg saying that one will never find a political party one is completely in agreement with, so one should just find one. Stoltenberg is not saying “vote for me”. This is noticed by informants, who state that this was “real and true” (W4, Dancers). One informant expresses an interesting metaphor for how he perceives Stoltenberg in the ad:

W1: [talking about the Stoltenberg ad in contrast to the Hareide ad] There is a point in the first movie with Stoltenberg where he says: so will you vote? And she says yes, I’m going to vote, and it was kind of apparent that she was not

going to vote for the Labour Party, but then he said, yes, that's good, it's important that you vote. So he [Stoltenberg] did not push politics, whilst here [Hareide] I feel that it is pushed upon me.

M1: What are you voting, huh? [making fun]

M2: He is a little more buddy, yep. Very much like cool

M1: The man in the street

M2: He has no faces in front of him. He has his own way, or one notices really fast that he is just himself where he is sitting.

(Dancers)

First, I would like to remark how this scene is frequently praised by informants because Stoltenberg is perceived to be spontaneous and organic rather than calculating and strategic in this scene. Many informants see him as going against the grain of many politicians, who they felt would seize any opportunity to persuade the taxi passengers. Instead, the taxi passengers are seen encountering a person, as opposed to a program committee. The wording in M2's answer is interesting when thinking about the inner/outer dichotomy that the authenticity ideal plays upon. The informant's answer indicates that he thinks he has been exposed to Stoltenberg's core being, the authentic Stoltenberg-as-human. Considering the scholarly literature on authenticity as performance (I.e. Tolson, 2001), it is interesting to witness how much of informants' language mirror a theatre-metaphor. This is particularly interesting considering that Meyrowitz' (1985) built on Goffman's theatre model of social interaction when describing the concept of middle-region behavior. This applies to M2 in the quote above. M2 perceives Stoltenberg to be himself, not wearing any masks – or “faces” as the informant puts it. This notion of a human behind all the layers of roles is a recurring one when informants discuss this theme. One of the high-school pupils touches upon this:

MHI: What does the film say about Stoltenberg?

W3: That he seems nice? And talkative?

W7: It kind of shows, that even though he is a politician and a prime minister, he is just a normal person too.

(Pupils)

These notions of a human-behind-the roles point to the inner-concept of authenticity, to the idea of the stable personality (Guignon, 2004, 2008). Informants frequently used words referring to theatre or movies in order to verbalize how they experienced politicians as-themselves:

W4: I believe him. I feel that he is honest. I don't feel he's been handed a script. Like many politicians often do, they hold speeches, everybody does that, Stoltenberg does that too, but I don't feel like he's trying to be something. He's sitting there being Stoltenberg, and is the prime minister, and a man. A dad.

(Dancers)

The informant mentions that Stoltenberg seems unscripted, in other words: spontaneous. Furthermore, she is aware of the multiple roles that Stoltenberg juggles, but seems to be convinced that what she just watched was first and foremost Stoltenberg, the human. An informant in another group comments upon Jonas Gahr Støre, noting that he «looks completely common», and elaborates:

W1: He's got an open shirt, and the whole movie is in grey colors. There is so little glamour. Those old pictures on the wall, It's a little grandmas-livingroom-feeling, and grey hair and you get a little [makes sound] NAWWW. He is very easy to like, because he is not done up.

(Nurses)

Both the reference to glamour and to ornamentation/being adorned can be read as an of-the-people-reference, but here I choose to interpret it as touching upon the act of «being one-self», or in other words – not putting on a show for the audience, giving off the impression that the person one is observing is really the «true» Støre. The Red Party ad produced discussions that further touched upon the tension between the scripted and the spontaneous in terms of authenticity. The way Bjørnar Moxnes presents his verbal argumentation, as well as the presentation in the ad itself (clearly stating that «this is the speech we did not get to hold at the PBS»), makes it clear that he is not improvising. This was also clear to the informants. However, when talking about Moxnes' authenticity, informants would rather attempt to discern whether this was his «own words» or not:

M2: I don't know if this is intentional, but he has an attitude of everyday-speech. This was just a guy saying all these things to the world, in a way. He is

just himself. No extra, not even a manuscript, it could be that he was told to stand in front of the camera, say everything you want to say, and we'll edit it

W1: Or that he has written that script himself, perhaps

M2: It could be that they haven't done that. That they've hit the balance between, how do we make it look like the politician has written it himself, and in a way, how it is very easy to see that someone else has written it. But here I experience that he has written it.

(Art students)

The awareness of a script seems clear in the informants. But they seem to be more interested in who has written the script, and eventually agree that it seems like the politician has written his own words. That this is implicitly highlighted by informants as a positive ideal, points to the ideal of authenticity, and a romantic notion of language as the spontaneous expressions of an individual's feelings and thoughts. Consequently, words, thoughts and feelings should come from the individual, and be the individual's own.

It is important to stress that informants' sensations of authenticity does not mean an automatic lowering of critical sense. Informants frequently commented upon their own sensation in a self-reflective light, or point out awareness of a form of construct. It would seem as if it is perfectly possible to have a positive experience and be critically aware of some of the mechanisms behind the experience at the same time. A brief exchange among the humanities students on the authenticity of Støre's warm personality points towards this tension. One informant mentions that she would like to be friends with Støre:

MHI: Why would you like to be his friend?

W1: Because he is so nice!

M1: He presents as nice

W1: But I choose to believe that he is.

M1: It's working.

W1: It works really well!

(Humanities)

Confronted by her slightly more cynical co-informant, W1 acknowledges that she has watched a construction, that might not necessarily be the final truth about how or who Støre is, but she is willing to suspend that disbelief and chooses to like Støre's personality. In a sense, this could be viewed as a contradiction. However, as I shall discuss later, several ideals active are not only contradictory – people seem to be aware of these contradictions, and are able to live well with them. At times, people seem to be expressing their fondness for a particular ideal, even though they to a certain degree also acknowledge the impossibility of it. This could be indicative of people invoking and talking about “ideals honored by culture” (Garzia, 2011, p. 701). While such ideals are interesting, whether they form the basis for actual candidate evaluations during elections, is another question. However, informants' frequent articulations of these ideals indicates at least that these ideals are highly at work at some level.

When reacting in the opposite manner, perceiving a politician as fake, staged or untruthful, the language of theatre becomes even more salient among informants. Typically, informants would remark on “bad dialogue and acting” and “bad actors” (i.e. in *Dancers*) after watching the non-fictional Hareide-ad in the 2013 material. Others described Hareide as “breaking the fourth wall” when talking to the camera (M3, Teachers). Words like “staged” (W3, Hairdressers), “fake” (W1, Right leaning), “scripted” (W4, Pupils) “constructed” (M1, Teachers) and “artificial” (M1, Right leaning) were common among informants when talking about a missing sense of authenticity.

Other than seemingly interpreting the ads that triggered this sense of inauthenticity in terms of bad theatre or unconvincing fictional films, informants also remarked upon a perceived lack of spontaneity in some instances. One of the high-school teachers remarked that “this was a new year's speech” (W2, Teachers) after watching the Hareide ad, indicating a stiff, formal and highly scripted speech event – not the casual interactions that producers envisioned. Contrasting the Hareide ad to the *Taxi Stoltenberg*-ad, one informant in the group of high school pupils remarked:

W3: I enjoyed the Labour Party ad. It was more random. You're lucky if anyone says someone funny. But this was so unbelievably staged, everything was planned to the least

W3: They've planned so much what is supposed to happen when

(Pupils)

In other words, the Stoltenberg interactions seemed more authentic-as-spontaneous than Hareide's more scripted encounters. Commenting on the Red Party ad from 2015, a business student found Bjørnar Moxnes to lack passion:

W1: I was just focusing on how he told it. At first I felt he was a little rehearsed, like he was telling a little story, but it was not so real, and I found him too friendly. It was like too cozy. He would have to have a little more passion if he is to fight for an issue, I felt that he wasn't as challenging as [he would like]. It was a little too much friendliness for me. For there to be any fight

(Elite business students)

Here, Moxnes' credibility suffers on behalf of the perceived lack of spontaneity vocalized by the informant. Or, there is a perceived mismatch in the challenger/underdog-narrative that the ad presents, Moxnes' performance and Moxnes' perceived enthusiasm for the cause.

Interestingly, in terms of perceptions of reality versus stagedness, the group of senior citizens perceived the Stoltenberg and Christian Democrat ad completely different from the other groups. While all the other groups generally judged Stoltenberg to appear more real, and Hareide to appear staged and scripted, the senior citizens evaluated Hareide as completely believable. One informant immediately stated that "This was no stunt. This was reality (...)" (W1, Seniors). This could be related to questions of film form. The style of the Stoltenberg ad, with its rather quick cuts, in-situ dialogue with variable sound quality, and, overall, the film language of the relatively modern genre of hidden camera, was not well received among the seniors. During the first showing, several asked if there was something wrong with the audio, and there seemed to be an overall sense of confusion to the extent that the film had to be shown once again. The calm, articulated and slow pace of the Hareide ad could perhaps more closely resemble a style of presentation that was both familiar and clear enough to be fully perceived by these informants.

A sense of scriptedness did not always co-occur with a critical stance, or necessitate dislike for the informants. After watching the 2015 Støre ad, one of the natural science students remarked:

W1: The only thing I was thinking about was that, yes, it is very directed what he is saying. But I'm thinking it has to be that way. When you hear Siv Jensen³⁸ talk without reserve, that never goes well!

[informants laugh]

W1: So it has to be planned! [laughs]

(Natural sciences)

In other words, one does not necessarily actively appreciate a scripted and rehearsed feel, but one can understand the need for a degree of planning in political communication. Another informant in this group went on to say that this is why he prefers other genres of political information, such as debates – in which things feel more spontaneous and the participants can call out and confront each other to a greater degree (M2, Natural sciences). In most cases this attention towards theatrics and production frequently marked a point in reception in which informants turned more critical, something I will elaborate in the part on authenticity breaches in the following chapter.

A perceived spontaneity did seem to be particularly important for informants. The group of hairdressers discussed their favorite film after watching all of the ads. Although they did not experience any of the ads as being particularly useful to them, *Taxi Stoltenberg* was mentioned as being pleasurable and entertaining. When prompted to explain why this was the case, informants touched upon the topic of the authentic as spontaneous:

W3: He has no script either, the other films do...

W1: He's like doing it on the fly

MHI: And you like that, or?

[informants say "yep"]

³⁸ The leader of the Progress Party.

MHI: Because if it is scripted, what is it like then?

W2: Like those people there probably got told what to do

MHI: What do you think about that

W1: A little fake

W2: Yeah, it is more staged. I don't know.

(Hairdressers)

Being told what to do and say is here perceived as inauthentic, staged and fake – and clearly described in negative terms by these informants. Overall, the informants actively used authenticity as an evaluative term, seemingly searching for who they could trust and who they could not. Interestingly, they did so while at the same time being aware of the constructedness of the authenticity appeals they were presented with. This leads me to my third sub-theme.

The third most prominent sub-theme of talk about authenticity was general talk and discussion on self-presentation among politicians. When talking about this theme, informants would often speculate on material that was “left on the cutting room floor”, or conversely calling attention to elements that were saliently present in order to tell a certain story or make a politician appear in a certain manner. Informants would also talk about the nature of the ad, that it was probably made to put someone in a better light. In other words, informants frequently acknowledged that ads are fundamentally about self-presentation.

This theme indicates a certain level of critical sensibility when it comes to genre – or at least demonstrates that many informants are acutely aware that politicians attempt to shape and create certain impressions, images and personas that are feasible and attractive to them. This is an indication of a critical sense, pointing towards the receptive virtue of literacy, the ability to interpret and assess the political rhetoric one is exposed to. The theme demonstrates that informants are aware that politicians (as all other people) are engaged in impression management and image construction:

M2: It was interesting to note how they mixed political talk in there. And there was some disagreement. You could sense that not all were in agreement (...) But still no heavy political counter-arguments. He could have had a passenger

that really knew politics, and kind of put the Labour Party on the spot. They would not include that in the film

(Teachers)

This sense of the producers only showing what they wanted to show was recurring in my material. Similar comments were made in connection to film form. One of the left-leaning voters commented on the poor resolution of the Taxi-ad:

W2: I think it is supposed to look a little ad hoc, or, it is not supposed to look like it has been planned and directed for ages. But I would have liked it better if it looked a little better

(Left leaning)

Here, the informant explicitly acknowledges the rhetorical use of a *cinéma vérité* - style in voicing her preference for a less pixelated look. Thus, she brings attention to her knowledge of the fact that it takes work and planning to make something look unplanned. Other comments in this vein took the form of explications of genre awareness. For instance, one of the right leaning voters showed an agnostic stance to the taxi stunt and Stoltenberg's character when asked about it:

M2: This could very well be what he's like. But I simply don't know. It is just a media campaign, it is just to put him in a better light. But I'm not saying the claim is wrong. This is how it is being shown, and it is this way I'm perceiving it.

(Right leaning)

Here, the informant accepts the premise of the ad (Stoltenberg is nice, of the people, this is the real Stoltenberg), while at the same time lapsing into a mediated mode (Michelle, 2007) in which he stresses the constructedness of the whole affair. This type of response was not uncommon. In general, many informants commuted between modes when watching the films, moving between transparent readings and more mediated readings. It is precisely this point that I will elaborate in the section concerning modes of reception in the next chapter.

Summing up, informants verbalized both experiences of authentic and inauthentic politicians on screen. The most common reaction was the latter, closely followed by experiences of a 'true individual'; the most of these comments were

attributed to the 2013 *Taxi Stoltenberg* advertisement. When experiencing authenticity, informants stressed dimensions of being spontaneous, unscripted, organic and able to come across as a human at the core. When experiencing the opposite, informants described politicians as stiff, scripted and fake, in short, as not being able to come across as anything else than someone acting the *role* of “politician”. This speaks to the dichotomy of private-collective, and private-public as shown in the binaries of authenticity that I elucidated in my theoretical introduction. Lastly, informants frequently engaged in a type of meta-reflection showing genre awareness. This awareness did not exclude appreciation of the authenticity ideal. People were at times highly aware that they were watching a construct, but that this was a construct that honored cultural norms and ideals that they could appreciate. Even though people are to an extent aware of what is happening, they can still appreciate or not appreciate certain ideals. This awareness is indicative of a critical sensibility, which points towards the receptive virtue of literacy. In some instances, the conversation between informants moved from the particular to the general level, as they started to discuss more general ideals of leadership and representation.

5.3.6 Leader-follower-relations and tensions

Even though the focus group conversations mostly limited themselves to evaluation of the concrete ads the informants were presented with, there were frequent instances in which, participants would briefly reflect on more general questions of leadership, trust and representation. Consider the following reflection, in which informants wondered why the Conservative Party used an airplane metaphor in their 2013 film

W4: But I wonder why they chose a pilot

MHI: What do you think? Do you have any theories? I don't know

W1: Maybe because when you're in a plane, the only person you can count on to get you safely on your way is the pilot. You have to really trust the pilot.

W2: Yes, he has a lot of responsibility.

W1: It's important to trust him. You are putting your life in his hands in a way, and that's what you're doing in politics too when you are voting for a party – they are the ones who will lead you, and make sure that you're all right.

(Dancers)

While not the most prominent, such moments occurred regularly across groups. Some concerned the fundamental importance of trust as outlined above, others came in the shape of pushback to the idea that characteristics of appearance and politician's bodies should matter for one's trust in them, a type of problematization of the personalization-nexus itself. Many comments also touched upon the central question of representation, or in the words of Coleman: "Experiences of being spoken for, as, to or about (...)" (Coleman, 2011, p. 39). Indeed, several informants addressed a particular notion or experience of being talked to or communicated with in a particular manner. These types of responses mainly came in two broad categories: statements that implicitly or explicitly signified that an informant felt that he/she was addressed in a positive sense, or statements indicating the opposite. The former was rarely explicit, but responses would involve informants saying things like "I feel it speaks to me a lot" (Private business school on *Our Norway*). Another informant talked about the pedagogical illustrations and tempo of the ad, and said that "I think it was OK. It was not like... they were not trying to talk down to people. The level was just right" (Art students on *Our Norway*). In other words, this informant found the level of pedagogic reinforcement to be satisfactory.

The latter, a sensation of being addressed in a negative way, for the most part concerned informants experiencing a sensation of being talked down to, but also being talked about in a negative way. Informants used phrases such as "snobbish" (W3, Dancers), "pushy" (W1, Dancers), "condescending" (M3, Teachers), "underestimating viewers" (W2, Teachers), "infantilizing" (M3, Seniors), "childish" (M3, Seniors), "mocking" and "scornful" (M1, Private business students), "sickening" (W1, Humanities), "elitist" (M1, Social sciences), "pompous" (M1, Social sciences) when reacting negatively, and experiencing being "talked down to" in some way. One informant, for instance, reacted negatively to the fact that Jonas Gahr Støre did not introduce himself, but just started talking away in his 2015 *Our Norway* ad: "I'm sure

everybody knows who Jonas Gahr Støre is, but it's a little pompous to just... everybody knows who I am (...) I'm going to tell you an important thing, and you're going to listen, because I'm Jonas Gahr Støre (...) I feel belittled" (M1, Social sciences). Another informant was seemingly disappointed in the 2015 Conservative Party's use of irony in their ad:

W1: (...) The start got me annoyed, throughout. It started with me being annoyed, and then I could not really turn it around, and I was sitting there thinking: No., why did you do this? You could have done it much simpler. Always doing it more fancy than it needs to be. You don't have to start with a bad joke to get people listening

(Natural sciences).

The last utterance in the quote indicates a form of disappointment that the producers would think that the informant would require jokes and entertainment to be interested in what they had to say. This suggests that the informant felt underestimated. The Christian Democrat ad from 2015 also provoked some informants, with its very clear presentation of Sunday shopping:

M3: When I have an open attitude, that one might just as well have Sunday open stores, I feel very attacked. I feel attacked.

(Elite business school)

The 2013 Christian Democrat ad also produced several instances of people feeling talked down to, in the sense that they felt underestimated. The main reason for this appeared to be that the ad was perceived to be explicit to a high degree. As one of the teachers said:

W2: It underestimates its viewers (...) there is nothing indirect, there is no interpretation, we don't have to figure out what CDP stands for (...) but he sits there, feeds the baby, is caring and then he says caring is important, it's just very double"

(Teachers)

In one instance, some members of the senior group appeared to feel misrepresented, or at least seemed to disapprove of the way their particular demographic was being pictured in the ad. Commenting on the *Taxi Stoltenberg* ad, one informant is not impressed:

M3: There was a typically old man there, right? (...) I think we are past that point in our political lives, that we find being with the prime minister a swell thing (...) I found it childish, to say it plainly (...) I think it has a general significance – that one treats the elderly in a bit of a childish way

(Seniors)

Not all members agreed with this notion however, and informant M3 met some pushback from one of his peers, who claimed that the situation depicted was not particular to the senior man pictured, since both young and old were enjoying Stoltenberg's company in the film (M5, Seniors). Another informant then went on to describe a more general sensation he had of the media, in which "one almost believes one is in a Kindergarten at times" (M3, Seniors). He felt misrepresented and perhaps infantilized – as he doubtlessly believed he would react quite differently to sitting in the cab with Stoltenberg.

These reactions highlight how it makes sense to treat the reception of political ads as a mediated encounter between leaders and the led – and how most often, these encounters foreground frictions between mass and elite. In most instances, the sense was that of being spoken down to through overstatement or being addressed in a condescending manner. As one informant stated, after he reacted negatively to *Somewhere in Norway*, which made fun of a view of politics in which everything could be centrally controlled and easily fixed: "I feel they are mocking us voters... she attempts to communicate that things aren't that easy. Well, does she think that we're sitting here imagining that it's that easy?" (M1, Private business school). While the answers outlined above indicate concrete evaluations of ads, in some cases – these frictions of representative democracy were taken one step further, resulting in the articulation of more general statements "on politicians".

In some cases, the mediated encounter with leaders and would-be leaders led to the formulations of what can be called "typical things to say about politicians", or general topoi on politicians. I use the word topoi here, because these "common conceptions" about politicians do seem to be argumentative commonplaces (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 165) that informants turn to in order to argue their position, often dislike, of a particular film. Usually, these types of formulations signified a type of rejection. This

is interesting in the light of the thought on leader-led-relations, because these types of responses point to a lack of trust, or even a breakdown in trust - not necessarily aimed at the concrete politician in question, but rather towards the political system as a whole, or the group of “politicians” as a whole. As such, these responses could indicate a less-than-enthusiastic view on the workings of representative democracy.

One frequent variety of such topoi was varieties of “politicians are dishonest”. In their crassest form, these are statements indicating that politicians are lying in order to gain power. In a more moderate form, they are statements indicating that politicians cannot really be trusted because they always promise more than they can keep. An example from the focus groups is when one of the hairdressers commented on the captain in the 2013 Conservative Party airplane-ad

W1: He is a typical politician, like, he promises very much, a lot of different things, like they say a lot of things, they are going to do this and that when they are elected. And when they finally get elected, they just don't.

(Hairdressers)

Another recurring comment was more indicative of a loss of belief in one's efficacy or political agency, such as “it does not matter who is in power”:

M1: I'm a skeptic in politics generally, I feel that this concerns all parties, they are talking about errors and how to fix them, and after elections, and everything is the same. Almost matters nothing who governs, because it is somewhat the same all the way. We, as regular folks, we don't notice the largest of changes

(Private business school)

While this could lead to a very pessimistic interpretation of this informant's view on democracy, he revisits the theme at a later point in the interview, adding an important nuance to the picture. When asked about his ideal ad, the informant elaborates on how people are not easily fooled: “The situation in Norway has been extremely similar for many years now. Radical change does not happen overnight (...)” (M1, Private business school). The takeaway across these examples, and the verbalizations of these topoi then, are about politicians' assumed tendency to overemphasize their political agency. For several of my informants, this was simply perceived as unrealistic and not credible.

