

Content analysis of press releases from the Norwegian serious fraud office: What do the messages say about focal concerns?

ABSTRACT

Serious fraud offices such as the Norwegian national authority for investigation and prosecution of economic and environmental crime (Økokrim) are facing many challenges when combatting white-collar and corporate crime. Press releases represent an element of facing such challenges as the messages are an important vehicle for the organization to disclose organizational activities to the public. This article reviews 69 press releases published by the Norwegian Økokrim from June 2022 to November 2023. The presented research applies the theory of focal concerns to identify main themes in the press releases. Three themes emerged: offender conviction, impression management, and crime deterrence. Offender prosecution followed by offender conviction is at the core of Økokrim's business. Impression management serves the purpose of emphasizing the important role of the national authority in society. The subjective perception of detection and prosecution by potential offenders can be influenced by crime deterrence messages.

KEYWORDS: Economic crime; focal concerns; press releases; impression management; crime deterrence.

INTRODUCTION

Serious fraud offices at the national level exist in many countries to combat white-collar and corporate crime. For example, both the United Kingdom and New Zealand have their Serious Fraud Office (SFO), while the Netherlands has its National Office for Serious Fraud,

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Environmental Crime, and Asset Confiscation (OSF). Økokrim in Norway is “the National Authority for Investigation and Prosecution of Economic and Environmental Crime” claiming to be “the main source of specialist skills for the police and prosecuting authorities in their combat against crime of this kind” (www.okokrim.no). Økokrim was established in 1989, and is both a police specialist agency and a public prosecutors’ office with national authority. The authority has two hundred employees, mainly lawyers, investigators, and accountants.

A challenging research issue is the choice of focal concerns at such national authorities. Focal concerns represent focus areas for an agency. Focal concerns theory suggests that people and institutions emphasize certain issues at the detriment of other issues (Higgins et al., 2012; Walker, 2023). The theory attempts to explain the priorities, actions, and behaviors of people and institutions based on their focal concerns. For example, Gupta et al. (2023) and Steffensmeier et al. (2013) studied gendered focal concerns claiming that women socialize into accepting nurturing role obligations.

This article applies the theory to identify focal concerns based on press releases from Økokrim. Press releases are an important vehicle for organizations to disclose organizational activities to the public (Gong, 2023). During the period from June 2022 to November 2023 that was the sample frame, Økokrim published 69 press releases. This article thus addresses the following research question: *What do press releases from the national authority for investigation and prosecution of economic and environmental crime in Norway say about the authority’s focal concerns?* This research is important as the activities of serious fraud offices are regularly debated in the public and reviewed by political bodies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many countries have established national authorities to investigate and prosecute serious and complex white-collar and corporate crime incidents. For example, there are SFOs in both the

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United Kingdom (Button et al., 2023; Osafsky, 2023) and New Zealand (Quah, 2022; SFO, 2023), and there are national economic crime authorities in countries like the Netherlands (Meerts, 2020; Nielen, 2004) and Norway (Gottschalk, 2023a; Økokrim, 2023). These agencies are supposed to be the main source of specialist skills for the police and the prosecution in their combat against economic crime by privileged and trusted individuals and corporations that may be “too big to fail” and “too powerful to jail” (Pontell et al., 2014: 1). The authorities face external challenges from very resourceful suspects and defendants with skilled defense attorneys, secrecy by corporate investigators reviewing economic misconduct in client organizations, criticism in the media regarding both role and performance, and other issues that might represent useful learning for the authorities as well as barriers to professional performance at the same agencies. External challenges and barriers for national authorities have been reviewed in the United Kingdom (Calvert-Smith, 2022; Levi, 2006, 2009; Middleton, 2005; SFO, 2022), in New Zealand (Peurseem and Balme, 2010; SFO, 2009), in the Netherlands (Meerts, 2020, 2021, 2023), and in Norway (Gottschalk, 2023a, 2023b; Riksadvokaten, 2017). The choice of these four countries as examples is simply based on availability of scholarly research works as well as similarities in policing.

The serious fraud office in the United Kingdom has experienced criticism for both lack of competence and lack of integrity. They are “too slow to act” (Levi, 2006: 1047). They have “been criticized by some for prosecuting” (Middleton, 2005: 831). They can suffer from “serious risks of media and political criticism for publicity-seeking incompetence” (Levi, 2009: 59).

The serious fraud office in New Zealand empowered its employees with authority that provoked media attention (Peurseem and Balme, 2010: 305):

SFO members are charged with investigating complaints of large frauds (usually over \$500,000), cases of public interest and/or complex financial frauds. The SFO Director

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has, under statute, the authority to require suspects to provide documentation and to be interviewed without the right to remain silent. The Director also has the authority to select complaints to investigate and prosecute, which they then follow through to resolution. This level of authority, in particular to select and screen potential fraudsters, is unusual. The SFO can be perceived, therefore, as an intimidating authority by those who are subject to its investigations.