5.3.7 Discussion

In this chapter, I have shown how my informants engaged with the ads' personalized content. As I have demonstrated, three key dimensions were highly active in the citizens' evaluations of the content: ordinariness, or an ability to come across as 'of the people', authenticity, or the ability to be perceived as a 'true individual', and pervading these two themes: sociability, a 'human' type of charisma, or the ability to come across as a pleasant and likeable person.

In the informants' use of the ideal of ordinariness, what was apparent in analysis was how coming across as "of the people" seemed to be a valued aspect among most informants. Conversely, obvious signs of ostentation or eminence, particularly in the form of clothing, led to responses indicating a disdain for aloofness. Informants appeared to celebrate the ideal of the proximate and human politician, in line with Norwegian egalitarian ideals. What "of the people" meant for my informants was seemingly connected to the politicians' ability to come across as common people, and thus able to understand common people's problems. Thus, ordinariness can serve the function as a cue for trust through reflecting a politician's ability to understand what is important for the people, as well as an indication of *eunoia* – good will towards the audience.

In their use of the authenticity ideal, informants clearly praised performances that appeared spontaneous and scorned theatrics and performances that carried hints of being scripted or staged. What was emphasized as particularly important was dimensions of spontaneity, unscriptedness, being organic and able to come across as 'human at the core' and enacting one's own persona. Equally important was the politician's ability to not come across as stiff, scripted or fake – or playing a role of some sort. As such, the dichotomies of private/public and individual/collective were also very much in play.

Importantly, both the ideal of ordinariness and of authenticity turned out to be so-called ambivalent ideals, mirroring Daloz' (2007, 2009) observations. While most explications of the ordinariness-ideal included positive praise, the opposite was also

the case. Informants reacted negatively when there was too much proximity, and a lack of eminence. The 2013 Christian Democrat and Labour Party ads bring this tension to the foreground.

In my material, I argue that the distinct Scandinavian ideal of ‘not just one’s true self, but as we are’ (Johansen, 1999, 2002; Kjeldsen, 2008b; Kjeldsen & Johansen, 2011) is present, along with the ideal of sociability – that of ‘human, someone I could talk to’. It is not enough to be authentic; one has to be authentic in a particular manner, namely in a way that is sociable and at the level of a conception of ‘the people’. These dimensions, largely formulated in a positive manner, relate to ways of displaying proximity. However, what is apparent when analyzing the utterances across interviews beyond face-value, is that the dimension of eminence is also very much at work. One main reason for this is the way informants at times were found to implicitly request eminence, as well as explicitly call out appeals that were ‘too proximate’.

Another important reason remained unarticulated, but was still significant. For example, in the ad that spawned the most talk about ordinariness and authenticity, *Taxi Stoltenberg*, eminence is indeed built into the main premise of the ad itself. As I have explained in chapter 4.1.4, Stoltenberg steps from the top of society down to the people. He moves from the King’s table to the streets. The fact that he is suddenly among the citizens is an important part of the surprise for his passengers. Such surprises and revelations are a key device of candid camera television, and are thus a key mechanic in the film itself. This points to an eminence that is not explicitly accentuated in the film, nor explicated in production interviews and reception interviews, but that is still highly present. Combining the insights on the ideals at work, and the tension between them, we are left with what I propose to call the authentic, ordinary leader. When translated into a mediated performance, this ideal involves activating key contact points with the ideals of authenticity, ordinariness and sociability, whilst at the same time walking a fine line in order to secure the needed distance and eminence.

The performance of the authentic, ordinary leader is inherently contradictory. A degree of ordinariness and of-the-people-ness is expected, but needs to be balanced by specific skillsets, competencies and other components of eminence that set one above the rest of the people. One is thus supposed to be of-the-people and above-the-people simultaneously: “captains and team members at the same time” (Coleman, 2011, p. 51). Key in the Norwegian situation is the ability to foreground a folksy ordinariness, whilst performing an unassuming type of eminence, or a modest type of eminence that is noticeable, but does not call attention to itself. Another key aspect is the notion of a sociable, ordinary human – someone one could talk to over the kitchen table, and perhaps even someone one would *like* to talk to over said table. Moving to the second part of the ideal, we find the contradictions of authenticity. The authentic individual is, after its own definitions, something one *is*, as it points to a romantic notion of a core personality. A leader, however, is a clear role in society – a persona one steps into, a part one plays. A key aspect in this regard is once again the notion of a human – but in this case not necessarily the sense of an agreeable individual, but a hint, or even confirmation of a true human being behind the role of the politician.

Authentic leadership, then, is the combination of appearing as a true individual acting true to oneself, with the right balance between closeness and distance, the right mix of proximity and eminence. The leader should be like us, but not completely. As such, the ideals can be called contradictory, and the informants met them with ambivalence, even though some of this ambivalence remained implicit. When examining the ideals at work together, it would appear that many informants showed an appreciation of a particular form of political persona. In the context of this examination, being oneself, being one of the people, and being agreeable and sociable were for the most part deemed positive. Informants appeared to celebrate a short distance between polity and politician. My informants appreciated these ideals, but still shifted between appreciative and critical modes with ease. As such, there is no indication of people being duped or misled by the arguments presented in the ads. As it turns out, it seems like many of my informants do indeed buy into the ad, but at the same time they are very well aware of what they are buying into. I take this to be in part indicative of the receptive virtue of literacy.

Moving to the overarching research question for the thesis, asking how political ads can be a resource for citizenship, I argue that the findings above demonstrate how political ads with personalized content lead to the articulation and negotiation of leadership ideals. In extension of this, I argue that informants orient themselves towards the receptive virtue of openness. The ads offer personality as a route towards thinking about important matters of governance, such as what types of virtues should be praised and scorned in a representative democracy. As I have demonstrated above, people employ these ideals in their practical judgement of concrete appeals of political rhetoric. My informants had a readily available vocabulary for managing the appeals they were presented with. Furthermore, they were actively negotiating what was presented, their own view of the presentation, their own ideals for leaders and their prior individual knowledge and judgement of the politicians. People had quite clear opinions about what they liked and disliked – indicating both that they had some ideals about what a good politician and a good leader should be like, and that they were quick to employ these ideals in their practical judgement of the political candidates on screen.

I argue that the findings I have presented above show how political ads can function as a resource for citizenship through sparking discussions and deliberations on leaders and leadership. The films activate reflections and articulations of norms, and the informants enact a rhetorical type of citizenship through these communicative encounters. Above, I have emphasized how informants navigate and negotiate the ideals of sociability, authenticity and ordinariness.

Moving to the more general level of friction illustrated by the theme of leader-follower-tensions, this shows how personalized political ads appear to have the particular affordance of creating a symbolic encounter between politicians and voters. This shows how political ads can facilitate a symbolic, mediated encounter which can accentuate or lubricate frictions of representative democracy. Interestingly, in some cases the symbolic meeting would foreground a set of problems in mass mediated democracies, such as lack of trust in politicians. Responses indicating that informants thought it did not matter much who was in power are a case in point.

What these responses fully indicate is difficult to answer within the scope of this examination. It could be that they indicate a state of disconnection towards politics, and as such provide a reason for that disconnection. It could also be that these encounters function as a form of pressure valve in which citizens at times find pleasure in yelling a little at the screen. Alternately, it could point to something fundamentally missing in the communication: trust. In all cases, it is a type of response that should be taken seriously, not at least by those wishing to communicate with citizens through ads and otherwise. If trust is missing, different modes and methods of communication altogether may be warranted. Crucially, these articulations further underscore how the reception of political ads can become a symbolic encounter in which mass and elite symbolically meet. This is an encounter that can either create or accentuate friction, as the sub-topic of negative conceptions on politicians indicate, or an encounter that can bring the two parts symbolically proximate, as several other reactions such as “experiencing closeness” described above are testament to.

Taken together, this type of reception underscores how personality can serve as a route towards politics, a way of thinking about politics through personalities. As we have seen, this type of thinking is not necessarily connected to single, concrete political issues, but rather involves a way of negotiating and thinking about what kind of politician one would want as a leader. These discussions can also function as a way of talking about representation – and a way to navigate and think about ideals and norms of contemporary political culture. Understood as an entry point into reflections on politics, the ads both lubricated and stressed some key tensions between leaders and followers in a representative democracy.

The type of qualitative investigation into evaluative concepts of personalization I have demonstrated in this chapter leaves us better equipped to think about concepts such as authenticity as evaluative (van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 396) and to understand how citizens perceive authenticity, something we still know very little about (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018, p. 3). However, an important caveat in this regard is the previously mentioned fact that it could very well be that informants rely on cultural mythology when formulating their answers in the focus groups – that they are talking about “(...)

what culture honors, not what voters consult in their judgement of a real candidate” (Garzia, 2011, p. 701). In order to further disentangle these factors, I now shift my analytical lens to the meta-level. The following chapter examines how violations of ideals such as authenticity may shed light on how voter evaluate and judge real candidates through political advertising.

5.4: Breaching moments, reflexivity and film form

In the following, I show how political ads can function as a resource for citizenship through how informants draw on content to judge form and form to judge content, in their evaluation of authenticity, credibility and what is right and fitting political communication. Through exploring how informants navigate the ads through the lens of reception research, we further our understanding of what cues and elements people draw upon in their evaluations, and what norms and ideals people navigate by. Furthermore, we gain additional knowledge of how the ads may function as a resource.

I argue that the the ads prompt informants to articulate and question their preferences, as well as spark reflexivity on behalf of their own positions and the positions of other people. This relates to the virtue of inclusion, of taking other people and their communicative needs into account, a type of civic affinity (Dahlgren, 2002; Schudson, 2006). It is at times also indicative of a willingness to experiment with other positions, and an openness to seeing other sides of an issue, that point towards the receptive rhetorical virtue of openness, in particular towards other views than one’s own (Asen, 2004; Dagger, 1997, 2002; Kjeldsen, 2014; Kock & Villadsen, 2017). Moreover, I show how informant engagement with form reveals that they have a ready vocabulary to dissect and evaluate form in a way that indicates a relatively high awareness of media texts as construction and their individual components. I take this to be indicative of the virtue of literacy, or communicative skills manifested through “media literacy” (Koltay, 2011; Livingstone, 2008), namely the ability to decode, evaluate and analyze electronic media (Aufderheide, 1993). This communicative

competence is a key type of civic knowledge (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 21) that has been labelled important for receptive rhetorical citizens (Kock & Villadsen, 2012a, 2017).

In the previous parts of this chapter, I have presented and discussed the three major themes and conversations that were common to most informants: Voters' experiences of the balance between image-information and issue-information in ads; negativity in political rhetoric as presented through political ads; and voters' mediated relation to their rulers in a landscape of personalized politics and appeals to authenticity and image.

In order to further illustrate how the ads can function as a resource for citizenship, as well as to show how my informants enacted a particular kind of rhetorical citizenship, I now draw on insights from reception theory presented in chapter 2. Consequently, the following chapter moves to a level of *how* people talk about what they are talking about, and conceptual notions that are present in the reception situation. This is the last empirical contribution of the thesis, and paves the way for my larger discussion of how all the findings and results in this thesis speak to my overarching research questions, as well as my individual research questions.

Here, I introduce the novel concept of “breaching moments”, particular events during reception in which an audience member stops shifting between different modes of involvement, and is temporarily grounded in a highly critical, mediated mode. I present two types of triggers for such breaching moments: One through ‘lack of fit’, which I conceptualize through the rhetorical term *aptum* (or *decorum*) (Kjeldsen, 2006), and one through ‘lack of belief’, which I conceptualize through the concept of *authenticity* (Enli, 2015; Guignon, 2004, 2008; Johansen, 2002; Kjeldsen & Johansen, 2011). I argue that examining these breaching moments is interesting because they give us key insights into how audience members navigate political ads when using them in their practical judgement of an ad or a politician. As such, this elaboration grants further insight into how people actually navigate ads as media texts. Exploring the concepts of “authenticity breach” and “aptum breach” allows us to gain a more nuanced understanding how people engage with mediated constructions in order to pass practical judgement on who is considered credible or not. Moreover, how

aesthetic dimensions such as film form and film style (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004) actually are crucial in constructing (or wrecking) such impressions, as they continually interact in the reception situation.

I then introduce a mode that often follows the breaching moment, namely a “diagnosing and constructive” mode, in which informants attempt to verbalize what went wrong, and how the ad could have been made differently in order to alleviate the perceived problems. This mode, indicative in part of a degree of media literacy (Livingstone, 2008) and an ability to deconstruct media messages, leads me to the second part of the chapter, in which I present and discuss findings from informants’ reception that I argue further indicates the receptive virtue of literacy. I do this through two observations: first, a degree of receptive communicative skills and awareness (media literacy), as evidenced by both the constructive mode as well as a high general ability and will to draw upon aspects of film form when arguing their view of an ad. Interestingly, I found informants to articulate a certain type of preference. Namely, they wanted ads that looked good or appeared well made in a spirit of perceived professionalism. While this type of preference is uncontroversial in the realm of commercial ads, it is an interesting stylistic contrast to the ideal of authenticity. Seemingly, authenticity in terms of film form is more concerned with artlessness and not calling attention to itself than for instance appearing spontaneous, unplanned or unpolished.

Second, moments of informant reflexivity in which they conceptualize and think about the reception situation, either on their own behalf or through thinking about other audience members or producers. This is an indication of the receptive virtue of inclusiveness. These examinations of how ads can function as a resource, and of how people can enact a rhetorical type of citizenship when facing the ads, constitute the basis for my closing discussion.

In the following, I briefly recap the literature discussed in chapter 2 on commuting between modes of reception, before I introduce two empirical contributions: the aptum breach and the authenticity breach. Furthermore, I outline four aspects of informants’ mediated mode of reception: a constructive and diagnosing

mode that followed many breaching moments, extensive talk about film form, and lastly informant reflexivity. I then discuss the findings. The breaching moments are treated as a potentially novel entry point towards a more fine-grained understanding of how audiences navigate this type of political rhetoric in evaluation of candidates, and the mediated modes are discussed in light of how they indicate informants enacting a receptive rhetorical citizenship.

5.4.1 The commuter's final stop: breaching moments

As we recall, the term of “commuting” refers to how informants move between different modes during their reception of a media message (Schröder, 2000). Throughout, I found my informants to commute in the manner one could expect judging from earlier studies in reception research (Liebes & Katz, 1990; Michelle, 2007; Schröder, 2000; Wilson, 1996). For instance, an informant can in one moment be in a transparent mode as she talks about inner features of a politician’s personality and mentality based on what is presented on screen. Seemingly accepting the ad as a type of “window to the world”, she assumes that the information presented on screen can tell her something substantial about the actual politician in question, and that politician’s ‘real’ personality. She can then shift into a referential mode, in which she draws on extra-textual knowledge in order to contrast her own conception of “the good politician” to what she is presented with on screen. This can then be followed by a mediated mode, in which aesthetic comments and aspects of production are drawn into focus. It was apparent that my informants made use of a wide repertoire when arguing for why they thought, felt or experienced an ad in a certain way, and that they would indeed commute between modes of reception. However, I now would like to bring attention to the receptive events of *breaching moments*, in which this commuting between modes ceased.

Table 12: Themes and frequencies for modes of reception

| Theme | Sub-theme | No- of references | No. of occurrence in groups (n=16) |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Modes | | 468 | 16 |
| | Aptum breach | 85 | 14 |
| | Authenticity breach | 65 | 15 |
| | Constructive/diagnosing | 59 | 15 |
| | Talk on film form | 202 | 16 |
| | Informant reflexivity | 57 | 15 |

For full list of sub-themes, see appendix B.

In my data material, I found two cues for such moments after analysis – one pertains to authenticity and the other to aptum. The former is concerned with belief – in whether a politician is being “his true self”, but also is perceived to be telling the truth. Authenticity also has a dimension of the media text itself – of presentation. As such, through their processing of various cues, informants can determine whether they believe the presentation of what they are seeing and hearing.

The latter concept, *aptum*, is concerned with what is fitting and appropriate. Rather than disbelief, it connotes a sense of disapproval from the informant on behalf of what he or she is watching unfold on screen. An aptum breach is triggered by

disapproval along patterns of expectations, appropriate behavior and appropriate language for the realm of politics and politicians.

I will now describe these two receptive events in more detail, and show how they occurred in the informants' meetings with the various films. It is important to stress that a breaching moment has three dimensions: an interpersonal dimension, a content dimension, and a dimension of film form. I will elaborate below. As Table 12 shows, most groups experienced authenticity breaches, aptum breaches and engaged in a constructive and diagnosing mode, with some exceptions. The art students were almost constantly grounded in a mediated, aesthetic mode from the get go. They were also very positive to all types of experimentation in regards to film form and humor – seemingly showcasing an “everything goes” attitude. They would comment on elements of aptum, but were so constantly grounded in a mediated mode that it is difficult to say if they experienced a breach of any kind. The nurses did not experience authenticity breaches per se – they commuted throughout, and kept engaging, while not relating to film form that much in their reception. The nurses were seemingly very positive and forgiving as a group, almost located constantly in a constructive mode. The group of hairdressers was able to articulate breaches and critical stances, but did not further engage with film form in the constructive and diagnosing mode.

6.4.1.1 The aptum breach

The essence of the aptum breach can be distilled in the sentence “I don't think this is fitting”. The source of dismay can be located in interpersonal aspects or directed towards film form. The former concerns moments when someone on screen is perceived to be behaving in a manner that is inappropriate. The latter concerns moments when the ‘language’ of the presented message is deemed unfitting in some respect. As we recall from chapter 2.1, aptum means “appropriate” or “fitting”, and is divided into external aptum and internal aptum. The norm of external aptum dictates that the orator's language should fit both orator, situation, audience and subject at hand. The norm of internal aptum dictates that the different components of a rhetorical utterance should fit together, and touches upon elements such as disposition, language, content and presentation (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 75). Aptum concerns a speaker's relation to societal norms, conventions and ideals (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 78). Because aptum is so

tightly interwoven with situational and societal norms, the rhetor risks her ethos in the eyes of the audience if breaking these norms (Kjeldsen, 2006, p. 78). Moreover, an aptum breach will have adverse effects, such as drawing attention away from the message one is attempting to communicate (Vatnøy, 2017, p. 106).

Indeed, as we shall see in the analysis below, an aptum breach produces comments that indicate a lessened perception of the sender's ethos. More pointedly, however, the breach becomes the central nodal point around which the rest of the reception revolves. The norm-violation calls attention to itself, and commands attention. Thus, it becomes a lens through which informants interpret and make sense of the rest of the message.

The concept can speak to violations at a formal level, at a level of general norms, and at a level of norms for interpersonal behavior. Importantly in this regard, the rhetor must speak in a way that is fitting to his or her own personal ethos. Typically, an old person using a young person's language (and vice versa) can in some cases be said to be an aptum violation.

Translating the concept of aptum to the reception of political advertising, I found three specific triggers that prompted audience response appearing to signify a breach of aptum that my informants reacted to. These were perceptions of inappropriate behavior; an unfitting use of language, either through mismatch with initial ethos or through choosing a film language too similar to variants of commercial advertising, thus becoming 'unfitting for politics'; and lastly the use of humor in a political setting.

Turning to the first trigger, this involves that the person on screen is perceived to be partaking in behavior that violates some type of norm, interpersonal or otherwise. For instance, Christian Democratic party leader Knut Arild Hareide is perceived as violating an interpersonal norm when he is feeding someone else's child in the 2013 ad *Hareide explains*:

W1: He stands out in that situation. Instead of being a part of the situation, there suddenly is a man in a suit there, with a spoon.

W4: Feeding a kid he does not know

M1: It is awkward. It is very awkward.

W1: VERY awkward.

(Dancers)

Note that the point that Hareide does not know these people is inferred. In any case, Hareide seems to be in violation of norms such as “don’t touch the children of people you don’t know”. Other informants used words such as “abnormal”, “silly” (W1, Hairdressers) and “unnatural” (W4, Pupils) to describe their reaction. This was a moment that truly stood out in reception. Almost all informant groups made note of it in a highly skeptical or questioning manner. Informants used words such as “(...) he just broke in, and just...blaaargh [makes sound]” (W1, Hairdressers), “super creepy” (M1, Teachers), “intruder”, “unnatural” (W4, Pupils), “idiotic” (W3, Pupils) to describe Hareide or the situation. Interestingly, one informant in the senior group assumed a family relation between Hareide and the people in the scene, stating that “If that was his brother next to him with the child on his lap, I don’t know... There was another man at least, there were two men and a small child” (W1, Seniors). This comment suggests a clear norm as to who this type of intimacy is reserved for, in this case close friends and family.

In another example, the actors in the Centre Party commercial are perceived to be violating some sort of intimate border, as they are performing without clothes:

W2: I don’t understand why those two men who were armwrestling had to be topless. (...) why did they need to be that, it’s a commercial, it’s a little weird.

MHI: Any other thoughts on the toplessness of those folks?

W3: It was really unnecessary, that’s for sure.

(Pupils)

At first glance, this norm is connected to public nudity. A particularly triggering moment is when the actor in the second commercial looks down on the maps drawn on his naked body, and then into the camera, smiling. Many informants interpret this as the man looking down on his own genitals, and then towards the spectator, with pride in his eyes. For some informants, this moment was far too intimate for a situation in

which they were expecting political argumentation. Many informants were confused by this, prompting responses of “awkwardness”.

M1: Well, we went from a map to the body of a dude that obviously was very happy with himself, and... well...

M2: I thought about RFSU³⁹. That would have been fantastic.

M1: Hehe, yes that would have worked. But yes, awkward.

(Teachers)

These informants were not alone in such reactions. Other informants used words such as “weird” (M1, Teachers), “weird sexual references” (W2, Teachers), “unfitting” (W2, Teachers), “strange” (W1, Left leaning), “peculiar” and “disturbing” (W2, Left leaning), “misleading” (M4, Mechanics), “unnecessary” (W3, Pupils) to describe what they saw. The triggering aspect here could also be touching upon the dichotomy of private/public. Nudity is acceptable in private, less so in public. In the public realm of politics, even less so. One tends to expect to see garments of officialdom, such as suits or shirts – or at least some kind of clothing.

Some informants found another type of inappropriateness when Prime Minister Erna Solberg acts in the sketch-like Conservative Party commercial from 2015. For some, she was partaking in inappropriate behavior because she holds the role of Prime Minister:

M1: but she is already the Prime Minister, which is quite an important role, so I think it’s a little weird. I would not have thought that she would be so ironic towards that role. Really, I found it a little banal and weird and not serious.

(Humanities)

Here, the norm is not interpersonal, but is rather connected to expectations of how a Prime Minister should behave, what a person filling that role should and should not do. For some informants, the role of Prime Minister apparently connotes some sort of respect or solemnity that should not be tampered with to such a degree. A similar response is given from the senior group when they watched then Prime Minister Stoltenberg interacting with people in a taxi. One informant explicitly stated that the

³⁹ A manufacturer of condoms.

film made her less interested in voting for him. When asked to explicate, she stated that it was all “too much”, and that Stoltenberg’s folksy approach went too far, because there should be some level of respect and distance between politicians and common people in society (W4, Seniors).

The second trigger was an unfitting choice of film language, either through internal aptum or external aptum; the totality of the film language when relating to the realm of politics, or the ethos of a political party or politician in relation to individual elements of ads. In the latter case, informants perceived the mode of behavior or some aspect of presentation as “unfitting” towards that specific political party or politician. For instance the political party were perceived to be “trying too hard”, or attempting to be something they are not, or something that did not ‘fit’. In other words, there was a mismatch between both the impression and expectation that the informants had towards a particular politician or a particular political party. This is qualitatively different from notions of authenticity breach, because this does not concern truth or relation to a core personality, but rather a lack of suitability in choice of presentation. As such, this specific subset of reactions of the aptum breach is more correctly formulated as ‘this does not suit you’, rather than ‘this is not who you fundamentally are’.

The Centre Party’s use of hashtags was frequently mentioned. Echoing Cicero’s thoughts on the importance of speaking and acting one’s age (Andersen, 1995: 64f), several informants appeared to cringe when experiencing ‘an old man using a young man’s language’. The notion that “this is something my grandmother would do” (W2, Teachers) and mentions of parents (M2, Right leaning) were frequent across several groups. A sense of missing the mark is central to these reactions, the perception of somebody trying to speak in a target group’s mannerism, but failing:

W2: Those who still think that hashtags are something you stick on a piece of paper, and as many as possible, that is people that are, [laughs], OLDER people, and it could very well work, it could perhaps impress my mother who is 55 years old, but I don’t think that fifteen hashtags appearing one after another is particularly rewarding

(Left leaning).

Interestingly, the group of older people interpreted the hashtags as something for young people, and not “(...) very old people such as ourselves (...) the country is to be run on by younger forces (...) (W4, Seniors). Several other groups, consisting of younger people, talked about this type of appeal to the young as something desperate or strained:

M9: I guess they’re trying to reach the youth with these hasthags.

MHI: There are almost only young people in this room – does this reach you? With the hashtags

[laughter, many informants say “no”]

MHI: Why not?

M3: Hashtags are so childish, in my view. Every time there is a hashtag, it’s like hashtag, YOLO, all of that, LOL. It belongs together.

M2: It’s a little too desperate an attempt for my part. In order to reach the younger generation.

(Mechanics)

The Centre Party, for many of my informants, was something more folksy, country-oriented and down to earth. For them, the use of the hip, even childish hashtags was a clear breach of what is appropriate for this type of political party.

Concerning the notion of unfitting film form and film language, comments addressed both internal and external aptum. Importantly, these differ from the comments comparing ads with intitial ethos through commenting on the internal relations of the elements of an ad, or an ad’s total relation to a situation. Turning to the first aspect, in the interaction below, informants watching the CPP ad *Sunday open* from 2015 react to various devices of film form present in the ad:

MHI: What was this, then?

W1: That was a really bad ad. I understand that it was intentional that it should be cheap and bad in the beginning there, but even in the end there, where they just cut him into that forest it was just...

[informants snicker]

M3: A cheap production, that’s right.

MHI: So cheap production value?

M2: I think that's what they are attempting to do, too, in the first part. But the thing is that they can't get away from it, so it comes on top of everything. I lacks contrast, so when the bad naggy Sunday shopping commercial comes on, it only comes on top of everything, because they have such a tacky production otherwise as well. If they would have had something more elegant that would give some more contrast, the point would have come across better

(Elite business school)

We recognize that the informants are commenting on the internal *aptum* (Kjeldsen, 2006) of the message – it lacks contrast, the various pieces of the ad do not fit well together, and it does not produce the effect that the producers intended – that the informants also identify correctly. Another example shows informants talking about external *aptum* for dimensions of film form, as they have just watched the Red Party ad from 2015:

W1: I actually like Bjørnar Moxnes, and I think the Red Party has good points. But I don't think that came across in this ad. I think it was a little, I got kind of a milk commercial feeling. [Informants laugh] Because Tine, they have these kinds of ads where they stand there and they talk close like that and then a little further away and like

M2: In front of a milky white background

W1: On a milky white background, just that they're talking about, because I work out so much, I have to drink milk every day. He could be saying that, and I would not notice [laughs]

(Natural sciences)

Here, the informants are talking more about external *aptum*. They are not necessarily concerned with how single elements of the ad fit together, but rather how the totality of the presentation comes across. In this case, the presentation was too much like a type of commercial ads they already knew. The informant W1 explicitly states that she is actually inclined to like both the politician and the party, but that this form of presentation was not to her liking because it was too much like a milk ad, and thus not fitting, leading to an *aptum* breach and a critical stance. An underlying norm in her responses could be formulated as follows: "Politics should not be communicated, or sold, in the same way as commercial products." Several other informant groups had

similar reactions, for instance remarking that the 2013 Centre Party ad *Pilots* looked like an ad for vitamins and health products (W4, Pupils), or even looked like an ad for a charitable organization because it was perceived to look less costly (W2, Left leaning; M1, Mechanics). One of the senior informants stated, after watching the 2013 Conservative party ad, that “It is about the same as regular ads. At times you sit there thinking, what the heck is this an ad for? It is just nonsense.” (W1, Seniors). In other words, ads can appear very similar – and the informant wants politics to be above and beyond the realm of commercial advertising, which she associates with a world of silliness, not the seriousness and somberness of politics.

The third trigger was the use of humor in a political setting. When watching the ads containing humor, all groups from the 2015 examination (except the art students) had one or more informant who expressed dismay, not at the content of the ads, but at the very fact that humor was being used in a political setting. Seemingly, these informants experienced a breach in expectations of genre. The expressed norm here is that politics should be serious, and that it is not something to make fun of:

M3: For this to be such a serious party, I got the feeling that it was a really non-serious ad, like. Ehm, it was kind of no facts, I did not get to know anything. The first thing I thought was that it was a commercial for [A known low-price supermarket chain in Norway], with all those colors and the fact that it was Sunday open, that’s the first thing I thought. Then, I mean, I had no expectations of this ad when it started, and I was only left with the feeling that it was a little non-serious.

(Private business school)

The informant above seems to have experienced a breach of expectations in terms of genre. He was expecting “something political” – perhaps argumentation, issues, or an opportunity to learn something. This may indicate that the informant considers the genre of political ads to be non-fictional texts, to be read much as a (very biased) newscast. The aptum breach in this situation is triggered by something that, in this informant’s eyes, does not belong in the realm of politics. Talking more generally about her views on political advertising, an informant from another group elaborates on why she does not appreciate the form of humor she has just witnessed.

W1: they have to do it in a much better way, and they have to move away from this awkwardness. Because it does not work, it is more like, the party is losing legitimacy, it loses credibility, because it just becomes ridiculous, they are being ridiculed, I feel, it becomes unserious, trying too hard and, a little like, they are losing a little face in my opinion.

(Law)

Clearly, the informant finds humor in political ads inappropriate, or in violation of her own expectations. This quote is also indicative of a possible result of politicians ‘missing the mark’ among some informants: a loss of credibility. The informant’s choice of words is also interesting, as she mentions that they are “losing face”. This suggests, as I argue, that there is an intimate connection between genre, film form and personal ethos that should not be ignored if one wishes to fully understand how people consume political ads as political rhetoric. It suggests that situational choices of genre can have an impact on politicians’ personal ethos. Of course, it could also be that the above quote is more indicative of the informant viewing “politics as circus”, which leads her to further disown the field and the actors within it, leading to a sort of disconnection. This would resemble the particular stance towards the role of entertainment in politics that I discussed in chapter on the tension between informing and engaging.

Summing up, I found aptum breaches to occur after triggers located at levels of genre (unfitting use of humor), unfitting language (unfitting film form or language that does not suit a particular party), and at interpersonal levels (improper behavior, personally or in terms of role). The aptum breach can be summed up in the sentence “I don’t think this is fitting” and related both to internal (within text) and external (the relation text-context) elements of aptum. Aptum breaches were followed by a critical, mediated mode, and in some cases followed by a diagnosing-constructive mode.

6.4.1.2 The authenticity breach

The essence of the authenticity breach can be distilled in the sentence “I don’t believe this”. I have already elaborated upon the concept of authenticity and how it is at work in citizen evaluation of politicians in the previous chapter. However, for the purposes

of this chapter, we can stress that that authenticity works both at an interpersonal level in people's evaluations of politicians (Johansen, 2002), as well as being a dimension in the evaluation of media texts as constructs (Enli, 2015). The target of the disbelief can be interpersonal (directed at the politician), the content of the presentation (the arguments within the ad), or the presentation (the construction of the media text). In terms of the construction of media texts, or presentation, authenticity concerns all elements of film form that attempt to create a transparent reading – the construction is attempting to pass as life, or life-like.

At an interpersonal level, we can recall that one probable reason why authenticity is often held in such high esteem is the concept's interrelation with other virtues that one might hold high for politicians, such as honesty, courage, consistency, and self-reflexivity (Guignon, 2008, p. 287). Authenticity is important because it becomes an evaluative indicator for virtues praised in politicians.

I found four triggers that prompted a breach of authenticity. The first, whether the politician was perceived to be inauthentic through not coming across as being true to themselves. The second, a disbelief caused by a mismatch between the presentation on screen and the informants' knowledge of externalities (either in their own lifeworld, or knowledge gathered from media or education). The third, authenticity breaches through film form – when there was something in the presentation and film language that broke the illusion of the text-as-life or life-like. And the fourth, a strong disbelief or even dislike of politicians in general, or a particular politician or political party specifically. The latter reaction is reminiscent of Ross' (2011) concept of “neutralization”.

When the politician is perceived as inauthentic through behavior (for nonfictional ads) or the informant does not believe in what is being conveyed through acting (in narrative dramatization ads), there is a breach in terms of the dichotomy between being oneself and pretending to be someone one is not (acting). Typically, informants mention words gathered from the realm of movies and theatre when describing what they see after such a breach: “rehearsed” (W2, Dancers), “artificial” (M1, W1, Right leaning) “scripted” or “like he is reading from a script” (W4, W7,

Pupils “planned” (M2, Natural sciences), “artificial” (M2, Elite business school), “a little fake” (M4, Mechanics) or “staged” (W3, Hairdressers). Discussing Knut Arild Hareide’s performance in *Hareide explains*, the group of dancers had the following exchange:

W4: He’s trying to be of the people.

M2: He’s trying very hard. He’s trying way too hard.

M1: You can’t try to be of the people. You can’t try to be something else than what you really are. What you’ve got, is what you have to work with. And then take it from there.

(Dancers)

Here, we see the ideal of authenticity at play. Personal characteristics are seen more as properties of a person, rather than a performance. If it has to be performed, or rather if it is perceived to be performed, it is considered fake (Tolson, 2001). The following quote concerns the same film, but is from a different group:

M3: This reminds me of an ad for Vitaepro, when he walks along and explains how things are connected. And what strikes me is how he throughout the ad breaks the fourth wall in a very awkward way,; he speaks to the camera while the others are in the same scene as him, not noticing. He is with them, at the same time he’s not with them. Yes. Bad acting, really.

(Teachers)

This quote is not particularly indicative of a transparent mode. Rather, the informant is talking about the whole ad as theatrics – he is interpreting everything he sees more towards fiction than nonfiction, which goes directly against the intention of the film. Not only does the informant not believe the acting, the fact that he considers it acting shows that he does not really believe the construction presented at all – far from the “relatively undistorted reflections of reality” (Michelle, 2007, p. 196) that a transparent reading warrants, and the genre of realism (inspired by journalistic documentaries) that the ad makers attempted to convey.

Reacting to *Our Norway*, an informant in the group of natural sciences was quite skeptical:

M2: I feel that he is First House⁴⁰ polished.

MHI: What does that mean?

M2: What he is saying seems very planned, very thought through, like it is not his words, like it seems directed, really, read proofs on it 100 times, tested for market groups, and so on, to make sure it fits in perfectly

MHI: How do you feel about that?

M2: I don't like it at all. No. It comes across as fake, pretentious

(Natural sciences)

Here, we see the dichotomy of spontaneous/planned at work. The informant suspects Jonas Gahr Støre of engaging in strategic language use, which for the informant feels fake, and is not to his liking. A more authentic expression would involve Støre speaking freely, or at least the informant perceiving that he did. Støre using a script, suspected to come from communications advisors, is here in violation of the romantic norm for language use: a person's words should be his or her own (Kjeldsen, 2014, p. 105).

A second trigger of the authenticity breach concerned informants relating what they saw on screen to their external knowledge of the world, events or information from their own lifeworld, in other words from a referential mode (Michelle, 2007) of reception. This sub-theme describes the reaction informants get when there is a mismatch between what is presented and their own knowledge of the world external to the media text. As such, the illusion of a presentation of reality breaks down. An example of this is an informant in the senior group. Witnessing Stoltenberg driving a taxi was ludicrous to him, because he knew that Stoltenberg could not possibly have a taxi license. Therefore, he found the advertisement completely unbelievable, and did not take it seriously. Knowledge of media coverage of the taxi stunt also triggered authenticity breaches in some cases, as there was a substantial amount of negative press at the time of its release, due to some participants being paid money to be filmed, which was perceived as cheating, since the whole point of the film was a 'real' candid camera situation:

⁴⁰ A well known and controversial PR-firm in Norway.

M10: Fun to see him in an act!

MHI: What?

M10: It is acting, all of it.

MHI: Tell me more

M4 [whispering loudly] CONSPIRACY...

[some informants laugh]

M10: Eeeh, I'm not going to put out conspiracy theories here, but, in the papers it said that it was an act, and, well, if he sits in a folksy setting here, it is because he has been put there because his manager has decided it for him

(Mechanics)

Here, we see the informant drawing on the press coverage that became a major part of *Taxi Stoltenberg's* media reception. As we recall, the coverage was initially positive until it came to light that the production agency had employed the method of 'street casting' and thus paid some of the people to appear in the stunt. Thus, he reads the people in the film through the lens of 'actors'. Following the logic of the authenticity ideal, one should not act out of external influence. Being paid to do something, or behave in a certain way, certainly violates this ideal. Moreover, the last sentence is particularly interesting, as it suggests that Stoltenberg himself was not acting out his inner self, but was placed there by a 'manager', a word further connoting the realm of show business and entertainment. It also further emphasizes how Stoltenberg in this instance was perceived not to be acting on his own behalf and accord, but through the will of other forces external to him.

A third trigger for authenticity breaches manifested through aspects of film form (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). Authenticity breaches through film form mainly occur because informants react to some aspect of film form (be it special effects, editing, sound, cinematography, clothing or any aspect of film form) – leading to a rejection. This breach trigger is more similar to Enli's (2015) conception of 'mediated authenticity' understood as the construction of 'reality effects' through established codes of genre and expectation that exist between producers and consumers of media (Enli, 2015). Breaking down the concept, an authenticity break through film form can

occur when one “sees the strings holding up the UFOs” when watching a sci-fi movie. It can break one’s suspension of disbelief in terms of fiction material, or it can bring greater attention to the constructed nature of a non-fiction media text through various slippages or cues that informants notice. A very clear example of such a breach comes from the group of art students. He is commenting on the Labour Party ad from 2015:

M2: I think the music reminds me of like a Kony 2012 video, where it always is very leading for how one is supposed to feel [talks about Støres on-screen behavior as unnatural for a while] But I did not like how the video is edited so that it jump cuts back and forth, it’s messy in a way. It takes away some credibility for my part

(Art students)

As the rest of the group of art students, this informant is highly articulate about film form, as well as almost constantly in a mediated, aesthetic mode. The film form authenticity breach does not always manifest itself so explicitly. Recall that the producers of the 2015 Christian Democrat film explicitly wanted to play with film form in order to create humorous points (the special effects were deliberately bad taste). The only group that “caught” this point and actually liked it, however, were the highly formally conscious art students. Other groups experienced authenticity breaches based on this device:

W2: Ooohhhhh [laughs]

W1: Putting on his dress shoes to walk in the forest

M1: Was that ending on green screen? Because it looked a little like it? Yes? Because that was a shame, then.

MHI: You did not like that?

M1: I’m thinking that it’s a very short trip outside to do a real recording from that forest, so, it looks a little fake in a way.

(Humanities)

The humanities students were not alone in experiencing this as a disruptive moment of the ad. Another informant used words such as “really awkward green screen (...) really cringeworthy” (W1, Law) to describe the green screen. With the exception of the art students, the poor production value was a recurring notion in all groups, which in

part undercut the informants' experience and enjoyment of the ad. Thus, a point of production that was obvious to the producers (and the highly aesthetically oriented art students) did not connect with the majority of informants I interviewed. It could very well be that the film formal joke that producers intended was a bit too clever for its own good.

This trigger is interesting because it suggests that production value, the look and feel of an ad, matters a great degree for its credibility. This is not to say that every ad should be a big budget production, but that it is probably beneficial to look a certain way. This might seem self-evident, but one could imagine it otherwise: that the ideal would be that political messages in Norway should look as simple and cheap as possible, considering the ideal of aesthetic egalitarianism. Rather, this points once again to the fact that the Scandinavian ideal of political communication is a very particular construction with certain norms. The Norwegian political ad should display an "unassuming artlessness" (Kjeldsen, 2007), but not be so artless as to be noticed for it. An ad that seemingly pulls this off is *Taxi Stoltenberg* from 2013. Interestingly, that is also the most extensively produced ad I have examined in this study.

The fourth and final trigger for authenticity breaches and reactions of disbelief was prompted by a strong disbelief in politicians, or even a strong *dislike* of politicians. Informants explicated this through a more generalized suspicion – tapping into general themes and narratives that exist around the field of politics, such as "politicians only lie", "they are self-serving" and so on. Talking about the amount of promises made in an ad, one informant shows a sense of disillusionment towards politicians and politics:

W3: And they have so many issues, like better conditions for sports and leisure, better care for the elderly, la la la la, a lot of things that really should just have been fixed a long time ago. And that really all parties are working with all the time, just that they're maybe fronting other issues to a larger degree.

W2: Also it is very general. They say nothing concrete. Of course, that's hard in an ad, but – it's like...

W4: Everything will be better.

W2: Yes.

W4: Yes, it's a little...

W2: We know they can't do it.

(Dancers)

While this informant is rather mild in her disbelief and articulation of the theme of 'politicians promise, but don't deliver', other informants were more explicitly damning in their language, using phrases such as "lying":

W1: I think he is lying

MHI: Why?

W1: I don't think he can keep all those promises. Yeah, they probably think they can keep them themselves. Like those in power now. Can't remember who they are. But those people. They also promised a lot. And they haven't kept it. So they're lying.

(Hairdressers)

That the informant has forgotten who is actually in power at the time is interesting, because it suggests that she is tapping into a topos of "all politicians are the same" – the notion that it does not matter who is in control (and in extension it does not matter whether I pay attention or care), a typical sign of disengagement and disconnection.

The trigger of dislike also concerns instances where informants have a strict dislike of specific politicians or specific political parties. Knut Arild Hareide, the leader of the Christian Democratic Party, was not particularly well received by one informant in the group of ship mechanics:

M3: If this guy appeared on TV, I would switch channels immediately. The whole dude seems horrible and fucking disgusting. Just the whole way he presents himself. It's almost a shame for the Christian Democrats. I mean, they have some good points, I think, but I would not watch for a second if he appeared.

(Mechanics)

When probing for what caused this almost visceral reaction, the informant later repeated that it had to do with Hareide's person. He just didn't like the guy. For the 2015 material, one informant stated that he could not bear listening to Prime Minister Erna Solberg: "I want to cover my ears when she speaks (...) she has no radio voice

and no television voice either (...) typical posh Bergen dialect, there is nothing worse than that..." (M1, Private business school). I also found this type of hostility directed more towards political parties. Another example from the group of ship mechanics played out when one informant verbalized his strong dislike for the Christian Democrats in general, due to a perceived mixing of religion and politics which he truly did not like at all, stating that it "pisses me off" (M2, Mechanics).

Some of these reactions are reminiscent of Ross' (2011) concept of *neutralization*. Informants recognize the encoder, or the encoder's position, and reject what they are presented with accordingly. The informant can neutralize based on the message coming from a group they don't trust (politicians) or certain actors they don't like or trust (a particular politician, party or ideology). In the last example I referred to, it seemingly did not really matter what the Christian Democrats were trying to communicate, as their message was being neutralized on completely different grounds altogether.

Summing up, I found authenticity breaches to occur at the level of film form, both interpersonally and at the level of the text's relation to the surrounding context that informants had knowledge of. The four triggers were perceptions of inauthentic individual politicians, a mismatch between textual content and external knowledge held by informants, breaches cued by film formal aspects, and a strong dislike of politicians in general or individual politicians. The authenticity breach was frequently followed by a critical, mediated mode, and in some cases followed up by the diagnosing and constructive mode that I will elaborate in the following.

5.4.2 The diagnosing and constructive mode

Earlier I mentioned that the breaching moment leads to a language of rejection. However, during analysis I discovered that this was not always the case, and that a typical "rejection" might not be a fully adequate word for what was going on. Informants kept on engaging with the ads, although in a markedly different manner. Following one of these two breaching modes, was often a mode which, in the terms of Michelle (2007), can be characterized as distant, objective, mediated and highly

critical. In some cases, informants appeared to reject the ad – stating something like: “this is just to gather votes!” (W2, Teachers) or calling the ad a part of “a big manipulation campaign” (M3, Mechanics), before seemingly being cognitively done with processing the ad, thus refusing to engage with it further.