The future of the SFO was up for debate several times. Concerns were expressed “over a declining number of prosecutions launched by the office, driven by what was claimed to be a conservative, risk-minimizing approach under the tenure of director Julie Read” (Nippert, 2018).

In the Netherlands, the national office was found to have a problematic relationship with corporate investigators who conduct internal reviews for their clients. A business of corporate investigators has grown that does not necessarily align well with public investigators.

Corporate investigators work in audit firms, law firms, and consulting firms. They take on the task of reconstructing past events and sequences of events for client organizations when there is suspicion of misconduct and wrongdoing. Rather than ignoring their work, the national office in the Netherlands might benefit from it (Meerts, 2020, 2021, 2023).

In Norway, Økokrim was hit by a scandal one decade ago, from which the agency still seems to suffer. Reuters (2014) reported about the scandal case:

Swiss-based rig operator Transocean and three advisers were acquitted of tax fraud in connection with shifting assets between subsidiary companies, a lawyer in the Norwegian case said today. Norwegian authorities sued several Transocean subsidiaries along with their individual advisers for 1.8 billion crowns (\$290.74 million) in damages. “Everybody, both the companies and the individuals charged,

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were acquitted of all charges,” Erling Olav Lyngtveit, the lawyer who headed the defense team, told Reuters.

After Økokrim’s failure in the Transocean case, the authority’s activities were evaluated. The Attorney General’s report on the case showed major deficiencies in management and major gaps in competence (Riksadvokaten, 2017). The skilled defense lawyers were professionally superior to the state prosecutors at Økokrim. Since then, the authority has taken on fewer serious and instead more less-demanding cases (Gottschalk, 2023a).

Given such challenging situations for serious fraud offices, it is relevant to study how they present themselves in the media by press releases. Press releases are an important vehicle for organizations, and compared to other disclosure approaches, “press releases cover a great variety of topics and publicize much more abundant information than other disclosures” (Gong, 2023: 2081):

Prior studies show that press releases could mitigate outsiders’ information acquisitions and interpretation costs and portray the firm as distinctive, proactive and interesting. Managers also have full control over press releases and can strongly influence audience perceptions of events and firms via their decisions on which information to highlight or emphasize and how to frame that information, such as using negative and positive tones. Consequently, press releases can be used advantageously by managers to disclose information and opinions.

A press release is a news statement initiated by an organization in possession of relevant information to produce the press release (Greene and Smith, 2021). A press release is an announcement originated by an entity and distributed via a news provider (Gong, 2023). It is at the discretion of the news provider, such as a newspaper or a television channel, whether they distribute the content of the press release and if they do, whether they make editorial changes to it. While managers have full control over press releases, they have no control over

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the intermediaries' use of highlighted information to the audience. When managers use own digital channels and social media to disseminate their information, then they have full control of the information reaching the audience. Even when they have full control over press releases to the intended audience, it may represent a critical communication step as they have no control of knowledge acquisition at the receiving end (Filip et al., 2022). Knowledge at the receiving end is a combination of the press release information combined with interpretation (understanding), reflection (thoughts), and context (relationships). A press release can, for example, be understood as "a form of cheap talk" and "reflect managerial overconfidence" (Filip et al., 2022: 65). Overconfidence refers to the bias in which an individual's subjective confidence in his or her own judgment is significantly greater than the objective accuracy and reliability of the judgment.

Gong (2023) examined how CEO overconfidence affects the tone of press releases. He found that press releases issued by firms with overconfident CEOs have more positive tone and receive more positive market reactions. The relationship between CEO overconfidence and the tone of press releases was stronger among firms with good operating performance.

Overconfidence was measured by how CEO exercised their stock options. Press release tone was measured by various proxies sampled from the news. The findings suggest that CEO overconfidence leads to biases in press releases.

Greene and Smith (2021) studied acquisition press releases to investigate how acquisition experience affects the career outcomes of non-CEO senior managers. They found the destiny for senior managers mentioned in the press releases to be significantly better than the destiny for senior managers not mentioned in the press releases.

Filip et al. (2022) studied the association between disclosures about key value drivers in press releases announcing mergers and acquisitions and acquirer stock returns upon the announcement. In a case study of Pfizer, they found that managerial enthusiasm in the press

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release was associated with the acquisition being negatively received by market participants, as evidenced by a significant decrease in the Pfizer stock price at the time of the announcement. According to the study, the press release document included 60 terms related to 'synergies', 36 terms related to 'growth', and 23 terms related to 'technology'.