However, not all instances showcased a clear rejection. Informants seemed, in some cases, to continue engaging in the text, but from a position that was rather firmly grounded in a mediated mode at the denotative level, and a discursive-analytical mode at the connotative level (Michelle, 2007). To put it simply, informants seemingly saw the ad as broken or imperfect in some way, and explicated ways to repair it. The diagnosing part is characterized by the informant identifying what went wrong, and the constructive part is characterized by the informant suggesting alternative ways of going about making the ad. Drawing on an example mentioned above, an informant proposed a solution to the Centre Party’s hashtag problem by claiming that it could perhaps “have been an idea with just one hashtag” (Dancers, 2013) instead of a multitude. The group of teachers was highly deconstructive in their answers, but also quite constructive. The following interchange occurred when they discussed the 2013 Centre Party ad:

M1: What really creates dissonance are these still images in the end, I think.

MHI: The still images. What happens then? Talk a little bit about that.

M2: Would it work better with just the logo? Like for the Labour Party.

[several informants say yes]

M2: I think so, too. An empty screen with just the logo.

W1: Yes, because this breaks completely with the formal expression, it becomes something quite different.

M1: To move from moving bodies to still images I find a little weird.

(Teachers)

The informants in this interaction continued discussing among themselves on how it could have been done differently. Discussing the perceived theatrics of Knut Arild Hareide, the pupil group discussed possible remedies:

W2: I think they should just make the whole thing more real. I mean, the concept was good. But it was not credible, since he appeared so fake. But if they could make it more real (...), they could have shown a real situation, that he is not placed there, they could have filmed while he was visiting someone, and he could be just talking casually.

(Pupils)

Interestingly, the pupils are here requesting what producers originally intended, but ended up having to move away from due to time constraints. Key here is that the informants are not just evaluating it as fake, but making their own suggestions to how the film could have been made. This type of articulation is also, indirectly, a verbalization of preference. The green screen moment of the 2015 Christian Democrat ad also sparked many instances of the constructive mode. In the exchange below, informants go on to speculate on how the producers could have solved the problem in quite practical terms:

MHI: You mentioned that green screen, does it spoil it for you, or

W2: Very much so. I mean, it takes you 20 minutes from the office in Oslo to get to Sognsvann. And there you have a forest. Sorry, it can't be that hard

M1: It seemed quite cheaply made.

W2: [engaged] I'm just thinking that they're spending more money on the green screen than [other informants are laughing] I mean it's 30 NOK for the subway to Sognsvann! It's true!

(Law)

As we observe above, comments concern both film form and aspects of production that could have been done differently. However, informants also give comments specifically on acting or the behavior of politicians they see. Below, the group of business students discusses the Red Party ad *Vote for a challenger*, which focused heavily on underdog narratives, and that one should vote for a challenger that can shake things up in the status quo of political parties:

W1: (...) I felt he was a little rehearsed, that he was going to tell a little story... but it was like, not so real, and I think he was too friendly. It was like, too nice for him to achieve something. He would need some more passion, if he is going to fight for an issue, I felt that he was not as challenging. It was too friendly for me, to represent any fight.

W2: He wasn't very challenging.

W1: No drive (...) If he is to challenge, why not do it properly?

(Elite business school).

For these informants, Moxnes' chosen mode of delivery was too somber, or perhaps not dramatic enough for the types of changes and inequality he addressed in his speech. Through engaging with the ad in a constructive mode, informants were able to make suggestions as to how the ad makers could have done things differently.

The epistemic value of these statements is of course troublesome. If producers had listened to the informants, it might very well lead to similar disasters. My point is not that informants have the authoritative view on what constitutes high quality political ads. Rather, I argue that the very existence of this mode indicates that informants are willing to engage with the texts in a manner that signifies both a relatively high degree of textual competence as well as the ability to, directly or indirectly, verbalize preference. This type of articulation is perhaps even clearer when examining the next category that emerged during analysis, namely the high degree to which informants addressed aspects of film form when watching the ads.

Summing up, informants went into a diagnosing and constructive mode frequently after perceived breaches of authenticity or aptum. When in such a mode, informants were in a mediated mode at the denotative level, and in an analytical stance at the denotative level (Michelle, 2007). They would frequently identify aspects of film form and production that they argued undercut the impression for them, and would then proceed to suggest how an ad could have otherwise been made. This mode is interesting because it further underscores how formal aspects matter for informant evaluations of credibility, and that a key component of receptive rhetorical citizenship lies in knowledge and competency on formal aspects, which I call the receptive virtue of literacy. Furthermore, as I will elaborate in the closing discussion, this type of elaboration is a way of articulating preference, which is an important step in reflection on one's own preference and in extension one's own positions. First, I will describe how informants talked about film form and showcased reflexivity more explicitly.

5.4.3 Talk of film form

Before elaborating in detail, I would like to mention the high frequency at which informants talked about aspects of production and film form. Informants for the most part showed a keen eye for various filmic devices, and regularly touched upon aspects of cinematography, editing, acting, clothing, props, special effects, sound and music. For instance, an informant in the group of law students would talk about her impression of the 2015 Conservative Party ad in the following way:

W2: Aesthetically, I think the first part was much cooler. The way it was filmed and the scenography and such. I found that to be a new angle.

(Law)

The most prominent reference in this regard was talk about special effects, prompted by the Centre Party's use of superimposed hashtags, as well as The Christian Democrats' use of techniques such as lens flares and blatant green screens in order to create an over-the-top ad aesthetic. Many also noted the Labour Party's use of animation in their 2015 film.

Most of the comments towards film form were descriptive and connected to individual preference. Concentrating more on aspects of talk about film form that signified something beyond immediate preference, I found two aspects to be particularly interesting. These were the informant's notion of 'production value', and their explicit talk about the relation of film form to the concept of credibility. What I call 'production value' was a recurring notion of ads being 'badly made' or 'well made', to use the informants' own terms. This notion of production value is not objectively tied to the perceived costs of an ad – expensive cameras or a skillful post-production, although those are indeed also aspects informants call attention to when talking about production value. Rather, the notion seems to be tied to a type of 'perceived professionalism' in terms of how an ad is made. For the most part, it is a concept that is invoked negatively. It is brought up for the most part when something is 'badly made':

MHI: What do you think of this one?

[Informants laugh]

W4: I think it is really badly made.

M1: I agree with you on that. Incredibly badly made.

MHI: Yes?

M1: In addition to, he has gotten a haircut, in some of the clips, I mean, the hair. It is not even made on the same day.

(Dancers)

Here, we see informants making some general statements on production value, before informant M1 more specifically addresses the question of continuity of space and time, which he perceived the ad to be in breach of. Often, the notion of ‘badly made’ is connected to a lack of professionalism. For instance, an informant in the group of teachers stated that “I get the impression that my pupils could have done this. I mean, it is very simple” (W1, Teachers). Turning to the pupils at the same school, they stated that they could have done it better:

W6: It looked like something we could have made.

W7: Yes.

(...)

W6: It was very simple and very simple. Or, everything was simple. We could have made the same

W7: We could have made a better one.

W6: A better one.

(Pupils)

The reference to pupils, both among the teachers and the pupils themselves, suggests producers that are not full professionals that are still in training. Formulations stating that it looked like an ad was made by someone who did not quite know what they were doing, were recurring for some ads, like the 2013 Christian Democrat and Centre Party ad. In some instances, informants would say that an ad reminded them of ads aired on holidays when only ideal organizations are allowed to air ads. Both the left leaning voters and the mechanics mentioned these types of ads and their style when discussing the Centre Party ad. Other words informants used to describe a perceived low

production value was “low budget” (M2, Private business school; M2, Art students), “cheaply produced” (M1, Law), “cheap production” (M3, Elite business school), “tacky production” (M2, Elite business school), “a lot of money for little” (W4, Law in connection with the fundraising of the Red Party), “really poorly produced” (M1, Elite business school), “badly made” (M1, Social sciences). When asked how they would make the ads differently, informants would state things such as “spend more money, or not necessarily... just to be creative in a way that does not make it awkward for people to watch” (W1, Law).

While most comments were essentially negative, some comments made remarks indicated that they appreciated a ‘low production value’. Commenting on the Red Party ad, one informant used the word “unpretentious” (W3, Law). An informant in the group of political science students remarked that the Labour Party ad of 2015 was “simple”, in a positive manner, and went on to explain that the “plain and simple look” suited political parties on the left (W2, Social sciences). The nurses appreciated the plain look of The Red Party ad, stating that it was “simple, easy to fathom (...) no glamour, very simple, down to earth” (M1, Nurses). Another informant stated that she liked that there was no unnecessary mucking about in the movie – she found it straight to the point (W3, Nurses). The art students appreciated the perceived low production value of the 2015 Christian Democrat ad, stating that it was “really fun, they have dared to take it further” (M1, Art students), including enthusiastic cheers of “lens flare! On everything!” (W1, Art students).

Lastly, a small amount of comments indicated pleasure in the way something was produced, in other words comments about a positive perception of production value. Informants would then use words such as “very well produced” (M1, Elite business school on Labour Party 2015). Such comments were rare in my material.

The main takeaway from this finding is the fact that informants both show a keen interest in and knowledge about aspects of media production, and they seem to carry some notion of ‘production value’, that they employ in their evaluation of the ads. This notion seems to be highly contingent on genre and genre expectations. When viewing ads that are presented in the language of factual formats, reminiscent of

documentary or broadcast journalism, informants appear to demand a higher degree of ‘perceived professionalism’ than other genres.

The second aspect that stood out in analysis was how informants would at times connect film form to the concept of credibility. This would occur both implicitly – through informants stating that they could not really believe Hareide, since he wore a sport coat on the soccer field (W2, Dancers) – or through a general notion of a film being “artificial” (M1, Right leaning on *Hareide explains*):

“I actually think it’s not credible. I think it seems very fake. It’s probably to do with location, but everything seems very staged and very perfect all the time”

(W1, Right leaning).

There were also concrete reflections on the connection between film form and credibility:

M2: It says something very interesting about the credibility of the films, and possibly also the party, when we kind of... when the expression becomes so important that it has to look well made for us to take it seriously.

(Teachers)

While not present in all groups, these types of responses were present and frequent enough (they occurred in 11 of 16 groups) to warrant mention and closer scrutiny.

Summing up, informants were both quick to address, and seemingly quite knowledgeable about film formal aspects when talking about the ads. This is an indication of the receptive virtue of literacy. Most groups had a ready vocabulary for dealing with film form, and would frequently use film form as an argument in their evaluations of ads. Seemingly, the informants operated with an ideal of ‘production value’ or a type of ‘perceived professionalism’ in the making of the media message that many of them deemed important. Furthermore, informants would further articulate this link by at times explicating and talking about the connection between film form and credibility.

The type of meta-reflection that I have shown in informants’ explicit treatment of film form and their articulations of how film form relates to credibility, is a

demonstration of how the ads are being employed as resource, and the types of cues and aspects that informants are looking for when they are to make their evaluation. This is interesting because it is an indication of the receptive virtue of literacy. Communicative competency can be said to be crucial for (rhetorical) citizens: the ability to deconstruct media messages, to treat messages as construction, and to articulate their own experience and preference in facing the ads. Such articulation is necessary for self-reflexivity. This type of reflexivity did not only occur in terms of a behavior of deconstruction and examining the nuts and bolts of ads, but at times also extended to the receptive norm of openness, in informant reflection around their own and other people's audience position. This brings me to my last observation, namely the type of audience reflexivity I at times found my informants to be engaging in.

5.4.4 Informant reflexivity

Informants displayed reflexive behavior in ways that can be said to be both beneficial and possibly detrimental when viewed through the lens of citizenship. When engaging in the former, informants showed a willingness to speculate in other audience positions, reflection around their own position and habitus, and last but not least a willingness to question their own audience position, and to question their own preferences. This type of stance is indicative of enactment of citizenship, because it is indicative of the virtue of openness. At times, informants also showed a type of concern for other groups, an orientation that goes beyond immediate self-interest, and towards the receptive virtue of inclusiveness. This type of questioning points to an acceptance of other audience groups, the preferences of other people, which is indicative of a type of concern for a wider political community, a key aspect of a civic culture (Dahlgren, 2002), or typically signifying a citizen orientation (Schudson, 2006). When engaging in the latter, informants would speculate on the rhetorical power and effects on ads on a generalized third person (Davison, 1983) that they imagined would be susceptible to manipulation and easily fooled. These types of third person perceptions reflect a type of stereotype that is widely documented by research on persuasive communication. It is potentially detrimental to a citizen-mode of engagement, because it in part underestimates other unknown audience members, not

believing they have the same competencies as themselves. Rather than speculating in concrete groups of people with good will, the third person perceptions rather plays into speculation on generalized ignorant others, assuming that they are lesser in terms of communicative competence. Here, it is important to mention that who is correct or not in terms of who are actually manipulated or who reads an ad more or less critically are empirical questions beyond the scope of this thesis. My main aim in highlighting this type of talk is rather to display a certain orientation that informants showcased at different times in reception.

Turning to the first type of informant reflexivity, this could take the shape of a willingness to step beyond one's initial reaction or position, as one of the informants in the group of dancers did, when she stated that "I'm trying with all my heart not to be critical" (W3, Dancers) when she was going to comment on the 2013 Conservative Party ad, and ad for a party that she did not at all think highly of. The other informants did not particularly like that ad either, but at one point, informant W1 starts taking another position, in which she reads the message more sympathetically, which prompted the following exchange:

M1: Do we like it now, all of a sudden?

W4: No, no, I'm trying to view it differently.

W1: Objectively.

M1: Yes, yes, of course.

(Dancers)

The example above shows an informant questioning and experimenting with her own position. One of the business students, after having been critical to all the ads, stated: "But I'm starting to wonder what actually appeals to me, now" (M1, Private business school). Informants would at times also question and interrogate each other's interpretations and the possible reasons for their readings, such as asking: "Are you saying this because of the ad, or because you know this beforehand?" (W2, Dancers). One particularly memorable interrogation occurred in the group of ship mechanics. One of the informants had a strong reaction to the Christian Democrat ad, and

enthusiastically talked about how much he disliked the mix of politics and religion, stating that “it pisses me off”. One of the other informants then intervened, stating:

M3: He did not really show any Christian tradition in here, did he? One could not really tell whether it was a Christian party from the ad

M2: But he said it two hundred times

M3: But there was no religion in the ad?

M²: No, but when you say Christian

M3: Since we’re talking about just the film

M2: No, but CDP, that’s what they stand for?

M3: Yeah, yeah, but he did not show it, there was no church in the ad, there just wasn’t

M2: Probably some hidden crosses

[laugh]

M3: If you wind it backwards you hear

M5: JEEEEESUS

M7: We can’t keep our previous prejudices out of our evaluation of the ad!

(Mechanics)

Here, after M2 has been pressed by his peer on why he read the ad the way he did, M7’s comment sums up the exchange. What is interesting here, is the apparent negotiation between fixed positions, and the arguments mobilized in order to support it. M2 read the ad in a neutralizing (Ross, 2011) manner, instantly rejecting anything that had the Christian Democrats as a sponsor. M3 did not accept his argumentation, and started questioning his reasons for reacting the way he did. As a group, the mechanics here explicated and in part investigated M2’s reaction. Later, M2 would return to his adamant position, but this time referring back to his own prejudice as a reason for his arguments rather than the text he had been presented with. While this is not necessarily indicative of self-reflexivity, it at least indicates a form of awareness of one’s own positions and preferences, or reasons for reacting in a particular manner.

At other moments, informants would turn the focus on themselves more literally, using their own self-reflexions in order to imagine other possibilities. One example comes from the group of teachers. After interpreting an ad, they started talking about why they had interpreted it that way:

M2: We have interpreted this through the lens of the critical middle class.

M3: I'm upper class.

M2: You're upper class. I would think that other people read this in totally different ways. Like for instance religious mother-in-laws

(Teachers)

The group of teachers had several of these moments, which is perhaps not so surprising considering their training. Responding to a colleague talking about how constructed and fake something looked, one informant interjected: "Are we seeing this because we are trained to?" (M2, Teachers). Informants then went on to discuss how they laughed at the ad – whether it was the type of laughter associated with home videos of kids falling over, connoting "they want to, but they fail" (M1) or the type of laughter associated with a camp type of viewing, such as when watching the Eurovision Song Context (M2).

Informants would frequently speculate in other audience positions, either through articulating who they thought this ad would appeal to, or experimenting with other audience positions themselves. Commenting on the 2013 Christian Democrat ad, one informant in the group of dancers stated that even though he himself did not particularly like the ad, he thought it could work well for someone else:

M2: Yeah, elderly and families who don't like stress, in a way, because he is very calm, it's not so quick paced this film, there is not much going on, the music is very calm, and then people could get a little like, ok, I have to fix this and this with the family, and okay

(Dancers)

Here, the informant is in part taking the position of someone else, attempting to empathize with other people's experience of the world, and other people's needs. Informants would frequently imagine an intended audience in a neutral or positive

manner. However, informants also partook in suspicion and disbelief in their fellow citizens. At times, they gave responses that can be said to be indicative of a distrust of a generalized type of other. Often, this would manifest itself through a fear for political ads' manipulative potential (potentially manipulative on other people). Frequently, informants would verbalize a fear of their fellow citizens voting based on trivial reasoning. What runs throughout these types of answers is a notion of third person perceptions: the belief that people outside one's immediate surroundings are somehow less critical, and more susceptible to manipulation than the people close to oneself. Talking about the 2013 Conservative Party ad *Pilots*, one of the dancers formulates this stance in the following way when asked who she thought the ad appealed to:

W3: People who ain't got that much up in their heads.

MHI: What makes you say that?

W3: Those who find it funny, and think it hits the spot, I think it will fit for those who vote for the Conservatives

W1: Ladies from [upscale local area]

M2: Ladies from [upscale local area].

W1: I think it would fit for ladies from [upscale local area].

(Dancers)

When speaking about the ladies from the local posh, upscale residential area, it was apparent in the interview that they marked their distance to these ladies, and that they talked about them in a condescending way. Here, the informants are implicitly constructing a straw man of the political partisans that do not share their views, namely that they are rich, posh, and possibly stupid. The notion of lesser intelligence also resonated among the group of mechanics, who were more politically diverse with a slight conservative leaning. For them, the third persons were not rich ladies, but rather appeared to be connected to a working class identity, or a lack of education. Talking about *Taxi Stoltenberg*, they remarked:

M8: A lot of people probably buy it, but it does not work for me.

MHI: Who buys it then?

M8: I better watch my mouth here

M9: Taxi drivers buy it.

M8: I'm thinking, people that are a little simple. They might buy it.

(Mechanics)

These types of negative audience conceptions occurred frequently (although much less frequent than positive audience conceptions). When engaging in such a mode, many informants seemed to conjure up an image of the third person as a person that is fundamentally unengaged and thus prone to vote for totally trivial reasons. Consider the following quote from one of the business students speculating on possible audiences for the 2015 Christian Democrat ad:

M2: I'm trying to think target group, who they are aiming at with this ad. Many people are stay-at-home-voters and don't vote for anything. And it is quick for them to vote for something like this, because then they get what they want kind of. They don't care about anything in politics, they are thinking: Sunday open, that's okay, better than nothing.

(Private business school)

Interestingly, the informant seems to think that this third person is engaged enough to vote, but seemingly without any clear preference or reflection around the matter. However, the existence of this mental group leads several informants to worry over them, especially when talking about the genre of political ads and their potential for strong effects or even manipulation. One informant, talking about ads in general and the ban on television stated that it would be best to keep the ban, fearing "misuse", and elaborates on why:

It's just wrong, one does not get at the essence, and one does not get the entire picture if one is to decide who to vote for based on advertising (...) it could be good to engage more people, but at what costs?

(W4, Law)

Here, the informant is negative to political ads because they may indeed fool these gullible people she is imagining. This notion is recurring among informants, and political ads are at times described as dangerous. One of the art students elaborates on the problem, and on her own conceptions of the third person trivial voter:

W1: A lot of people vote because they have seen one argument from one party about something. For instance, I am quite provoked when I hear people say things like that they've never examined the ideology of a party, they just go for single issues, like, when I was younger I heard someone say they they would vote Conservative because that would make the booze cheaper.

(...)

It's stupid if people don't examine the connections and understand the ideology behind it (...) there is a balance people are not considering (...) many people vote by chance, or perhaps because they happen to be close to a space where they can vote, and they remember that one issue. I think more knowledge is better, at the same time as getting people's attention is difficult.

(Art students)

In her closing sentence, we recognize the same dilemma as the student of law above – engagement is important, but through packaging politics in entertaining formats, one risks voting based on trivialities. Not for oneself, or one's friends – but the third person voter, who is unengaged and prone to such irrational decisions. The trivial voter seemed to have a high degree of presence as an idea among my informants. Addressing the attack in the 2015 Labour Party ad, the group of business students were annoyed at the lack of macro explanations. One informant then went on to state that "(...) People are sitting there who might not have that much of a clue and they see it, and think oh, it's their [The Conservative Party] fault, ok. And not the oil (W2, Elite business school). Another informant in the same group stated that he experienced the intention of political ads and "the entire political media show" (M2, Elite business school) was to persuade as many voters as possible, and to "(...) engage people who don't really have a clue, or don't care" (M2), to which a last respondent replied that an ad of this kind could easily bring home people that are a little naïve, and that they would think along the lines of "Oh, this was a nice ad, this seems nice, but then let's vote for the Labour Party!" (W1, Elite business school).