RESEARCH METHOD

National fraud offices are relevant to study as policing units since they are at a high level of knowledge rivalry with those corporate actors that are suspected of law violations. Knowledge rivalry refers to arguments regarding both facts and the law, where knowledge is defined as information combined with interpretation, reflection, and context. As argued by both Gottschalk and Hamerton (2023) and Gupta and Gottschalk (2023), in the courtroom as a theater scene, white-collar expert attorneys defend their clients at a knowledge level that the prosecution has to match. Therefore, national fraud offices are established to concentrate key national knowledge for the investigation and prosecution of white-collar and corporate crime. National fraud offices need expert knowledge work among investigators as well as prosecutors. The term "fraud" is here applied in the wider sense of economic and financial crime since this is a typical label used for national authorities globally.

The national authority in Norway granted access to press releases for this research. The media department at the authority issues news statements to all major newspapers and television channels. One researcher doing this study was added to the email list of editorial contacts when the researcher asked for it in June 2022. Within the time frame selected until November 2023, this research was able to review 69 press releases from the Norwegian fraud office Økokrim across 18 months to apply focal concerns theory as a way of identifying main themes. While eighteen months is a long period, it cannot be confirmed that the 69 press releases are representative in relation to the total universe across time. However, having

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reflected on Økokrim activities for several years, both by presence in courtrooms and by reading coverage in the media, there is limited reason to believe that the sample is not representative.

Qualitative content analysis enables research to uncover underlying focal concerns in the police unit (Walker, 2023). Each press release was interpreted by their perceived meaning for classification. Early patterns that emerged involved meanings regarding a criminal case and more generally meanings about criminality. Categories were included about the specifics in each press release. Once all press releases had been analyzed to develop initial categories through open classification, another round of analysis was conducted for focused categories. This is a form of thematic analysis of the press releases and based on key themes identified, the findings will be interpreted from the perspective of the focal concern theory.

The press releases are listed in the Appendix. The first column in the table shows the date, where the first press release was on June 20, 2022, and the last press release was on November 14, 2023. The second column repeats the core message in the press release. A total of 69 press releases are presented in the table.

The research focus is both content and reception of press releases with an emphasis on the latter. Not all press releases seem driven by agenda setting by the agency itself but rather by the information available such as indictments and new convictions.

RESEARCH RESULTS

When the stepwise and iterative research method of uncovering underlying focal concerns was applied to the sample of 69 press releases by the Norwegian authority Økokrim, three main concerns resulted. The first concern seems obvious as it addresses the main task of the authority, which is to investigate and prosecute economic and environmental crime. However, less than half of the press releases reported offender convictions. Thirty-two out of sixty-nine

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press releases concerned “offender conviction” that represents 46%. The remaining 54% then attracted research attention. Some press releases seem to address issues related to criminal justice in general by presenting Økokrim as a socially responsible actor in society. The major focal concern among these press releases emerged as “impression management”. Surprisingly many press releases ended up in this category: twenty-four out of sixty-nine messages that represent 35%. The final focal concern identified was “crime deterrence” in thirteen of the sixty-nine messages that represent 19%. The classification might be challenged in that a few presses release report acquittal of defendants that might belong in the concern of “offender conviction” rather than “crime deterrence” or “impression management”. However, given that the number is very low and that the angle of those acquittal messages has more the implicit concern of “crime deterrence” or “impression management”, they do not really belong in the category of “offender conviction” even if the label was changed from “offender conviction” to “offender prosecution”.

The most frequent focal concern is “offender conviction”. The longest prison sentence was passed on April 13, 2023, where a man was convicted of investment fraud against 77 victims. The court set the length of incarceration to 5 years. The most severe sentence set for white-collar and corporate crime in Norway is 9 years. Almost never, the convict has to serve more than two-thirds of the sentence in prison, so the actual incarceration has never exceeded 6 years. The average conviction in recent years is 2 years and 2 months, where the actual incarceration then is less than two years. These relatively low numbers compared to sensational numbers in the United States such as Ponzi-Madoff with 75 years, do not indicate that white-collar and corporate crime are not considered serious in Norway. Rather, the numbers indicate few years in prison for all kinds of crime, also for the category often labelled street crime. The focal concern of Økokrim in these press releases is to communicate actual cases that the policing unit has handled to successful conclusion. Since Økokrim hardly

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ever takes cases to court where there is not an overload of evidence (Gottschalk, 2023a, 2023b), successful offender convictions is the main message.

The second most frequent focal concern is “impression management” that refers to the release of information regarding accomplishments to reduce the discrepancy between the desired and perceived professional image of the organization (Lim and Jiang, 2021). Impression management aims to generate positive evaluations of an entity (Bass et al., 2023). Impression management is a conscious or subconscious process in which people attempt to influence the perceptions of other people about a person, object, or event by regulating and controlling information in social interaction. Impression management is a strategy where Økokrim leadership might release information to distort stakeholders’ perception of accomplishments or lack of accomplishments in the organization (Demaline, 2023). Impression management can be construed as manipulative or deceptive. An organization’s words and actions can be purely authentic or manipulative to manage its impression. However, impression management itself never means creating inauthentic behavior.

Authenticity refers to how words and actions of the organization are in line with or consistent with its true identity. Authenticity is an important aspect of impression management in that an organization can be discredited when it sends a false or artificial message. From the impression management perspective, public relations are the strategic and deliberate efforts of managing an organization’s communications and actions in order to give consistent impressions to its stakeholders and publics. Lim and Jiang (2021: 470) argued that impression management theory is connected to the two-way communication perspective:

Because an organization manages its impressions based on the reactions of and requests from its publics, it can continuously construct and reconstruct its identities.

For example, when an organization such as Økokrim releases a press statement, then there will be reactions, first by the media and then by the public. The media will consider whether

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the press release is of interest and whether messages from Økokrim should be communicated in a supportive or critical form. The public then, especially individuals who feel persecuted by Økokrim, might respond in the media. Journalists in the media will frame their reporting, for example “with the four pillars of criminology: perpetrator, cause of crime, victimization, and punishment” in their efforts of sense-making (Horn, 2023: 2):

Media can be understood as a sense-making device through which the public accesses knowledge about events which then contributes to producing, legitimizing, or challenging wider hegemonic attitude towards social issues and realities, such as politics, economics, or crime. It plays a role in creating and mirroring individual and societal perceptions, actively framing realities in a certain way. Reporting a story involves selective coding of information, and stories get reported using schematics of interpretation, also known as frames. These are often aligned with the philosophical, economic, and political goals of news sources, meaning that what is being reported will most likely be distorted. This is especially true for crime news as crime is a highly politicized subject that can receive a variety of representations across non-fictional media.

Impression management by press releases to influence people’s perceptions might thus be especially risky in policing when “news sources distort the reality of crime” (Horn, 2023: 2). Distortion can typically occur when it was the media rather than Økokrim or some other agency that first reported corporate or individual wrongdoing.

The first press release in the table in the Appendix communicates a message about the release of a new edition of Økokrim’s environmental magazine. Publishing a magazine is certainly not at the core of being the national authority for investigation and prosecution of economic and environmental crime. Spending time writing and editing a magazine might, however, serve the purpose of impression management to communicate concern beyond individual

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environmental crime cases. The magazine creates an impression of Økokrim being worried about climate change and other environmental issues that are normally addressed by politicians and not by the police.

The second entry in the table is also classified as impression management. It was at a time where Russia invaded Ukraine, and all Norwegians were upset with the Russians. The Norwegian government donated military equipment and training to Ukraine and imposed sanctions on Russia. The press release indicates that Økokrim is aware of the situation and wants to provide its contributing share to punish the Russians by being active in recovering assets from Russian state citizens that would be in line with the sanctions.

The next impression management press release was October 4, 2022, when a man was charged with involvement in fluoride-carrying gas trade. The emphasis on environmental concern is visible in several press releases that serve the purpose of being aligned with the people of Norway who find environmental protection very important. At the stage of charging someone, it is not at all obvious that Økokrim has sufficient evidence to cause conviction in court. However, to be fair, later press releases confirm that Økokrim did indeed have sufficient evidence as shown by press releases on March 10, July 6, as well as October 17, 2023.

The third and final concern is “crime deterrence” for which also Økokrim (2023) argue themselves:

Our production of criminal cases provides strong general deterrence, and our delivery of assistance and sharing of expertise to the police districts ensures a good effect of the resources the police and public prosecutors use nationally to combat such crime.

Deterrence is a process in which threatened or actual sanctions discourage criminal acts (Rorie and West, 2022). Deterrence strategy by investigations implies that the authority passes penalties on suspects who never have a chance to defend themselves in court. The penalty is

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suffering from negative public attention, lack of job opportunities, and time spent in detention and interrogation as an accused where they have to explain themselves. The authority then behaves like a court where they punish people. However, that is a role assigned to judges and not to investigators or prosecutors. The authority argues that it is difficult to obtain the necessary information without a thorough investigation. While this is certainly true, a policing principle seems forgotten that an investigation should only be launched when it is somehow obvious that crime has indeed occurred by a criminal.