Other indications of such third people perceptions occurred when informants would suggest that other people vote based on trivial reasoning. For instance, one informant stated that the 2015 Conservative Party ad was entertaining and cool, which probably would attract "some voters" (W1, Social sciences on Conservative Party, 2015). Addressing the same ad, one of the informants (W1) in the group of nurse

students stated that employing humor in this manner was a clever trick, and that it could shift people's votes, because they vote for trivial reasons. When probing for who behaves in this manner, the informant suggested people without interest in politics, without a clue about politics and also those without much experience with politics – the new voters. Later in the focus group, other informants also voiced their worry about “people voting for the wrong reasons” (W2, Nurses).

Interestingly, most informants seemed to be talking from a position in which they felt politically efficacious when invoking the third person perceptions, with one key exception. Talking about the Centre Party ad of 2013, the hairdressers were left confused. One informant stated that the ad would perhaps work on “some clever people that understand it” (W1, Hairdressers), followed by her colleague excusing herself by stating that “These answers are not very good” (W4, Hairdressers). All the other informant groups that did not understand the Centre Party ad blamed the ad and the ad makers, whereas the hairdressers appeared to blame themselves. This resonates with the indicators I have mentioned elsewhere, of that the hairdressers had a low political self-esteem or efficacy. They did not think the political ads were meant for them.

Summing up, informants oriented themselves towards the receptive norm of openness through displaying numerous instances of reflexivity. This type of reflection took many forms, but most markedly appeared as a willingness to identify and question one's own position, and a willingness to step beyond one's own position – either into a perceived “objective” mode, or into an imagined audience group. Informants both had positive conception of other audiences' possible readings, as well as negative conceptions. In the latter case, informants displayed viewpoints that resonate well with the literature on the “third person” in media effects research (Davison, 1983), in which one assumes that persuasive communication influences others more than oneself. When doing so, informants would often imagine stupid people without education, or show a type of fear for voters that vote for the wrong reasons. I now turn to a discussion of what this type of reflexivity, as well as the other

findings I have presented in this chapter, might entail for political ads understood as resource, and for informants possible enactment of receptive rhetorical citizenship.

5.4.5 Discussion

A distinct pattern of reception emerged during analysis. While watching, some informants would fixate on an aspect of an ad – and then go into a highly critical, rejecting mode. At times, this would be followed by a diagnosing (identifying what ‘went wrong’ for them) and constructive (suggesting how the ad makers could have gone about differently) mode. I found two such triggers for rejection. Both operate on an interpersonal and a presentational level: they can be directed at the politician present on screen, or at the media text as construction. The *aptum breach* occurs when an informant implicitly or explicitly states that something is unfitting – be it at the interpersonal level, through norm violation or behavior that is not concurrent with the presented party’s ethos, or at the level of language – internally (how do various elements of a text fit together) or externally (how does the totality of a text relate to an audience, a situation, et cetera). The *authenticity breach* occurs when an informant implicitly or explicitly does not believe what she is experiencing. This can also operate at the interpersonal level (I don’t believe the person I am watching is sincere, for instance) and at the level of media texts (I don’t think this text is giving an undistorted presentation of reality).

It is important to mention that breaching moments did not happen in all groups, or all the time, but they were events of reception that stood out, and therefore deserve some attention on their own. Because these breaching moments are intimately connected to how voters exercise their practical judgement in terms of deeming who and what is to be trusted, they should be of high relevance to the study of political rhetoric. They are also interesting because they conceptually concern both media text (well grasped by communication science) and personal ethos (well grasped by rhetorical studies), and how these two aspects interact.

Furthermore, I found informants to be highly willing to talk about aspects of film form, an aspect they appeared to have a ready vocabulary for. When engaged in this talk, informants seemed to have some notion of ‘production value’ that mattered a great deal to how they evaluated ads in terms of credibility. Intimately connected to film form, this notion seemed to imply a certain look of a media text that was ‘well made’ or that looked professional, as opposed to something that looked like it was made without competency or care, or even looked like it was made by amateurs. I also at times found informants to articulate and talk about the connection between film form and credibility more explicitly. Lastly, I found informants to display a type of audience meta-reflection, in which they talked about their own positions, their own views, or their own habitus, attempting to articulate why they meant what they meant, and why they evaluated an ad as they did. Informants would also speculate in other audience positions than their own, either a perceived “objective” stance, or through speculating in more concrete audience groups. Here, informants were both neutral and positive to their imagined others, as well as suspicious. In the former case, informants would show good will towards other groups, and seemingly empathize with why someone would like a type of ad they themselves did not prefer. In the latter case, informants tended to worry that their imagined others would be manipulated or fooled by an ad, since they believed them to be susceptible to such manipulation, as well as prone to vote for less-than-ideal reasons.

I argue that the two breaching moments show how film form (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004), initial ethos (McCroskey, 2001) and content intermingle and are employed by informants to varying degrees when navigating the ads. The reason these moments are particularly interesting is because they provide an entry point to understand more fine-grained aspects of how political ads actually function as resource, and what elements of the political ads should be studied further by future studies. I found interpersonal norms and aspects of production to matter greatly, alongside aspects of content and arguments presented. Granted, it is within the present project difficult to state what aspect is the most important, or precisely describe why informants verbalize their experiences this way. On the one hand, informants could be actively using these aspects in their practical judgement, either as heuristic cues

(Chaiken, 1980) or information shortcuts (Christiano, 2015; McDermott, 2005; Popkin, 1995), for instance using authenticity and aptum as short cuts to determine their own stance towards a politician. On the other hand, informants could be articulating their preformed opinions about certain political parties and politicians, using for instance aspects of film form as a type of argument supporting their preset position, in a type of post-rationalization. However, what the breaching moments bring to the foreground is the key importance of including notions of form in our understanding of rhetorical citizenship. My results indicate that competence and knowledge about form are essential for the enactment of rhetorical citizenship. Seemingly, important facets of credibility are located in, and negotiated through, precisely the interrelation between a transparent access to politician's interpersonal qualities, and a mediated access to matters of presentation and film language. That form and content are related, indeed inseparable, is a key insight from rhetoric, and has been demonstrated through a plethora of studies from reception research in media studies. However, further ventures into how people navigate form and content in political rhetoric as rhetorical citizens is a promising avenue of research. The notion of production value as an evaluative concept at work among citizens, is a case in point. What kind of video style appeals to whom, and when?

I found informants to be engaging in a diagnosing-constructive mode, to be talking extensively about film form, and to show displays of reflexivity. Granted, my choice of method and the interview situation could have produced or prompted many of the results I have presented above. For instance, some informant groups were prompted at some point during the interview to talk about appeals, with questions such as "who could this work for". Despite this caveat, we cannot get away from the fact that not all responses were produced in this manner. Most informants leapt readily to the topic of formal aspects without being prompted – and if they were prompted, it was done in a very open manner, such as "why do you say that?" Concerning audience reflexivity and speculation on the position of others, these findings could be produced both by being prompted and through informants wanting to put their best foot forward, presenting themselves as good citizens, attempting to answer 'correctly' in front of the researcher. However, most responses signifying reflection on audience positions did

not occur after being asked "who could this work for", but rather at other points in the interview. Being prompted by situation and researcher may explain some answers, such as the highly critical ones meant to state that "this does not fool me, I see right through it". But it does not really take away the fact that the constructive-diagnosing mode is actually indicative of articulation of preference. As we have seen, such articulations of preference can be an important first step in questioning one's preference, or speculating in other people's preference, which in turn can be indicative of important facets of receptive rhetorical virtues important for rhetorical citizenship, such as inclusiveness and taking other people into account, or openness towards other views. Whether people would behave in such an ideal manner outside of the interview situation is another question. However, my aim in this thesis is not to empirically fixate what people are doing with ads, but rather to demonstrate potential: how ads *can* function as resource, and how people *can* enact a rhetorical type of citizenship.

Thus, I interpret the diagnosing-constructive mode, informants' extensive talk about film form, and their displays of reflexivity as traces of receptive rhetorical citizenship. I argue that such behavior is an indication of a receptive rhetorical virtue, namely that of literacy: the ability to deconstruct and assess a communicative message (Kock & Villadsen, 2012a, 2017), a type of media literacy (Aufderheide, 1993; Koltay, 2011; Livingstone, 2008) in action. Importantly, this does not mean that informants were *critical* at all times. For instance, one could question the much occurring preference of a high production value, when comparing it to the relative success of *Taxi Stoltenberg*, which intentionally showcased a low production value in order to gain an 'authentic' look. This grainy, pixelated and low-cost production perhaps did not call attention to itself because it matched with informants' expectation of genre. However, it does say something about how people navigate these ads. Because they are not instantly dismissed, because they are indeed in some way a resource, people are looking for cues, hints and traces within the ads to help them make sense of what they are watching.

An interesting moment between production and reception is the intentionally low production value of the 2015 Christian Democratic ad *Sunday open*. In particular,

the visual gag of the blatant (for the producers) green screen calls attention to itself. Most informants did not catch this joke. Indeed, many informants reported that this moment spoiled the ad for them. The art students, however, did catch it – and appreciated it, both in terms of the overdone production and the green screen specifically. The art students are trained in film language and formal aspects to a much higher degree than my other informants. This suggests that a type of sophistication factor, or nuances in media literacy, should guide further investigations if one wants to understand how different audiences negotiate credibility through their interaction with media texts.

The relation of film form to credibility and informants' emphasis on the importance of production value, are two main takeaways from this insight. In light of my overarching research question, I argue that these findings suggest a relatively high sophistication as far as film formal aspects are concerned – as informants for the most part were able to identify and talk about key components of film language, and to voice and discuss their own preferences. This is arguably a crucial component of rhetorical citizenship. As Kock & Villadsen state, citizens' critical engagement with public deliberation is a chief concern for the rhetorical citizen (Kock & Villadsen, 2012a, p. 5). In order to actually do this, communicative competence is crucial. This is also highlighted by Dahlgren, in his dimension of civic knowledge and abilities, which especially pertains to communication skills (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 21). Interpreting this as a need for media literacy – the ability to "(...) decode, evaluate, analyse and produce (...)" (Aufderheide, 1993) media messages – the type of film formal competence my informants show indicate that they have a vocabulary or a repertoire to manage such messages. It would seem that my informants showcase at least the ability for analysis and evaluation, indicating a type of "skilled interpretation" (Livingstone, 2004, p. 12). That said, what they use this repertoire for, and whether it amounts to ideological or political reflection around actual issues, is another matter. To paraphrase Morley (2006), audience activity does not mean power.

Regarding informant reflexivity, I argue that my informants at times enacted receptive rhetorical citizenship. They did this through showing an orientation towards

a willingness to speculate in other audience positions, reflecting on their own positions and their own habitus, and at times a willingness to *question* their own position. In some moments, informants also articulated and questioned their preferences. Importantly, this is not what informants were doing at all times., but it was still a salient mode in the analysis of reception. Similar to the finding in part 1, in which many informants took the communicative needs of others into account, the type of behavior discussed here leans more towards a type of empathy, in that informants were imagining other people's experiences. I interpret this behavior as an orientation towards the receptive rhetorical virtue of openness. I take it to be indicative of a civic affinity, a sense of belonging to the same societal entity, and the willingness to deal with each other despite differences (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 21). Moreover, I argue that informants are at times oriented towards a skill praised in the rhetorical tradition – the ability to view an issue from several angles. This type of ideal is present both in Cicero's *De oratore*, Quintilians *Institutia Oratoria*, and through the sophist ideal of the *Dissoi Logoi*, the ability to take the opposite position in any issue.

However, I did in some cases find that audiences had a rather negative conception of the imagined other, when they displayed classic third person perceptions: the belief that other people are more easily influenced by communication than themselves, and that these 'other people' often are lesser in terms of intelligence, education or similar aspects. It is unclear what prompts a speculation marked by good will, and the inverse, and why. Future studies should further investigate the link between different types of ads and audiences, and examine what prompts a speculation of good will versus a speculation of suspicion. It could very well be that this is dictated by partisanship. For instance, one could be prone to think lesser of 'the other side', politically. Such behavior is well documented in the US, but is probably messier in a multi party context in a consensus democracy.

Concluding, the breaching moments and the diagnosing mode first and foremost call attention to how some informants reacted in an adverse manner (viewing the situation from the perspective of producers) in the reception situation – when reception did not go as intended. However, such unexpected turns highlight a central aspect. I

argue that these moments show how informants are clearly using political ads as a resource for negotiating the credibility or ethos of a political party, or an individual politician, and that aspects of film form are crucial in their doing so. As such, political ads can function as a resource for citizenship by providing a contact point in which dimensions such as ethos and credibility are negotiated. Political ads are one type of input, or argument, that citizens can engage with and navigate when they are making sense of their political preferences.

In the reception situation that I produced, informants also showed a ready vocabulary for managing film form, as well as a tendency to articulate, reflect and speculate on their own preferences and the preferences of others. Thus, they oriented towards the receptive virtues of inclusiveness, openness and literacy. Though prompted by the interview situation, this type of behavior signifies how political ads furthermore can function as a resource by being conducive of a type of discussion and talk that enables the enactment of rhetorical citizenship through experimenting with other people's positions, articulation of one's own preferences in terms of politics, political parties and political leaders, and quite possibly reflexivity and questioning around one's own positions. This type of questioning stands in contrast to a type of taken-for-grantedness that could very well have become the outcome of the focus group interviews. People might have articulated their like or dislike of an ad or a political party, and swiftly moved on. As such, this type of behavior points towards an openness that is an important part of the reciprocity of respectful and good political talk or civic discussion. It points towards an attitude that is willing to engage with other people's positions, and it is dialogic in the sense that one's own position is not fully fixed.

I will return to this discussion in the part to which I now turn. It is the fourth and final part of the thesis, and contains the summary and discussion of the findings I have presented.

Part IV: Summary and discussion

5.0 Summary and Discussion

I have now examined the producers' thoughts and salient aspects in the ads, as well as themes sparked by the ads in the focus group interviews, including a look at informant answers from the angle of reception. We are now ready to revisit the research questions that have guided this thesis.

In the following, I summarize my understanding of the ads from production to reception. I turn to the insights and results I have produced throughout this research project in order to address my research questions. I then turn to address a selection of nuances, limitations and implications of my findings in a concluding discussion, before making suggestions for further research.

5.1 Research questions answered: Ads from production to reception

The research interest of this thesis was formulated in my overarching research question, formulated as *“How may Norwegian political advertising function as a resource for rhetorical citizenship?”*

In order to investigate this, I turned to people's reception of the ads. In order to better my grasp of people's reception, however, a look towards production and texts was warranted. RQ1a therefore was: *“How do political parties and advertising agencies intend for their ads to work, and what kind of rhetoric do they attempt to structure into the ads?”*. In order to supplement the production analysis and to gain a better understanding of what people actually were engaging with in the focus groups, RQ1b was: *“What salient aspects of argumentation and film style are present in the ads?”* I will now sum up the results from the production interviews, and look at how the ads performed in reception when compared to producer intentions, before moving to reception and RQ2.

At an overarching level, I found that the use of political ads from the perspective of producers was characterized by uncertainty. The genre itself was considered to be novel and not yet quite set. In terms of political ads as a potential resource for citizenship, producers conceptualized ads both as a powerful tool for persuasion and as a type of argument, depending on the situation. Personalized content was conceptualized more directly as a resource, as producers treated this type of content as a form of bridge between politicians and the people. I now turn to the eight films, summing up their production and reception, before moving into detail on the themes that the produced ads talk about.

Taxi Stoltenberg was **produced for the 2013 election by the Labour Party**, a large and resourceful political party in cooperation with an award-winning advertising agency. It was **intended** to reshape Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg's ethos from a bureaucratic technocrat to a man of the people, through showing the 'real' Stoltenberg, a man at ease in conversation among common people. **Salient qualities of the ad as text** were a *cinéma vérité*/candid camera style of production, and a heavy emphasis on human qualities at the expense of political issue information. Even though much of the explicit appeal of the ad is concerned with proximity and ordinariness, the ad also positions Stoltenberg as eminent and extraordinary through narration and choice of genre: he descends from the King's table to the streets, and a major premise for this type of candid camera production is that one does not expect a politician or celebrity to move so freely among the people. **In the focus groups**, the ad mainly generated talk about the balance between entertainment and issue information, as well as talk about ordinariness, authenticity and sociability. Most groups appreciated the ad at some level, with the clear exception of the group of senior citizens, who found both the film language and the content of the ad to be less than satisfactory. Among the other groups, most informants celebrated the ideal of the "ordinary authentic leader", whether they liked Stoltenberg or not. Those seemingly appreciating Stoltenberg's personality, were less reserved than for instance the group of right leaning voters and the mechanics, who appreciated the ad in a more strategic manner: they explicitly stated that the ad was well made and a very good idea, although they had their reservations about Stoltenberg and the Labour Party. For a noticeable amount of

informants, the negative press coverage manifested in reception, leading to an authenticity breach because several had a notion that they had read somewhere that actors had been employed or similar accounts.

Pilots was **produced for the 2011 election and disseminated again for the 2013 election** by a local division of the Conservative Party, a large and resourceful political party, in cooperation with an award-winning Hollywood professional working pro bono. The ad was **intended to** communicate a need for a change of government through metaphorically visualizing a stuck system through a fictitious dialogue between two pilots. **Salient qualities of the ad as text** were the soft-attack genre, in which a pure critique is presented with humor. While producers explicitly wanted to avoid overstatement, the text held the potential to be misunderstood through its implicitness. Furthermore, the lack of *probatio*-argumentation in combination with the ad's narrative left the potential for people perceiving the Conservative Party as rather powerless. **In the focus groups**, the ad generated a lot of talk about negativity and the balance between entertainment and issue information. The informants reacted quite differently to the ad's enthymeme. Informants with a high political interest, like the group of right leaning and left leaning voters, instantly caught the cues and references placed in the ad by producers, such as the reference to the Labour Party slogan. For other groups of informants, like the hairdressers, the mechanics and the pupils these cues were not apparent, and several informants stated that they thought they watched an ad about airlines until the very end. The negativity in the ad was also perceived differently across groups. The high-interest groups found the critique to be acceptable, even mild. Other informants were less certain. For instance, the group of teachers was split on their perception of the ad, but contained informants that expressed disappointment in the Conservative Party because they engaged in this form of communication.

Hareide explains was **produced for the 2013 election** by **The Christian Democrats**, a small party of low resources using in-house staff and a small production agency. **The ad was intended** to inform and argue about key political issues for the party, as well as to bring party leader Knut Arild Hareide closer to the people through

foregrounding his interpersonal skills and pleasant persona. **Salient qualities of the ad as text** are the choice of Hareide as protagonist and the people he at times interacts with as background or scenery. Furthermore, Hareide's wardrobe choice of the garb of the politician, the sport coat, throughout the film. The combined impression could lead to perceptions of Hareide as an intruder in a range of situations. The genre of film is a quite conventional type of journalistic documentary in which Hareide acts as a host. However, this type of format is not particularly well suited for getting close and personal with the politician, as he remains in the mode of presenter. **In the focus groups**, the ad generated discussion about the balance between entertainment and issue information, authenticity, ordinariness and sociability, and several reactions to what appeared to be breaches of interpersonal norms. Most groups did not appreciate the ad, with the clear exception of the group of senior citizens, who found it to be satisfactory both in terms of content and form. The main problems for most informant groups were perceptions of Hareide as in some way unnatural, or intruding upon the activities of others. In particular, feeding the baby of a family and playing soccer in formal wear were moments that triggered a clear language of rejection and ridicule.

Lifeforce in all of Norway and *#Elderlyresource* was produced **for the 2013 election** by the Centre Party, a small political party with limited resources. **The intention** of the films was to create awareness around the issues of elderly policy and transport. **Salient qualities of the ad as text** are a lack of narration, an excess of hashtags, the use of bare skin, and a type of film form and genre that is not typical for the realm of political advertising. **In the focus groups, the ads generated** a lot of talk about the balance between entertainment and issues, mainly through being perceived as presenting no political information in the views of informants. They also frequently prompted reactions indicating a type of norm violation in form of aptum breaches. Most groups appeared genuinely confused by the ads, at several levels. Some groups, the group of seniors and the group of mechanics, attempted to read the ad sympathetically and articulated readings that were at times reminiscent of producer intentions. Most groups did not, however. Rather, the common reaction and response was confusion and speculation on meaning and intention. The informants identified the

use of nudity in a political setting, as well as a perceived “low production value” as particularly problematic.

Our Norway: an exhibition in 92 seconds was **produced for the 2015 election** by the Labour Party, in cooperation with a large and award-winning advertising agency. **The ad was intended** to establish an overarching narrative of Norway heading in the wrong direction after the change in government. **Salient qualities of the ad as text** are the ad’s length, the presence of attack and critique, the amicable and proximate presentation of Jonas Gahr Støre, and that the ad’s narrative is framed in a way that overplays political agency, as the conservative government is being positioned to take the blame for factors such as the global fall in oil price. **In the focus groups**, the ad generated much talk about the balance between issue and entertainment information, negativity, ordinariness, authenticity and sociability. Even though the critique presented in the ad can be said to be mild, for instance compared to other political cultures, all informant groups noticed and remarked upon the political attacks that Støre makes in the ad. Contrary to producer explications, the constructive nature of the script was not what was emphasized by informants. Overall, the reception of the ad varied between groups. Some groups, like the elite and private business students, found the ad to be overplaying political agency, and found the cause-effect argument presented in the ad to be too simplifying. Other groups, such as the nurses and the humanities students, did not problematize this aspect. The art students were enthusiastic about the ad’s execution in terms of production.

Somewhere in Norway was **produced for the 2015 election** by the Conservative Party, who employed a mix of in-house resources and an independent filmmaker. **The ad was intended** to create a positive sentiment around Prime Minister Erna Solberg, through the use of humor. **Salient qualities of the ad as text** are a play on the popular perception of the Conservative Party as a party for the rich elite, an abrupt switch between a satirical beginning, with a maximalist style in terms of color and mise-en-scene, and a documentary-style ending. Notably, the narrative effectively cancels the notion of Solberg as all-powerful, but never explicitly cancels the presentation of her posh lifestyle. The ad is dissonant in terms of local politicians,

because it simultaneously foregrounds them by including them, and diminishes them through not presenting them properly – they are for instance never introduced by name. **In the focus groups**, the ad mainly generated talk about the balance between issue and entertainment, as well as authenticity, ordinariness and sociability. All informant groups noticed the abrupt switch between satire and documentary, and all informant groups reacted negatively to the switch, with regular comments stating that the ad should have stayed fully in the mode of satire. Furthermore, almost all informant groups were either confused by, or disapproving of, the initial mockery of stereotype. The sole exception was the group of art students, who appreciated the Conservative Party’s boldness. For the other informants, the initial presentation was perceived as something they could envision the conservatives doing, thus partly reinforcing the stereotype. Others found the ad to be condescending because it introduced a wildly magical scenario before explicitly stating that this is not really how the world works. Other informants reacted more to the documentary ending, with comments about how out of place the politicians seemed in a normal neighborhood. As in “*Hareide explains*” from 2013, clothing prompted such reactions, as Oslo Mayor Fabian Stang walks around with a knitted sweater around his neck for the duration of the ad.

Sunday open was produced for the 2015 election by the Christian Democrats, who employed in-house resources and cooperated with a small production agency. **The ad’s intention** was to establish that the Christian Democrats was a good option to vote for if one wanted stores to stay closed on Sunday. The ad was to achieve this goal through the use of humor. **Salient qualities of the ad as text are the use** of a purposively excessive commercial ad aesthetic and jokes made with film form, such as a blatant green screen moment. The pushy ad aesthetic is also contrasted with a harmonious nature at the end of the ad. **In the focus groups**, the ad produced talk about the balance between entertainment and issue information, in particular the use of humor and focusing on a single issue. It also produced a lot of talk about film form, and some talk about Hareide’s personality. All but one group (the art students) disliked the ad. The art students, on the other hand, loved it. As for the other groups, they did not appreciate the details that were meant as jokes – such as the conspicuous green

screen. In opposite reactions to the art students, these moments were not read as jokes, but as ‘bad production’. For some groups, the excessive ad aesthetic in the first part was not excessive enough, leading to lack of contrast between the two parts and in some instances confusion.

Vote for a challenger was **produced for the 2015 election** by the Red Party, a very small political party with very limited resources, who raised money through crowdsourcing and cooperated with an independent filmmaker sympathetic to the cause in order to produce the ad. **The ad was conceived as** a direct response to the party not being invited to the election debate on the Public Service Broadcaster, thus missing the opportunity to present the traditional closing appeal. Thus, the ad is made to look like one such appeal, and furthermore intended to make people vote for the Red Party by establishing them as a clear alternative to the entire political establishment. **Salient qualities of the ad as text** are the use of a stripped-down talking head format and an unassuming style. The verbal script of the ad is highly critical of other political parties and politicians, speculating on their motives and thus appealing to voter cynicism. A risk of coming across as impotent was present, due to the small size of the Red Party, thus reducing their power to alleviate the situation they describe. **In the focus groups**, the ad generated a lot of talk about negativity as well as authenticity, ordinariness and sociability. While all groups made note of and commented upon the negativity of the ad, the reception was mixed across groups. While some informants found the appeals enticing, others dismissed it out of cynicism, as party leader Bjørnar Moxnes was perceived to be playing precisely the game of all other politicians. Some informants also found Moxnes to be nagging, because the ad was made as a reaction to the Red Party not being invited to the election debates on the PSB. The film form of the ad was also met with mixed reactions: some found it to be fitting, whilst others found it to have a ‘low production value’, and were surprised that the Red Party did not get more value for their money considering the crowdfunding.

In general, the ads I examined were produced from different outsets, ranging from big budget productions with access to highly competent and expensive creative

personnel, to low-budget productions with serious constraints on time. An overarching finding in the material was that the use of political advertising was characterized by uncertainty among political parties and ad agencies. For the most part, this was a result of a perception among the producers of the ads as a novel format, combined with a low degree of professionalization. Consequently, producers were experimental or uncertain. Producers were at times very optimistic towards the genres potential for persuasion, but equally unsure about the degree of its efficiency. Some producers uttered indications of moral qualms when faced with what they perceived to be a powerful weapon, indicating that they were not willing to win an election at any cost.

The focus groups had differing opinions and interpretations of the ads. If attempting to draw a general lesson however, it would appear as some ads fared better than others. These were the ads that were ‘pure’ in terms of genre execution, combined with a focus on personalization. Ads that contained several concepts or ideas at once, such as twin goals of informing and displaying sociability, or both being humorous and serious, were not as successful. Informants appeared to favor contrast ads over pure advocacy or pure attack. Broadly speaking, informants appreciated entertaining ads, but did not appreciate ads that contained too much humor, when seen in proportion to the amount of issues presented. Ads purely attempting to entertain (such as *Taxi Stoltenberg*) fared better in that respect. Generally, it would appear as if the producers’ rather blurry conceptions of who their audiences are lead them to both overestimate and underestimate their viewers. Cues, devices and metaphors that are thought to be blatant are missed or misunderstood by some groups, while obvious to others. Advertisements that are thought to respect the interested at times bore them. Resources mattered, as the films that were generally well received were costly to produce. A notable exception is the Red Party ad, who managed to pull off an unassuming style with an extremely low budget.

A general impression is that producers’ uncertainty towards the genre as a whole manifested in several of the ads I have examined. As a consequence, the ads tended to overreach in terms of intention or ambition (*Hareide explains* and

Somewhere in Norway being two examples of this). Informants were sensitive to this uncertainty, and frequently discontent at the end result. The assumptions of producers were often a mismatch with the desires of the audience. For instance, producers appeared to be of the impression that humor is unconditionally a good device to employ. The audience most definitely disagreed with this notion, regularly wanting more seriousness and above else: more argumentation and information they would find useful. This observation leads me to the following sum-up of themes, of which the balance between informing and entertaining will be treated first.

5.2 Research questions answered: Themes of reception

In the reception study, I asked with RQ2a: *“How do citizens make meaning of and use the ads in their own arguing about politics”* and with RQ2b: *“In what ways do citizens enact a receptive rhetorical citizenship when faced with the ads?”*

Moving to the thematic analysis of the focus group discussions, I found four recurring and key themes that I have described and discussed in this thesis. These were a) experiences of political ads as a genre with a particular mix of informative and entertaining elements, which particularly manifests itself through ambivalence towards what is the correct balance between the two considerations, b) experiences of negativity, c) experiences of personalized content, which was by far the most dominant theme in my data material. Lastly, in d), I brought attention to moments of failure of authenticity and aptum, various mediated modes such as the constructive and diagnosing mode, as well as signs of communicative competence and informant reflexivity.

Theme 1 addressed informant experiences of an affordance of the genre of political ads – located in the intersection between speech and message - as it is known to combine issue information with entertaining devices. Theoretically, I approached this theme through conceptualizing it as touching upon the tension between informative and entertaining aspects of a communicative text, a tension that has been ever present in the rhetorical tradition, as well as in a range of fields of scholarly research. **In particular, informants talked much about** the relative amount of issue

information and entertaining elements within each ad, either through talking about issues, talking about image, or explicitly talking about the balance between the two considerations. The use of humor was a frequent conductive element for such conversations. Informants also thematized the balance between general arguments and concrete arguments, and the balance between arguing for a single issue versus several issues. **I found that** informants were deeply ambivalent to the ‘correct’ balance between image and issue content. It appeared as if informants don’t quite know what would be best or what they want. Ads that were low in issue content were perceived to be shallow but entertaining. Ads that are high in issue content were judged to be informative, but boring. Informants were not in agreement on the benefits of focusing on single issues, something some informants approved and others not. While a high number of issues could lead to reactions of disbelief, and the impression that the politician or party is promising too much, focus on a single issue was deemed way too narrow. Furthermore, informants articulated a preference for the concrete over the general. Discussions on the use of humor mostly mirrored the talk about the balance between entertainment and issue information. Some informants perceived humor to be unnecessary, improper and taking up space that could be used for important issues. Other informants perceived humor to be a good device for engaging the less politically interested. **At the level of my overarching research interest,** this theme demonstrates that political ads can function as resource for citizenship by sparking conversation of what political rhetoric should offer citizens in the intersection between the sometimes conflicting goals of informing and engaging. Informants were at times engaged in testing and articulating their ideas about what information and entertainment means for citizens. The receptive rhetorical virtues of connection, a willingness to be informed and connected to the polity, as well as the virtue of inclusiveness, a willingness to take other people’s communicative needs into account, manifested itself through this theme. Informants celebrated the ideal and importance of being informed. Informants were also critical towards an exaggerated focus on entertaining aspects, but still stated that entertainment was important to engage people, in particular the unengaged. Thus, they are orienting themselves towards the normative goal of maximum popular inclusion.

Examining this theme more closely has provided us with new knowledge on how people relate to a tension that is highly present in political ads, and indeed in a wide range of communicative texts that citizens relate to. In particular, further exploration of how people articulate their own needs and preferences in terms of the balance between information and entertainment should be given more attention in future studies.

Theme 2 addressed informant experiences of negativity and attack in political ads. Theoretically, I approached this subject matter through conceptualizing negativity as something inherently neutral, and potentially useful for democracy. This theme was mainly addressed in relation to the ads *containing* some form of attack, namely the 2013 Conservative Party film, as well as the 2015 Labour Party and Red Party films. **In particular, informants talked much about** the balance between problem presentation and the presentation of solutions, and made comments on negativity that were critical, neutral or appreciative in nature, and comments that were uncertain towards negativity, in which informants appeared to be negotiating whether a type of critique was warranted, appropriate or not. **I found that** informants, through articulating their preferences for a balance between presentations of problems and presentations of solutions, were attempting to discern between useful and non-useful negativity. Negativity on its own was perceived to be less useful than negativity paired with proposals for alternative plans of action. Importantly, informants did seem to appreciate and accept negativity, but not just any kind of negativity. The cultural topos of “putting one’s own house in order first” manifested itself, a highly present topos in a Norwegian context. Mindful of this, it would appear as if informants were articulating wishes for contrast ads (Jamieson, 2000) – containing both criticism and advocacy. In some cases, informants displayed reactions that indicate the adverse potential of negativity for citizen engagement, as they responded with comments indicating disillusionment, disenchantment or a lessened belief in the problem-solving potential of politics. **At the level of my overarching research interest,** this theme shows how political ads can function as a resource for citizenship by sparking conversation on communicative norms in general – for instance, when is it acceptable to go negative? Furthermore, negativity can act as a cognitive provocation that

prompts a problem-solving and information-seeking type of orientation. Wishes for following up problem definitions with concrete plans of action were frequent. In terms of virtues of receptive rhetorical citizenship, this is resonant with the receptive virtue of connection, a willingness to be informed and connected to the polity. Lastly, I found informants to be for the most part willing to accept a certain degree of critique and attack that are in line with rhetoric's emphasis on the productive and unavoidable nature of conflict. For some informants, however, negativity became an argument supporting their own orientation away from the political realm. Considering the rather soft nature of the ads in my material, this could be cause for some concern. In some instances, I speculated that informants judged negativity to be unacceptable because they employed interpersonal norms for conversation in their judgement, rather than norms of political discussion. Further exploring what types of repertoires in the intersection between public and private that people employ in their assessment of political rhetoric, should be a fruitful avenue of further research.

Examining this theme more closely has provided us with new knowledge about a much contested feature of political communication, namely negativity. In particular, how people talk about useful and non-useful negativity should be given further attention by research.

Theme 3 addressed informant experiences of ads with personalized content, both through ads featuring the presence of a party leader, and through concrete appeals attempting to bring a politician 'closer to the people'. Theoretically, I treated this theme as part of the literature on personalization of politics, stating that leader figures have been become more important both from the view of producers as well as for citizens evaluating political candidates. **The ads that sparked conversation** on this theme were all ads featuring a party leader: *Taxi Stoltenberg* and *Hareide explains* from 2013, and all the ads in the 2015 sample. Three key dimensions were highly at work in informant evaluations of the content: ordinariness, or an ability to come across as 'one of the people'; authenticity, or the ability to be perceived as a 'true individual'; and straddling these two, sociability, a 'human' type of charisma, or the ability to come across as a pleasant and likeable person. **I found that** coming across as "one of

the people” appeared to be a valued norm among my informants. This became even clearer when contrasting statements praising ordinariness with statements that showed disdain for aloofness. Informants celebrated the ideal of the proximate and human politician, in line with Norwegian egalitarian ideals. I argued that ordinariness in this respect serves as a cue for trust through reflecting a politician’s ability to understand what is important for the people, as well as *eunoia* – good will towards the audience. When talking about authenticity, informants praised what they perceived as spontaneous, and reacted negatively to performances that appeared staged or scripted. My findings resonated with Daloz’ conception of the relationship between proximity and eminence as a tension (Daloz, 2007, 2009), in the sense that informants seemed ambivalent to the ideals. Although praising ordinariness and proximity, too much of it produced adverse reactions. In the informant answers, I identified a particular ideal at work in the Norwegian context, that of the “authentic, ordinary leader”. This is the image of a politician who comes across as himself, but who enacts this self as a type of down-to-earth egalitarian folksiness combined with a toned-down, implicit eminence, resonating well with what Daloz has called “conspicuous modesty” (2007). It is an ideal that is paradoxical and contradictory, but still seemingly at work among my informants when they were to pass practical judgement on the candidates they were presented with. **At the level of my overarching research interest**, this theme shows how political ads can function as a resource for citizenship by sparking conversation on who the ‘good leader’ is, both concretely for ads as well as more general reflections. Importantly, this theme brought to the foreground the potential for political ads to function as a symbolic meeting point between citizens and politicians. The ads acted as a springboard for conversations on what kind of politician one would want as a leader, and a way to navigate and reflect on norms of political culture. As a resource, the ads provide a route towards engaging with political matters through personality. When doing so, they are calling upon and adhering to ideals that are context specific to the political culture they are experiencing. As such, this theme activates the receptive rhetorical virtues of connection to the polity, as well as providing a pathway to the articulation and questioning of generally held beliefs such as leadership ideals and problems of representation in a mass mediated democracy, signifying the virtue of

openness. Lastly, although informants would appreciate these ideals, they could also identify the ideals as constructions. They also showed a keen eye for self-presentation among politicians. This was indicative of the receptive virtue of literacy, the skill to pick apart and decode the rhetoric one is exposed to.

Examining this theme more closely have provided us with an entry point into a more nuanced understanding of how citizens actually evaluate the politicians they are presented with through mediated encounters, and the ideals and concepts they activate when doing so. In particular, we have gained a more detailed and rich understanding of how concepts like sociability, ordinariness and authenticity are at work in everyday evaluations of politicians. Future studies should further explore how people use such concepts as a type of “information shortcuts” (Popkin, 1995) in order to pass judgement on credibility and trustworthiness.

Theme 4 consisted of results from a view of the focus groups from the perspective of reception. Here, I turned my attention away from the thematic content of informant statements, and towards how informants were speaking, guided by reception research and audience studies. Turning to the literature on the various “modes of reception” (Michelle, 2007) that informants typically commute (Schröder, 2000) between, **I found** two “breaching moments”, instances in which the commuting informant would be grounded temporarily in a mediated mode of reading. The first of these two was *aptum breaches* – moments when informants reacted to either a perceived norm violation or something that did not fit in terms of film form or language. The second was *authenticity breaches* – moments when informants’ suspension of disbelief broke down because of perceptions of fakery, external knowledge dissonant with the presentation in the ad, something amiss in film form, or a breakdown in initial ethos through a strong dislike of a politician or a party, a so called “neutralization” (Ross, 2011). These breaching moments were often followed by a highly critical mode. Some informants went into a cynical reading, talking about manipulation and other elements indicating a low trust in politicians, whilst other informants continued to engage with the material through what I propose to call a diagnosing and constructive mode of reading, a mediated mode in which informants

would attempt to articulate what they experienced as ‘wrong’ with an ad. I found informants to be talking extensively with what at times is an impressive vocabulary of film formal aspects in their evaluations of ads, as well as moments of explicit informant reflexivity. **At the level of my overarching research interest**, this theme shows how political ads can function as a resource for citizenship through showing how citizens draw on content to judge form, and form to judge content, when experiencing the ads. The ads, to a certain degree, prompt informants to articulate and question their own preferences, as well as occasionally spark audience reflection on behalf of their own positions and the positions of other people. As such, exploring this meta theme has shown how citizens orient themselves towards the receptive rhetorical virtues of inclusiveness through a willingness to take others into account and openness, through being open to and experimenting with other views, as well as the virtue of literacy through display of communicative skills. Informants for the most part had a ready vocabulary to dissect and evaluate form.

Examining this theme more closely has provided us with the two concepts of aptum breach and authenticity breach, which should be useful for those interested in how people go about in evaluating political rhetoric and what types of ideals and norms they call upon when they do so. Undoubtedly, there are other breaching moments to be found, if one investigates other genres of political rhetoric, or other types of advertisements. This is a promising avenue of future studies. Moreover, examining this theme has given us a more detailed and in-field glimpse of what people enacting a receptive rhetorical citizenship can look like. Importantly, I have only examined four select virtues in this thesis. Future studies should explore a broader range of receptive virtues, and in which types of situations they come into play.

5.3 Contribution of thesis

This thesis set out to contribute empirically by examining the receptive dimensions of rhetorical citizenship. The thesis set out to contribute theoretically and

conceptually through combining rhetoric and reception research, and by formulating key virtues of what could constitute receptive rhetorical citizenship.

Empirically, this thesis has contributed with new knowledge on how citizens feel about what political rhetoric is supposed to provide, their thoughts and articulations of communicative norms, and their thoughts on ‘the good leader’. Moreover, we have seen how the genre of political ads can spark a receptive rhetorical citizenship at two levels. First, by enabling conversations on the themes mentioned above, and second through the types of orientations they display in their talk. In this thesis, I have explored how citizens related to four proposed virtues of receptive rhetorical citizenship: inclusiveness: a willingness to take other people into account; Openness: towards other views than one’s own; Connection: a willingness to be informed and connected; and literacy: the communicative skills to articulate one’s preferences and experiences as well as skills to interpret and assess the political rhetoric one is exposed to.

This exploration has provided crucial nuance to a field that has been dominated by quantitative studies, precisely lacking in the type of qualitative detail that my thesis provides. At the level of themes, we have gained valuable insights that further inform our understanding of how people relate to political rhetoric and political ads. For instance, we have learnt more about how citizens relate to major trends of political communication and political advertising that has been extensively explored from a quantitative perspective and often at the level of contents and effects.

We have learnt that people are ambivalent to political ads as a genre, through their mix of entertaining and informative elements. We have in part confirmed suspicions that the line between issue ads and image ads is indeed blurred (Kaid, 2004), because the two aspects are impossible to discern in reception. People can’t watch an image ad without thinking about information, and vice versa.

We have learnt something about how people perceive the much-contested category of “negative ads”, or ads containing some sort of attack or critique. Here, we saw that informants for the most part accepted, in some instances even wanted,

negativity. Importantly, we have learnt something about the distinction between useful and non-useful negativity.

We have learnt something about how people use personality as a route to judgement about candidates and other political matters when watching ads. Importantly, we have seen that elements of personalization – ordinariness, authenticity and sociability – are ideals that are highly at work. Thus, we have been able to add nuance to the nuts and bolts of concrete practical judgements of ethos.

We have also learnt something about how people concretely draw upon form to judge content and vice versa, as well as what kind of receptive rhetorical citizenship that is enacted when people are exposed to political rhetoric in the form of political ads.

In the production interviews, we found that the Norwegian political ad understood as a rhetorical practice, still was in a state of immaturity, produced in an environment with a relatively low degree of professionalization when compared to for instance an American context. Producers were uncertain of how and when to use political ads, which they perceived as a new tool. The producers were not quite clear on audience conceptions, as they conceptualized a split audience member. At times stating awareness of people's autonomy and ability to think for themselves, indicating a voter-citizen, and at times very instrumental in their understanding of how their ads work, indicating a voter-consumer. Personalized content, however, was conceptualized in a way that suggested a type of bridge between the political elite and the people. In this line of thinking, political ads are a tool for maintaining a personal bond between politicians and citizens.

At the level of reception, it would appear that political ads, in my examination, functioned as a resource for citizenship at two levels. First, through sparking engagement in and conversations around themes that informants identified in the ads, such as the mix between entertainment and information, negativity and personality. Second, through informants orientations towards a greater polity, found in their explicit thematizations mentioned above. In people's orientations, I found clear

suggestions of enactments of a receptive rhetorical citizenship through the four virtues I have explicated previously.

5.4 Limitations, implications and future research

I now turn to the last bit of this thesis, in which I would like to discuss three key points related to my findings, and the avenues of future research that they point towards. First, I comment upon some of the nuances between informant groups. Second, I discuss some of the dissonant cases indicating the opposite of my main claim, that ads have the potential to spark a receptive rhetorical citizenship. Third, I discuss what kind of medium for rhetorical citizenship the ads I have examined actually are. I argue that they seem to produce more talk about presentation and personality than talk about concrete, substantive issues.

5.4.1 Nuances of informant groups

It was my intention in the research design to gather a wide group of readings, and focus on the themes that were shared across groups. While the groups shared the broad four topics I have presented in this thesis, there were also interesting and noticeable differences in decoding from group to group. I take these nuances to be manifestations of socio-cultural differences between the groups. Informants studying economics would employ models of macro-economics in order to understand a political issue. Dancers are more attuned to comment upon body language, and the language of performance and theatre comes more easily to them. People intimate with the political world are more often in a strategic and tactical mode. People with different backgrounds and interests will have different interpretative repertoires to access. I have attempted to call attention to the differences in reaction in the individual chapters above. However, when viewing the material in total, three groups stand out from the rest, for different reasons. These are the group of hairdressers, the group of seniors, and the group of art students.