Deterrence by investigations is a matter of chasing top executives and other elite members in society. An example is the press release on August 22, 2022, regarding Jo Lunder who resigned from the position of chief executive officer at VimpelCom, a mobile phone network operator with headquarters in the Netherlands. After his resignation, Lunder was chased by Økokrim for his alleged knowledge of corruption in Uzbekistan, where several mobile phone companies, including VimpelCom, were competing for mobile phone licenses. Lunder was imprisoned. After having been investigated for several years by Økokrim, the charges against him were dropped. In the meantime, he lost on the market for new chief executive positions because of the ongoing investigation. In the end, in 2022, Lunder had to refund legal expenses to the Norwegian state amounting to NOK 400,000 (about USD 40,000). Oslo district court decided that Lunder had to pay the state to cover part of the legal costs in the compensation case that never came before the court. One month earlier, the former telecom executive withdrew the compensation lawsuit against the state; just before the trial was due to begin (Lund, 2022: 12):

Lunder had put forward a record high compensation claim of up to NOK 600 million, based on past income and expected future income. -It is a family decision. After careful deliberation with the family, I have chosen to withdraw the lawsuit. The case has been a big strain on us for the past seven years; Lunder told the newspaper in

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connection with the compensation case being put to rest. -We have spent a lot of resources over several years, together with the state attorney, on countering Lunder's factual and legal claims, Økokrim chief Pål Lønseth told the newspaper in connection to Lunder withdrawing the compensation claim.

Lunder had put forward three arguments for the state to cover its own legal costs, which would be an exception to the main rule in the disputes act (Lund, 2022: 12):

“The arrest and imprisonment have caused Lunder great and irreparable damage and loss. It is assumed that the state does not dispute it. It is also an indisputable fact that the criminal prosecution was groundless, even if it took the police over two years to reach this conclusion”. “The police withheld a number of key documents and information in connection with the imprisonment case. This was information that the police were aware of when they imprisoned Lunder in October 2015”. The state has refused a reasonable settlement offer. Already prior to the lawsuit, an initiative was taken to dialogue with the state, without it being accommodated. It therefore became necessary to initiate legal action”, writes Lunder's lawyer. Lunder made a settlement offer to the state of “NOK 15 million as a full and complete settlement”.

The settlement offer was put forward by lawyers Sven Eriksrud and Edvard Stulien at law firm Schjødt. The state did not accept it, and the court did the following year assign no weight to Lunder's three arguments. Deterrence strategy by investigation implies here that Lunder received a penalty from Økokrim that was never possible for him to contest in court since Økokrim terminated the case ahead of prosecution. The penalty for Lunder was suffering from negative public attention, lack of job opportunities, and time spent in detention and interrogation as an accused person, who had to explain himself. The press release from Økokrim dated August 22, 2022, seems to celebrate that Lunder had to pay:

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The former CEO of VimpelCom, Jo Lunder, sued the state on the basis of Økokrim's investigation into gross corruption. Prior to the lawsuit, the state's civil rights administration had rejected Lunder's claim for compensation. The case was part of a larger international investigation into corruption in Uzbekistan. The telecommunications company VimpelCom admitted that corruption had been committed, and pays 795 million dollars in fines and forfeiture to the American and Dutch authorities. Økokrim investigated what knowledge Lunder had when he approved a transaction in 2011 in which 30 million dollars was transferred to a company controlled by the daughter of the former president of Uzbekistan. The case was dismissed following the state of the evidence on October 31, 2017. Økokrim takes note that Lunder has withdrawn the lawsuit, where he claimed, among other things, that Økokrim acted negligently when arresting him. We have spent a lot of resources over several years, together with the Government Attorney, to counter Lunder's factual and legal allegations. I assume the other party now realized that our case was so strong that there was reason to withdraw the lawsuit. We believe that Lunder himself bears the risk of the suspicion of corruption, and that Økokrim cannot be blamed for the arrest and presentation for custody.

A similar story could be told about the former mayor reported in press releases on July 4 and July 11, 2022, regarding crime deterrence as a strategy even when someone is found innocent by the court. Another interesting example is the press release on November 30, 2022, where Økokrim suffered defeat and decided not to appeal the verdict. However, the press release indicates that the person is nevertheless guilty despite acquittal in court.

DISCUSSION

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Three focal concerns were identified for the serious fraud office in Norway based on press releases from Økokrim. Offender conviction was the most frequent concern addressed in 46% of the press releases. The most serious conviction of five years in prison was covered by a text of 354 word in the press release on April 14, 2023:

A man in his 40s from Moss has been convicted of gross fraud of NOK 54 million against 77 victims. He has been sentenced to five and a half years in prison. The case is now legally binding, after the Supreme Court has decided not to forward his appeal for consideration. He has also been sentenced to pay compensation to the victims of NOK 60 million. He is also denied the right to run self-employed business for five years from the time he finishes serving his prison sentence.