I have already discussed the hairdressers in the methods chapter of thesis, but we recall that this group spoke less and about fewer topics than all the other groups. To give a sense of range, the group of hairdressers had 98 references across 33 sub-topics. At the other end of the spectrum we find the teachers, with 454 references across 56 sub-topics. As I have detailed in chapter 4, much of this was due to a problematic interview situation. However, I also claim that the hairdressers had a low political self-esteem, a low efficacy, as they did not seem to think that political ads were for them, but rather for “someone smarter”, to use their own words. This observation has a parallel in the research on news avoidance (Blekesaune et al., 2010; van den Bulck, 2006) and public (dis)connection (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2016; Hovden & Moe, 2017). Further pursuing how people with a low orientation towards political affairs relate to the political rhetoric they are exposed to, is an area that should be investigated also from the perspective of rhetoric.

The group of seniors stood out in their preferences of film form and content, but seemingly also in the type of ideals and norms they invoked when they were interpreting the ads. The contrast between the senior group and the rest of the groups’ reception of *Taxi Stoltenberg* and *Hareide explains* is a good example of this. Turning to the type of ideals, most groups found *Taxi Stoltenberg* to be amusing and to some degree celebrated the ideal of authenticity and ordinariness, the authentic leader – but the senior group did not do so. Although one informant appeared to be positive to the ad, the majority of informants here found *Stoltenberg* to be ‘too close’. Thus, he was perceived to be acting in an untoward manner in the respect of being the Prime Minister. The senior group seemed to appreciate a degree of reverence and distance, understood as ‘respect’ between the Prime Minister and the people. They thought that governing the country was an important and solemn task. Thus, a Prime Minister should not be engaging in stunts and foolery in order to flatter the populace. Turning to film form, all informant groups except for the seniors found *Hareide explains* to be tedious, because of the high amount of issue information. Moreover, they objected to the film language in the ad. The seniors had the opposite reaction. After watching the ad, they felt informed, and that they had gotten a good glimpse at the party’s policies. They also explicitly stated that they experienced it as reality, not as a stunt. It appears

as if the relatively straight-forward film form of *Hareide explains* was more to their liking in contrast to *Taxi Stoltenberg*'s grainy resolution, quick cuts and poor sound quality. As we recall, the informants struggled to get any meaning at all out of *Taxi Stoltenberg*, which had to be screened twice, because hearing aids had to be turned to the max. Interestingly, what was appealing to the seniors in *Hareide explains*, was what the other informants often objected to. For instance, one of the teachers remarked that the ad had the film language of another era, referencing an old children's show (M1, Teachers). That the seniors stood out as a group in terms of the ideals for both politicians and film forms they articulated, resonates with Vatnøy's finding among middle-aged people's engagement with political *memes*, which differed substantially from younger people's readings (Vatnøy, 2018, p. 150ff). Further exploring the tastes and preferences for the film form and style of political rhetoric across the dimension of age or cohort is a promising and interesting venue for future research.

The group of art students was, probably due to their training and interest, almost fully immersed in a mediated mode of reading throughout the interview situation. To give an illustrative example, the figure below shows the percentages of answers from informant groups that were coded under the sub-theme of "talk about film form". As we see, the fine art students are in a league of their own in this respect.

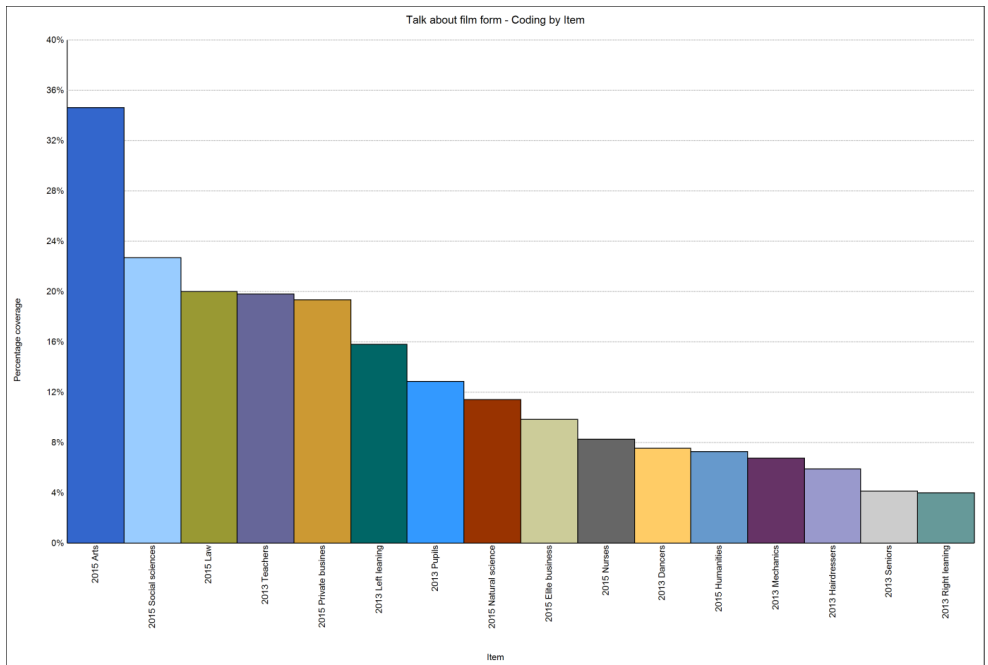


Figure 13: Talk about film form, broken down by groups.

All in all, the fine art students come across as a type of ‘expert viewers’. They were highly deconstructive, finely attuned to film form and techniques of movie production, as well as willing and able to read a message in a playful and ironic manner, as the case of “*Sunday open*” is testament to. When viewing this ad, the informants from the group of fine art students would shout out “lens flare!” and “oooh, green screen” in an appreciative manner, whilst the other groups would react negatively, stating that they did not appreciate such bad production. Further research should take into account how degrees and nuances of media literacy (Aufderheide, 1993; Koltay, 2011; Livingstone, 2004, 2008), or this type of particular cultural capital, influences how audiences engage with and negotiate political rhetoric.

5.4.2 Orientations away from receptive rhetorical citizenship

In this thesis, I have argued that political ads hold the potential to function as a resource for the enactment of rhetorical citizenship. However, while I have

demonstrated how political ads can indeed spark conversation over a range of themes, and conversation that displays orientation towards virtues of receptive rhetorical citizenship, political rhetoric in general and political ads in particular can doubtlessly spark other types of behavior or orientations. First and foremost, this is apparent already in my data material. For instance, some informants displayed reactions reminiscent of Ross' (2011) "neutralization", in which one identifies the sender of a message as someone one does not trust, thus rejecting the message. Ross used the example of a conservative viewer watching a program containing critique of inequality and promptly shrugging it off on the grounds of it being a product of "leftist media" (Ross, 2011, p. 6). Such neutralizations can occur on the basis of dislike or distrust of particular political parties or politicians as well, following the literature on selective exposure and selective trust (Knudsen et al., 2018; Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl, & Pingree, 2015; Warren, 2018). Besides neutralizations seemingly driven by political liking and leaning, there were also instances of informants rejecting a message or not engaging with a text because they seemingly had a low amount of belief or trust in politicians as a group, or politics as a practice. Typically, these responses were indicated by an informant stating that all of politics is merely a show, that politicians could not be trusted, and that the only thing politicians were trying to communicate were attempts at flattery in order to get one's vote. Alternatively, informants would engage in a cynical mode of motive speculation, in which they attributed less-than-ideal motivations to the respective politicians for their choice to communicate something. Other informants seemed at times more grounded in the mode of the voter-consumer. For instance, several of the student informants did not want to engage with the issue of Sunday opening hours, because they themselves enjoyed buying groceries on Sundays. This was most explicit in the answer of the art student who could not fathom why he should know anything more about this issue, stating that he really would not care unless it affected him directly, and he sat there hungry on a Sunday.

Neutralizations made on the basis of political dispositions, affective rejections or strong statements of disgust or dislike, as well as due to a mode of voter-consumer, all are perfectly legitimate. They do, however, point towards other types of orientations than that of the voter-citizen. This is because they do not adhere to for

instance to the virtue of being open to other views than one's own, or the virtue of inclusiveness, indicated by a willingness to take the (communicative) needs of other people into account. As such, they should make us question the full range of receptive reactions that exposure to political rhetoric and political ads can entail, not just the democratically promising enactment of receptive rhetorical citizenship. A second point that we should consider when discussing the limitations of the potential of political ads, is the interview situation. In the case of my examination, I found people to mostly engage with the material at some level, as well as to orient themselves towards a selection of receptive virtues. However, as I have discussed in chapter 3, the unavoidable obtrusiveness of audience research can help produce some of these findings, due to factors such as social desirability. People could be enacting and celebrating 'the good citizen' in order to come across as 'good' individuals in front of a university researcher. Alternately, people could be praising an ideal of the culture they live in, such as popular inclusion or participation when asked by a researcher, and still not live up to those ideals or even give them much thought in their everyday lives.

What do people do when they are not being interviewed in the speech event that the focus group constitutes? As indicated by Hagen (1992), who studied people's reception of the news, indifference to the format is also an option. In their study of popular culture and public connection, Street et al (2015) emphasize the importance of recognizing that "moments of little or no political use" exist. The same can be said for the use of political advertising. While I have argued for the potential of enacting citizenship through political talk and orientations towards receptive virtues, I would also like to recognize that this particular mode will probably not be present all the time outside of the interview situation. Moments of connection and disconnections are not necessarily distinct, neatly and strictly separated, but rather exist with fluid boundaries (Street et al., 2015, p. 121). This is perhaps a more productive metaphor than the more dichotomous on/off-switch of connection or disconnection. People might very well do all kinds of things with political ads. The purpose of this thesis, however, has been to demonstrate how political advertising, in the Norwegian context, potentially establishes a communicative situation in which citizens can enact a receptive rhetorical form of citizenship. In these enactments, they engage in orientations towards the

political, be it at a level of deep orientations, or more directly oriented towards concrete issues and politicians. That said, this awareness of other possible readings, reactions and modes of engagement point us towards fruitful avenues of further research. Scholars interested in receptive rhetorical citizenship should explore the full range of citizen engagement or disengagement with political rhetoric, employing a range of methods in a range of contexts. For instance, researchers could explore how people, both thought to be oriented away from and towards public matters, relate to the political rhetoric they are exposed to, whether they seek it out themselves, or come across it inadvertently. As Groot Kormelink and Meijer (2017) have shown for current affairs television, and Coleman and Moss (2016) has for televised election debates, researchers should pursue a bottom-up approach to people's media use of the genre of political ads. Fundamentally, what citizens do or don't do with political ads when they are not being gathered as audiences by a researcher is an empirical question, and should be treated accordingly.

5.4.3 What medium for rhetorical citizenship?

While I found the political ads in my material to be widely conducive of political talk among informants on a range of themes that I have outlined above, the particular type of conversation the ads appear to invite warrants a comment. Fundamentally, it is my impression that the ads produced a lot of talk about *people*, and their way of presenting themselves. At the level of issues, however, the films containing concrete proposals and at times quite tangible political argumentation around standpoints did not produce extensive talk about the issues. For instance, rather than talking about Hareide's thoughts on school policy in "Hareide explains", informants frequently commented on the *presence* of argumentation, or noted that he was talking about school policy, before moving on. Furthermore, aspects of personality seemed to be given primacy by informants. If Jonas Gahr Støre was presenting issues, a lot of comments address Støre's appearance and way of presenting himself, rather than *what* he actually was saying.

This could be a result of the interview situation, following that all the informant interviews were conducted post-election, and that informants were in a different mode of engagement. It could very well be that informants would have been more in a mode of information seeking and attempting to gain overview over issues if the study had been performed in a “live” election. Another possibility is that the types of conversations produced are the result of particular affordances of political ads. It could simply be that the political ads in my material were not conducive of talk about issues, but highly conducive of how something is communicated, in particular by individual politicians if present. This could be an indication that the affordances of the ads are similar to that of television, which has been stated to foreground aspects such as personality (Hjarvard, 2013; Meyrowitz, 1985) at times on behalf of issues.

These observations does raise the question of what kind of medium for rhetorical citizenship political ads actually are: whether political ads have particular affordances that have a bearing on the type of resource they provide. An important caveat in this regard is that we should not be too hasty in praising political ads as a resource, based solely on how informants react to them. After all, we could be dealing with competent citizens who are able to extract gold from a very limited resource indeed. While this is a consideration to keep in mind, it is certain that the ads at least to not stifle the discussion and talk between informants.

Based solely on the present exploration, it is not easy to decidedly state what kind of rhetorical citizenship political ads offer. However, judging from the advertisements I have examined it is clear that they offer substance and opportunity to deliberate on both issues and form of expression. It is also clear that that my informants latch on to this offering, even though the balance is heavily skewed towards talk about expression, appearance, personality and ethos.

Some of the themes the ads produced could very well apply to other genres of political rhetoric, as the many discussions on the balance between informing and engaging are testament to. However, in my material, the theme of personalization was by far the most dominant. In this theme, we can observe affordances that are unique to the case of audiovisual rhetoric. Judging from the way informants talk about what they

see and hear, political ads seem to call attention to and set about thematizations of the form of expression itself. Political ads appear to bring questions of authenticity to the very foreground of evaluation. This is not the case for genres such as political speeches or election debates. If an audience is left wondering whether a politician has been ‘acting’ after a political speech, something must have gone horribly wrong. This could very well be an affordance of film as a medium: one is staged for the camera, something that foregrounds role-playing, making one’s ability to appear true and real become of utmost importance. An interesting aspect of ads-as-resource are that many of the ads actually offer at times quite substantial issue-information, but these are typically not discussed or explored to any degree. Hareide might have some good arguments, but that is nothing compared to how ridiculous he looks out on that soccer field. It is not hard to criticize this tendency. However, through foregrounding politicians and party leaders as characters, and through informants’ talk about politicians-as-characters, political ads offer a resource for thinking about and deliberation on what a politician is and should be.

When discussing this point, it is important to remember that I only examined eight films, and that we should be wary of drawing conclusions on political ads in Norway as a whole from such a limited sample. There are many other ads that have been produced, and there are other types of ads in the pool of Norwegian political ads that could produce different conversations and reactions. In calling attention to this observation, I do not claim that political ads normatively ought to produce talk on concrete issues. That political ads primarily makes people talk about people is not necessarily a problem (as long as citizens’ media diets do not consist solely of political ads) from a systemic approach (Dryzek, 2016; Mansbridge, 1999) to the public sphere, in which various forums provide various input and output.

However, I do think that the type of conversation ads invite to is an important empirical question, because it will largely determine what kind of resource for citizenship political ads amount to. Therefore, future studies should examine a wider range of ads than I have here. Moreover, comparative studies in which one compares the conversations of political ads to those produced by other formats such as current

affairs television, election debates, et cetera should be a priority. This includes comparison across political cultures, as citizens in other countries and cultures probably relate to political ads in a manner different to the Norwegian case.

Even though informants were talking a lot about personality, they were addressing a lot of matters of political importance in their doing so. From a research perspective, we have gained new knowledge on how people negotiate ethos through mediated communication. In particular, we have gained additional nuance and detail as to how people not only judge the judgement (competence) of political speakers, but how they also “(...)” try to ascertain whether the speakers are morally trustworthy (...) (Kapust & Schwarze, 2016, p. 100), a question of integrity. We have seen how citizens in part employ personality and appearance as a type of information shortcut in order to determine whether someone is trustworthy or not. I found my informants to praise, perhaps above all else, authenticity – the politician’s ability to come across as true to his or her inner self and convictions. Guignon (2008) argues that authenticity is so praised in contemporary culture because in order to be authentic, one has to have other virtues as well – virtues that are often praised in politicians, such as integrity, consistency and honesty. As such, further conceptualizing authenticity as an “information shortcut”, a cue for trustworthiness, should be a priority of future research. This should be done not only through establishing and further clarifying the concept of authenticity as information shortcut theoretically, but should also involve concrete empirical studies, qualitative and quantitative, that investigate how people actually use the concept of authenticity when they navigate the nexus of political candidates, political rhetoric and trust.

5.5 Conclusion

This thesis set out to demonstrate how a particular form of political rhetoric, political ads, can function as a resource for citizenship. I stated that the genre functions as a resource by providing substance for everyday practical judgement on issues and

political leaders, as well as a through citizens' use of the ads to discuss general topics of political matters and democracy.

Modern, mass mediated democracies are full of potential contact points between leaders and followers. Following the impetus to look in many places for publics and enactments of citizenship (Hauser, 1999; Hauser & Benoit-Barne, 2002; Kock & Villadsen, 2012a), I have examined a small piece of the public conversation, namely the conversations invited to and produced by political ads.

A reception situation with a limited audience of ads is perhaps a “small” place to look for democratic insights and nuances of citizenship. However, as reception researcher Kim Christian Schröder argues, one should not limit what constitutes political action only to traditional, institutionalized acts of citizenship. Rather, we should take into account the possibility of everyday behavior being political: (...) every conversation we engage in is part of the process through which society's political life is constituted (...)” (Schröder, 2000, p. 252). Employing the lens of rhetorical citizenship is beneficial in this regard because as Kock & Villadsen (Kock & Villadsen, 2012a, p. 11) writes:

A rhetorical focus has a special regard for individual actors in the public arena, not just the eloquent politician or NGO representative, but also the person watching a pre-election debate on TV, chipping in with a point of view on a blog on civic issues, collecting signatures from passersby on a windy street to stop municipal budget cuts, or deciding to join a local interest group

Or, in the present study: people talking together, discussing what their would-be-leaders has just decided to communicate to them. As political ads represent a form of “direct” mediated contact between the political elite and the citizens it represents, this examination has told us something about how people listen to what politician say when they present themselves and their arguments, but also the type and nature of the everyday talk produced among citizens after viewing the ads.

From the vantage point of receptive rhetorical citizenship, the job is far from done. Every day, people are exposed to, or employ, rhetoric in a variety of situations,

be it in everyday discussions with the family over the breakfast table on a provocative opinion piece in the newspaper, or in enthusiastic debate with colleagues in the intensive weeks of political connection prior to a national election. Further exploring the range of modes, orientations and repertoires that people enact in these situations should be a prime task for rhetoricians in the future.

6.0 Bibliography⁴¹

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⁴¹ In this list of references, I have translated Norwegian titles into English. The translations are indicated by brackets. The translations should not be seen as official. Rather, they are meant to indicate the subject matter of the texts in question.

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Appendix A: Interview guides and mini-surveys

Guide for production interviews

Semi-structured interview guide

The most important themes:

1. Process: How were the films made
2. Relations: cooperation, perception, affordances
3. Rhetoric: Intention, devices, audience

Themes:

- Inspiration and influence
- Work flow and process
- The ad itself
- Audience and intended response

Open questions

Process and workflow – from idea to product

Can you tell me a little about the production of this ad, and your role in it?

How was the process / how did this come about?

Who decided the ad should be made

Did the ad fit into a particular strategy / did it answer to a particular situation

Who contacted who

Who did what

How did you experience the party's relation to the ad agency and production agency

Inspiration and influence

What or who inspired you in the work with the ad?

The ad itself: preferred reading and interpretation

What did you want to say with this ad

What did you want to achieve with this ad / What did you want with this ad?

Which thoughts about [party] and [politician] did you want the audience to be left with after watching the ad?

What actions have you taken in order to make as many as possible reacted in the way you just described?

Audience

Who did you want to reach with this ad

Were there any particular groups you envisioned?

Do you have any thoughts on who would like it well, or not like it?

Evaluative

What do you think about the ad now?

If something was problematic, what was the cause of this?

Guide for focus group interviews

The most important themes:

1. Decoding: How do the respondents perceive/read the message of the ad (polysemy)
2. Intention: How do the respondents perceive producer intentions? (implied producer/rhetor)
3. Valence: How do respondents evaluate the ads, their elements and their messages? (polyvalence)

Questions:

[initially, just wait to see if someone speaks]

What did you see here?

What does the ad want to say?

What does the ad communicate?

About the party?

About the politician?

What do you think of the ad?

What do you think of what the ad claims?

What do you think of the presentation of

The party?

The politician?

What do you think the people who made the ad thought like?

Who does this ad appeal to?

Who does this ad work for?

How does the ad attempt to achieve what we've just talked about?

Generally, how would you make an ad, if you got to decide?

Generally, what do you think of political ads?

Of being communicated to in this manner?

Continually:

WHAT makes you say that? WHY do you think that? HOW do you know that? HOW do we know that?

Mini-survey for focus group interviews

Page 1:

Gender?

Underline what fits:

Woman Man

Age?

If you have studied something, what study have you attended?

(If you have attended several, you are welcome to mention all)

At what level are you currently studying?

Circle what fits

Yearly study Bachelor Master

How interested would you say you are in politics?

Circle what fits

Very interested – quite interested – somewhat interested – not very interested – not interested at all

What party would you vote for if there was an election to the Storting tomorrow?

Page 2:

What does the film want to say? First thoughts. Write keywords or a sentence that sums up what the film wants to communicate. Or just use the place for notes.