-There is a special case with many victims. With the Supreme Court's decision, we put an end to an extensive fraud case that has affected many elderly people, says first state prosecutor in Økokrim, Marianne Bender (...)

-It is important that it becomes widely known that such frauds are widespread, and that people must be careful where they invest their savings, says Bender.

The length of this press release is typical for Økokrim. Also, the structure of the press release is typical. The press release has selective elements from the court document and statements from the prosecutor. While a court document tends to be thirty to fifty pages, the selected text in the press release is a few lines as quoted above. Both the text selections and the prosecutor statements are problematic. It is also problematic that the defense got no opportunity to comment on the sentence. First, the text selection is problematic because only sentences that fit in the prosecutor's reasoning are included in the press release. Next, the prosecutor statements are problematic since nobody is questioning the validity of her opinions. Finally, everything presented by the prosecutor should be objective, while defense lawyers are allowed to be subjective. However, the statements by prosecutor Bender do not seem

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objective but rather subjective. For example, there is no support in empirical studies in Norway that “such frauds are widespread” and that the case demonstrates “the professionalism with which they appear”. Therefore, since Bender is subjective, the defense attorney for the convicted man might be included with a statement to create some kind of balance. Such balancing statements are never included in press releases from Økokrim maybe because Økokrim wants to create an impression that Økokrim was obviously right all the way regarding offender conviction.

Impression management was the second most frequent focal concern addressed in 35% of the press releases. An example might be the press release on October 12, 2023, where Økokrim management somehow interferes with political decision-making by stating that Økokrim is against limitation period on confiscation claims. They argued that asset recovery takes time. However, as insiders in the Norwegian criminal justice system are aware of regarding Økokrim, the police unit works at their own pace that is often very slow (Gottschalk, 2023a, 2023b).

The literature review mentioned overconfidence and press release tone that might be stronger among firms with good operating performance (Filip et al., 2022; Gong, 2023). It is reasonable to ask whether overconfidence and excessive press release tone are found in the large fraction (35%) of the press releases having impression management as their focal concern. It does indeed seem that Økokrim themselves believe that they have good operating performance.

The impression of being a global actor with extensive cooperation with other law enforcement agencies is exemplified in the press release the day before regarding Økokrim having campaigned against organized fraudsters in Romania:

Yesterday, the Romanian authorities took action in Romania on behalf of Økokrim, where three Romanian men were arrested for serious fraud and identity theft. Økokrim

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will request the extradition of two of the accused to Norway for prosecution. Since January this year, Økokrim has investigated a large number of frauds committed against at least 400 Norwegians after receiving a report from the national roads administration. The total loss is probably many millions of kroner. 40 Romanian police officers took part in a coordinated action on Tuesday this week. A crew from Økokrim has been present during the operation and the case will be further investigated in Norway. Økokrim will request the extradition of two of the accused Romanian citizens to Norway for prosecution.

The impression management here is not only emphasizing international police cooperation. Together with other messages, Økokrim might seem to support the idea that most crimes come from bad people abroad. External attributions place the cause of negative events on external factors such as foreigners doing bad things in Norway. This is in line with many politicians in Norway. Surprisingly many inmates in Norwegian prisons have foreign origins that might partly be explained by where the police look for criminals. Attribution is generally about how one makes judgments about responsibility and causality (Piening et al., 2020). The claim that “in the last year, there has been a significant growth in digital fraud, and there are now so many frauds that it has become a societal problem” might be somewhat unfounded. Yet it aligns with people’s perceptions of digital risks such as the abuse of artificial intelligence. Generally, the press releases assigned to impression management in the table seems to serve the purpose of strengthening Økokrim’s legitimacy by being conformant with stakeholder views. Legitimacy refers to alignment to social norms, values, and expectations (Saenz, 2019). Conformance refers to meeting and potentially exceeding societal obligations. Conformance characterizes voluntary actions that constitute a response to social and normative expectations (Durand et al., 2019).

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Crime deterrence was the third and least frequent focal concern addressed in 19% of the press releases. Crime deterrence was exemplified above by the case of Jo Lunder. Another example is the press release on October 13, 2023, when Økokrim charged a woman with hiding of the husband's embezzlement. The signal from Økokrim is an attention at followers in crime as well as the gender perspective. Followers in crime may claim obedience (Mawritz et al., 2017), threats by humor (Yam et al. 2018), shame and guilt if they fail to support their leaders' actions (Fehr et al., 2015), and suppression of negative emotions such as disappointment, uncertainty, and annoyance (Glasø and Einarsen, 2008; Gottfredson et al. 2020). Followers would like the leader to have confidence in their ability and motivation that can be achieved by loyalty, support, respect, and obligation (Andersen, 2022). The deterrent effect of the press release is that Økokrim simply does not accept those kinds of justifications and excuses. The gender perspective is also a crime deterrence signaling issue in this press release as Økokrim traditionally has focused on the central actors in white-collar and corporate crime and ignored those in the periphery. Typically, men have been central while women have been peripheral. In this press release crime deterrence occurs in the form of saying that you cannot hide behind your husband if you were somehow involved yourself. Generally, research suggests that women are more seldomly suspected of crime (Benson and Gottschalk, 2015). An avenue for future research is the extent to which press releases are in fact effective in reaching the intended purposes. There is certainly a relevant question what works and what does not work when a serious fraud office publishes press releases as indicated in this article. Furthermore, there are limitations to this research that might encourage future research. For example, the sample size of 69 press releases over a period of 18 months is very small when claiming that there is little reason to doubt their representativeness. Another example is the focus on the reception of press releases versus their content. To be consistent with the aim of analyzing the content of law enforcement releases, future research might focus more

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exclusively on the content of press releases. The manipulation of press releases might also be considered (Hock, 2021; Hock and David-Barrett, 2023). An alternative to the thematic analysis of identifying themes might be to have prefixed themes and count instances for each theme.

CONCLUSION

Serious fraud offices such as the Norwegian national authority for investigation and prosecution of economic and environmental crime (Økokrim) are facing many challenges when combatting white-collar and corporate crime. Press releases represent an element of facing such challenges. This article has reviewed sixty-nine press releases published by the Norwegian Økokrim by identifying focal concerns in these messages. Three themes emerged: offender conviction, impression management, and crime deterrence. Offender prosecution followed by offender conviction is at the core of Økokrim's business. Impression management serves the purpose of emphasizing the key role of the national authority in society. The subjective perception of detection and prosecution by potential offenders can be influenced by crime deterrence messages.

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APPENDIX

DATE	PRESS RELEASE HEADING	CONCERN	MESSAGE
20.06.2022	New edition of Økokrim's environmental magazine released	Impression management	Environmental commitment
23.06.2022	Økokrim wants to recover assets from Russian state citizen	Impression management	Community responsibility
04.07.2022	Mayor acquitted of corruption charges in court	Crime deterrence	Still somewhat suspected
11.07.2022	Mayor acquitted of corruption charges in court	Crime deterrence	Still somewhat suspected
22.08.2022	Former VimpelCom CEO cancelled compensation demand	Crime deterrence	Not completely innocent
23.08.2022	Sentence and new prosecution in money laundering affair	Offender conviction	Police case endurance
14.09.2022	Sentenced to prison for serious fraud in the Nordic case	Offender conviction	Seriousness of crime
04.10.2022	Man charged with involvement in fluoride-carrying gas trade	Impression management	Crime detection ability
10.10.2022	Convicted of using firm's credit card for private expenses	Offender conviction	Protecting businesses
02.11.2022	Indictment for bankruptcy fraud formulated	Impression management	Sufficient evidence at hand
04.11.2022	Convicted to prison for participation at money laundering	Offender conviction	Police case endurance
07.11.2022	Attorney and nurse charged with embezzlement	Crime deterrence	Terrible accusations
16.11.2022	Tax evasion over a period of six years	Offender conviction	Ability to obtain evidence
30.11.2022	Økokrim does not appeal verdict against soccer player	Crime deterrence	Not really innocent
30.11.2022	National risk assessment 2022 by Økokrim	Impression management	Critical role in crime fighting
02.12.2022	Convicted to prison for Covid-19 fraud of government subsidies	Offender conviction	Protection of public interests