Film 1:

Film 2:

Film 3:

Film 4:

Appendix B: Full code tables

Themes, sub-themes and categories

Table 13: Overview of themes, sub-themes and categories

| Theme | Sub-theme | Categories |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Image and issue | <i>Balance</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion: amount of information positive/negative • Proportion: amount of entertainment positive/negative • Talking about balance |
| | <i>Humor</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive comments • Negative comments • Uncertainty • Unintended humor |
| | <i>Concrete/general issues</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanting more concrete information • Criticizing vagueness |
| | <i>Single/many issues</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion: amount of issues positive/negative |
| Negativity | <i>Problems/Solutions</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive comments to balance • Negative comments to balance • Wanting solutions to problems • Wanting negativity (too positive) |
| | <i>Critical comments</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distaste for negativity and attack • Disappointment in ad sponsor • Backlash towards ad sponsor • Employing interpersonal norms |
| | <i>Neutral comments</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling attention to negativity • Appreciating negativity |
| | <i>Uncertainty</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tone and form of ad • American tendencies/Trump • Discussing legitimacy • Discussing private/public norms |
| Personalization | <i>Ordinariness</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing proximity (clothing, role, tone, manners generally) • Experiencing distance |

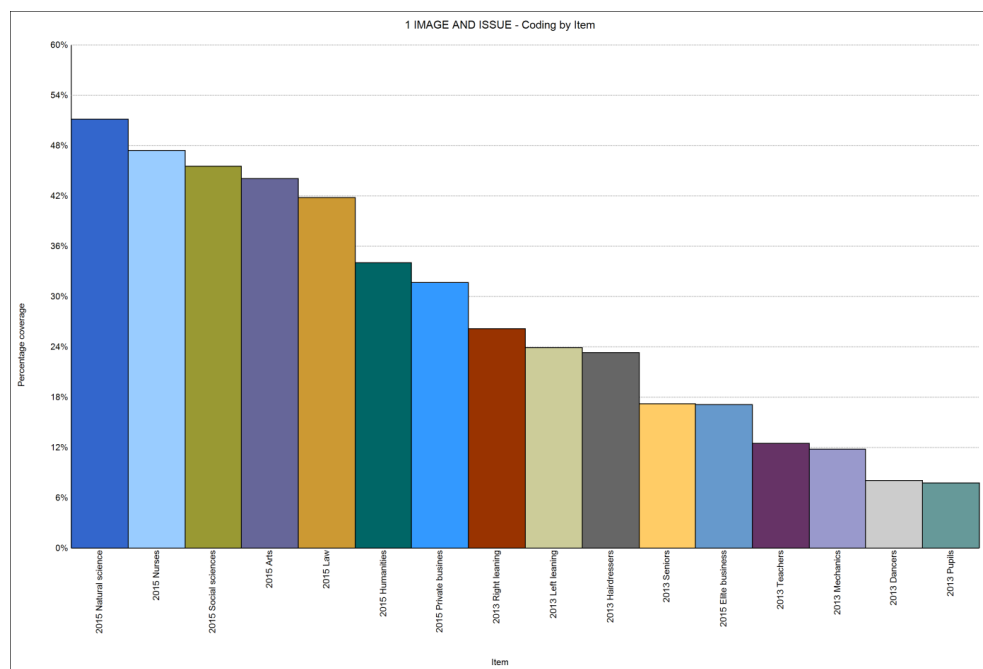
| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| | (clothing, role tone, manners, generally) |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At our level • Of the people / thematizing “of the people” • Too close • Talking about closeness and distance |
| <i>Authenticity</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unscripted, spontaneous, conversational • Scripted, staged, fake • Talk about self-presentation |
| <i>Leader-led-relations</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sociability • Being talked to: positive/negative • General topoi on politicians • Conceptualizing politician as party • Relating to initial ethos • On leadership and leadership ideals |
| Receptive modes | |
| <i>Aptum breach</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate (norm violation) • Internal aptum: film form • External aptum: film form • Unfitting language for politician or party • Use of humor unfitting |
| <i>Authenticity breach</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inauthentic/acting politician • Dissonance with external knowledge • Film form authenticity breach • Strong dislike/disbelief/ neutralization |
| <i>Constructive/diagnosing</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pointing out errors • Suggesting other solutions • Speculating on what went wrong |
| <i>Talk about film form</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cinematography • Editing • Mis-en-scene • Acting • Special effects • Sound • Production value: cheaply made (positive) • Production value: cheaply made (negative) • Appreciating production value • Relating film form to credibility |
| <i>Informant reflexivity</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing other audience positions • Talking about other audiences • Questioning own preference and position • Thematizing own habitus and position • Third person perceptions (negative) |

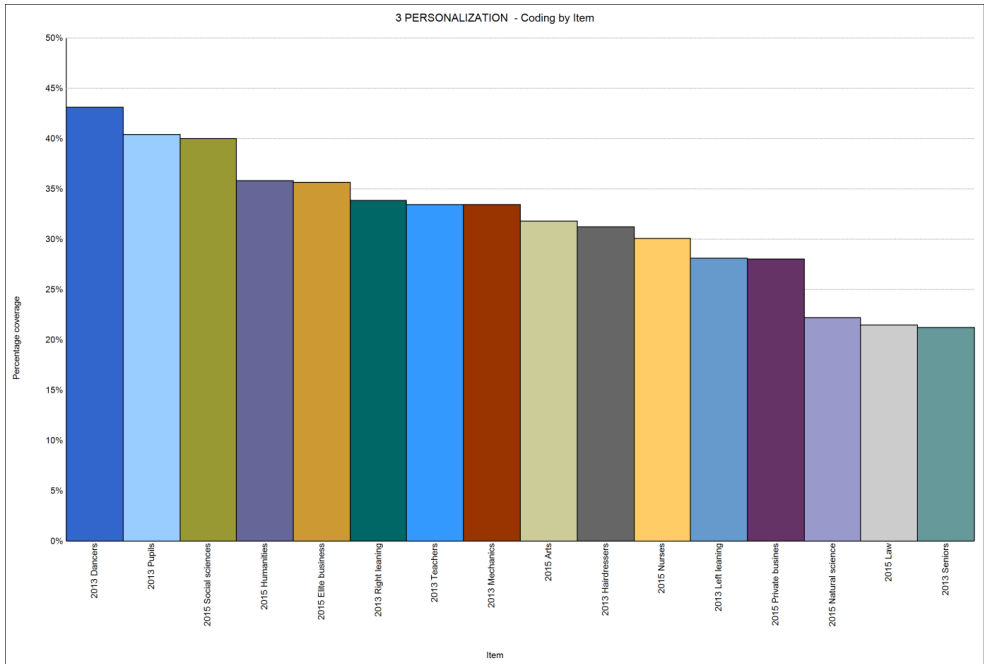
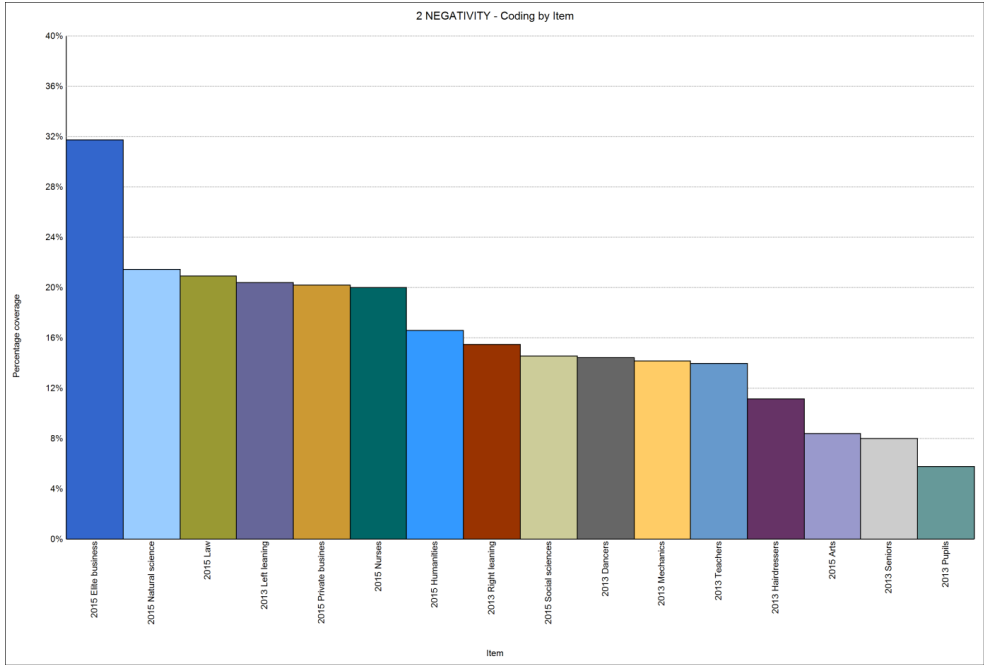
Nodes and references per group

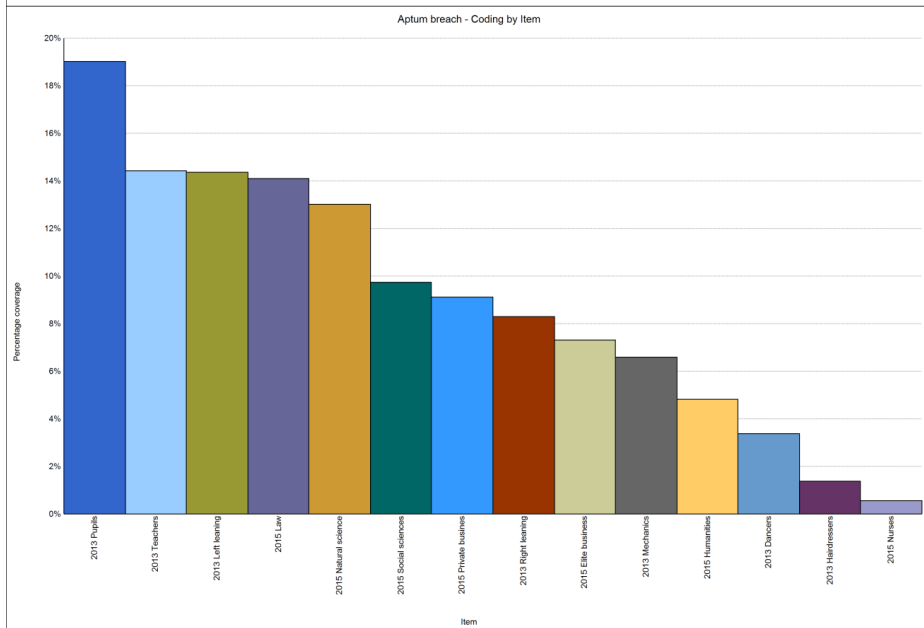
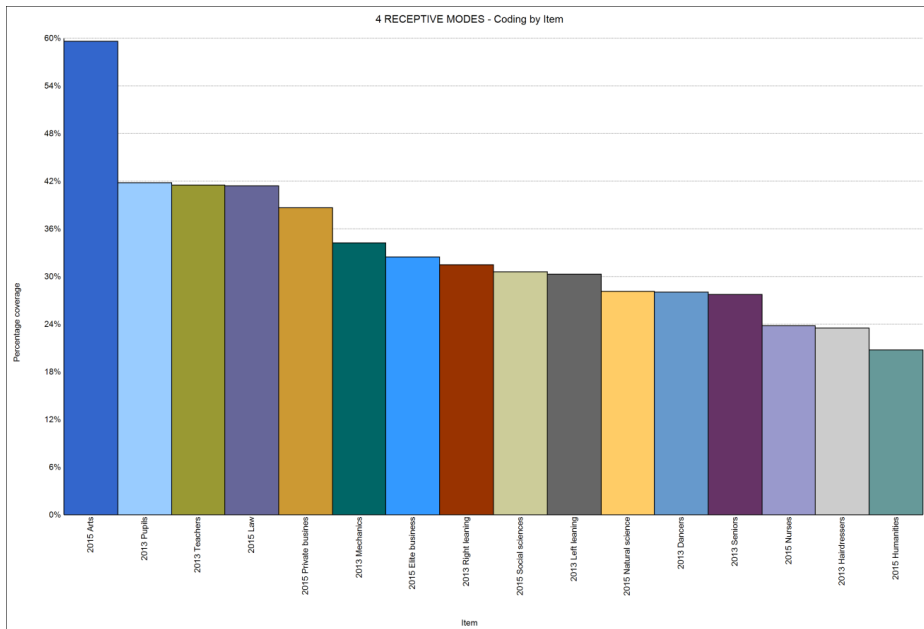
Table 14: Groups, number of nodes and number of references

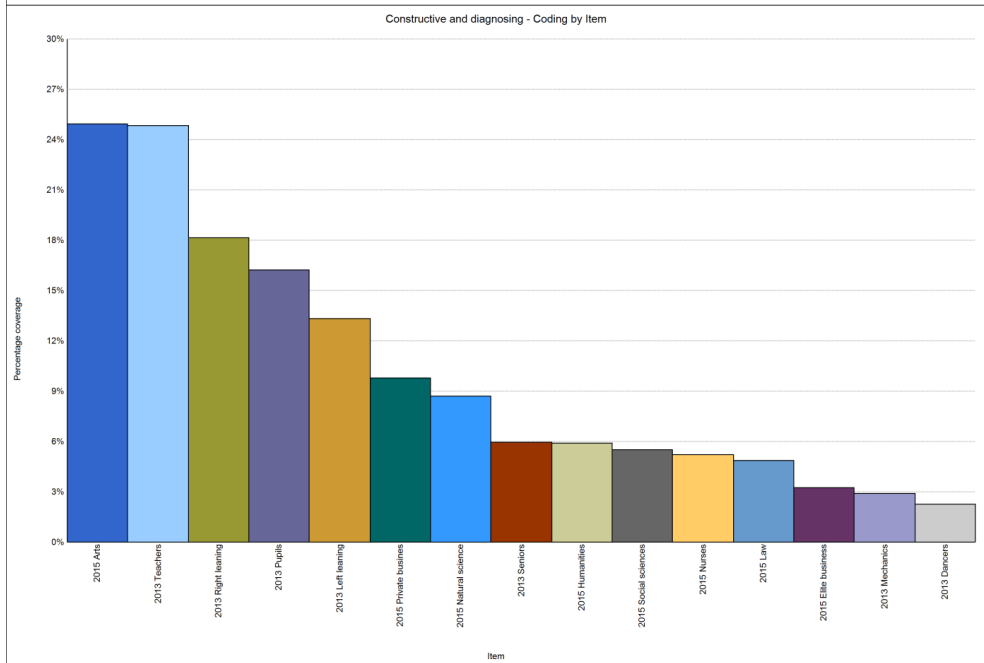
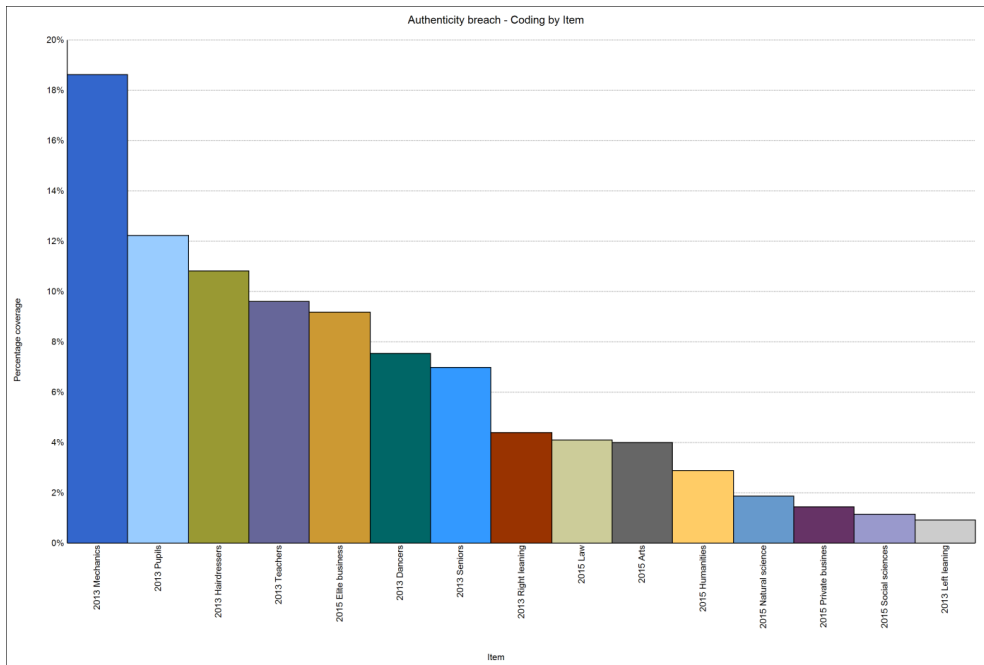
| Year | Group | Nodes | References |
|-------------|-------------------------|-------|------------|
| 2013 | Hairdressers | 33 | 98 |
| 2013 | Seniors | 40 | 158 |
| 2013 | Mechanics | 46 | 195 |
| 2015 | Humanities | 46 | 206 |
| 2013 | Right leaning | 45 | 206 |
| 2015 | Elite business school | 47 | 248 |
| 2015 | Nurse vocational | 48 | 249 |
| 2015 | Natural science | 47 | 252 |
| 2013 | Pupils | 48 | 252 |
| 2013 | Left leaning | 41 | 260 |
| 2015 | Private business school | 49 | 270 |
| 2015 | Fine arts | 50 | 346 |
| 2013 | Dancers | 53 | 351 |
| 2015 | Social sciences | 52 | 364 |
| 2015 | Law | 49 | 369 |
| 2013 | Teachers | 56 | 454 |

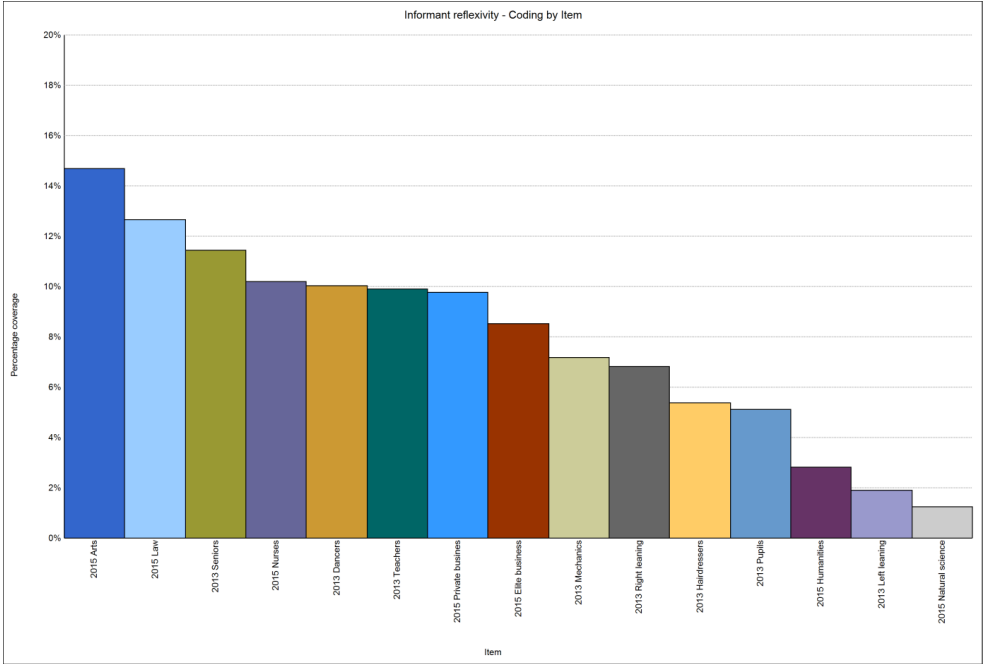
Distribution of themes across groups











Appendix C: Fact sheet on Norwegian political parties⁴²

The Labour Party (49 representatives, 27,4% of popular vote in last election), founded in 1887. A social democratic center-left-party, traditionally strongly affiliated with trade unions. Has since the 90s increasingly appropriated a form of market-liberalism in their ideological profile.

The Conservative Party (45 representatives, 25,0% of popular vote in last election), established in 1884. A liberal-conservative center-right party, and the second largest party in Norway.

The Progress Party (27 representatives, 15,2% of popular vote in last election), founded as “Anders Lange’s Party for Substantial Reduction in Taxes, Duties and Governmental Interference” in 1973. The party is characterized by a mix of conservative liberalism and right-wing populism.

The Centre Party (19 representatives, 10,3% of popular vote in last election), founded in 1920 as “the Agrarian League”, and later named “Farmer’s Party” is a centrist agrarian party with a tradition of EU-resistance and strong ties to various farmer’s organizations.

The Socialist Left Party (11 representatives, 6,0% of popular vote in last election) was founded in 1963 by a group of anti-NATO activists. The party fronts a democratic socialist ideology.

The Christian Democratic Party (8 representatives, 4,2% of popular vote in last election) was founded in 1933 and is both Christian democratic and socially conservative.

The Liberal Party (8 representatives, 4,2% of popular vote in last election) was founded in 1880, and is a social liberal party.

⁴² All numbers of representatives and vote-share are gathered from the last election to the Storting, that was held in 2017. Voter turnout was 78,2%. All details on party descriptions are gathered from Bengtsson et al (2014): *The Nordic Voter: Myths of Exceptionalism*, p. 211-213; The European Election Database (http://www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database/country/norway/parties.html) and Nordsieck (2017): *Parties and Elections in Europe*.

The Green Party (1 representative, 3,2% of popular vote in last election), founded in 1988. Explicitly concerns itself with green politics, and the green movement. They are also explicitly not committed to any side of the left-right spectrum, for which they are regularly criticized from both sides of the political spectrum.

The Red Party (1 representative, 2,4% of popular vote in last election), founded in 2007 after the Red Electoral Alliance and the Worker's Communist Party merged. After a long history of communist allegiance, they are now described as "a left-wing political party that tries to get rid of the communist label" (Bengtsson et al, 2014: 213).

Appendix D: Film overview

Table 15: Ad analysis overview

| Ad | Title | Production perspective | Text perspective | Reception perspective |
|---------|------------------|------------------------|---|---|
| 2013 L | Taxi Stoltenberg | Personalization | Non-fiction, candid camera | Image-issue-balance, personalization, authenticity breach |
| 2013 C | Pilots | Image | Fiction, satire | Image-issue-balance, negativity |
| 2013 CD | Hareide Explains | Personalization, issue | Non-fiction, talking head | Image--issue-balance, personalization, aptum breach |
| 2013 CP | #Lifeforce... | Issue | Fiction, Visualization | Aptum breach, image/issue-balance |
| 2015 L | Our Norway... | Issue | Non-fiction, talking head | Negativity, personalization |
| 2015 C | Somewhere ... | Image | Fiction, satire AND non-fiction, talking head | Image-issue-balance, personalization, aptum breach |
| 2015 CD | Sunday open | Image | Fiction, satire | Image-issue, personalization, authenticity breach, aptum breach |
| 2015 RP | Challenger | Issue | Non-fiction, talking head | Negativity, personalization |

For instance, the production interviews around the Red Party ad of 2015 emphasized issue-focus, the textual analysis found the ad to be a typical talking head-ad, and in reception, the ad sparked conversations on negativity and personalization.. L=Labour, C=Conservative, CD=Christian Democrat, CP=Centre Party, RP=Red Party.



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