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09.12.2022	King crab conviction for illegal trade	Offender conviction	Trade in seafood needs protection
04.01.2023	The district court has decided on asset recovery from Russian citizen	Offender conviction	Proceeds from crime seized
20.01.2023	The Lycamobile case: Both prison and fine	Offender conviction	Crime does not pay at all
02.02.2023	Two seafood exporters fined for export of king crabs	Offender conviction	Whistleblower trusts Økokrim
08.02.2023	Record number of reports of digital fraud against individuals	Impression management	Magnitude of crime increasing
15.02.2023	Two convicted of tax evasion of the government scheme	Offender conviction	Protection of public funds
16.02.2023	Record high seizure of crypto money in the Axie case	Impression management	Understanding of crypto technology
20.02.2023	Conviction in the Crew Gold case for fraud against shareholders	Offender conviction	Protection of the stock market
09.03.2023	Business man convicted of money laundering	Offender conviction	Proceeds of crime detected
10.03.2023	Man convicted for involvement in fluoride-carrying gas trade	Offender conviction	Environmental crime for profit
20.03.2023	Two men convicted of money laundering of proceeds	Offender conviction	Tracking of crime proceeds
24.03.2023	Man convicted of fraud against 94 year old woman	Offender conviction	Protection of the elderly
30.03.2023	A man was convicted in a court of appeal for tax evasion	Offender conviction	Protecting fair tax system
13.04.2023	Convicted of investment fraud against 77 victims	Offender conviction	Responsibility for the community
17.04.2023	The former president of the International Biathlon Union	Impression management	International police work
28.04.2023	Worried that offenders claim to be police or bank clerks	Impression management	Social responsibility
02.05.2023	Two persons convicted of insider trading at Aker Horizon	Offender conviction	Protecting business interests

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22.05.2023	Charge and fine at construction work in Færder municipality	Offender conviction	Protection of public interests
24.05.2023	Convicted to prison for money laundering of proceeds from fraud	Offender conviction	Disclosure of concealment
26.05.2023	Chairperson charged with bankruptcy fraud	Crime deterrence	The elite does not escape attention
02.06.2023	An increasing number of suspicious transactions reported to Økokrim	Impression management	Critical role in fighting crime
13.06.2023	Økokrim investigating attorney after suspicion of corruption	Crime deterrence	Attorneys abuse their positions
14.06.2023	Digital fraud harms trust in society according to report	Impression management	Technological competence
26.06.2023	Warning against criminal craftsmen on your door	Impression management	Protecting little people
27.06.2023	Reduced punishment for corruption in the health care sector	Offender conviction	Protecting market mechanisms
03.07.2023	Økokrim with reminder: Leave wild animals alone	Impression management	Wildlife is important to us
06.07.2023	Økokrim fines customer who bought illegal fluoride gas	Crime deterrence	Pollution is a major concern
20.7.2023	Two men charged with property damage, fraud, and tax evasion	Crime deterrence	Professional police work
08.08.2023	Convicted of money laundering in the delivery van industry	Offender conviction	Important to avoid laundering
08.08.2023	Owner of delivery van company convicted of tax evasion	Offender conviction	High tax morale is important
21.08.2023	Økokrim open investigation into former government minister	Impression management	Økokrim protects democracy
30.08.2023	Økokrim does not open investigation into the foreign minister	Impression management	Økokrim reviews elite members
30.08.2023	Økokrim chief is biased in the foreign minister case	Impression management	High standards for integrity
31.08.2023	Økokrim chief is biased in the foreign minister case	Impression management	High standards for accountability

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31.08.2023	There is no suspicion of economic crime by the foreign minister	Impression management	High standards in the profession
06.09.2023	More severe conviction for serious fraud	Offender conviction	Professional police work
07.09.2023	Økokrim not initiating investigation against the foreign minister	Impression management	Awareness of the public debate
08.09.2023	Two persons convicted and two acquitted in the same criminal case	Offender conviction	Innocent until proven guilty
22.09.2023	Økokrim takes over a case from the national security policing	Impression management	Effective police cooperation
03.10.2023	One person sentenced to prison for insider trading	Offender conviction	Stock exchange protection
05.10.2023	Five persons convicted in corruption at municipal housing	Offender conviction	Following up media disclosures
11.10.2023	Økokrim has campaigned against organized fraudsters in Romania	Impression management	International cooperation
12.10.2023	Økokrim is against limitation period on confiscation claims	Impression management	Political statement
12.10.2023	New modus of fraud is detected in Norway	Crime deterrence	Signaling competence
13.10.2023	Woman charged with hiding of husband's embezzlement	Crime deterrence	Attention at followers in crime
17.10.2023	Another person convicted of fluoride holding gas purchases	Offender conviction	Pollution bad for the environment
19.10.2023	Two Lithuanians charged with labor market crime	Crime deterrence	Criminal foreigners
27.10.2023	Former lawyer and nurse convicted of embezzlement	Offender conviction	Professional police work
30.10.2023	Illegal cutting down trees can be serious environmental crime	Crime deterrence	Nature conservation
31.10.2023	Decision to open investigation against former prime minister	Impression management	Claiming important role
02.11.2023	Press briefing regarding suspicions against former prime minister	Impression management	Playing judge in society

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06.11.2023	44-year-old man convicted for money laundering in king crab case	Offender conviction	Local police cooperation
14.11.2023	Executive at courier company sentenced to prison	Offender conviction	Trusting media disclosure

Table: *Press releases issued by Norwegian Økokrim from June 2022 to November 2023*