‘PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED?’

MALTA’S POLITICAL PARTY-OWNED MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY

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‘Preaching to the Converted?’
Malta’s Political Party-Owned Media and Public Relations Strategy

by Reuben Sciberras

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Declaration

This work is an original document composed by the undersigned. It has not been accepted in any previous applications for a degree. All the work recorded in this document was carried out by the undersigned. All verbatim extracts have been distinguished by quotation marks and the information sources have been specifically and duly acknowledged.

Signed:

Date: 14th May 2010
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who made this journey with me. It is a source of joy and fulfilment to know that one’s life is enriched by the presence and support of various people. To all of you who stood by me through thick and thin, from beginning to end, my word of thanks is surely not enough, but I still say it as a mere drop in the ocean of gratitude.

I will not single out any one as omissions can easily occur and the whole exercise will then end up being counter-productive. But there is always an exception, and this is my tutor, Dr Julia Jahansoozi. She was there for me throughout, patiently guiding my erratic and often convoluted methods of working my way through this Dissertation.

Any positive outcome from this study is surely the result of her intervention, whereas all the deficiencies and shortcomings are but mine, and mine alone.
To my family
Abstract

Title of Document: ‘Preaching to the Converted?’ - Malta’s Political Party-Owned Media and Public Relations Strategy

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The media scene in Malta over the past 20 years has seen a rather unique development wherein the two major political parties have developed a fully-fledged media operation (broadcast, print and online) as part of their communication strategy to target voters.

This study asks whether these party-owned media organisations are addressing all their publics which their owners need to address as a political party, as well as whether the journalists working with these politically-owned media organisations feel part of the owning party’s PR effort. The third question is whether the parties are cognisant that they could be ‘preaching to the converted’, whilst not focusing enough on other publics, such as alienated party supporters, floating voters and disillusioned supporters of the opposing party.
The study is framed within existing theories on various media and political communication issues. These include the type of media model present in Malta, the power structures affecting media in the context of political control from within the owning organisation as well as the credibility and reputation of the media as seen by the voters as well as by the journalists who work within. It also discusses the communication models being used by the political parties in relation to their audience/voters, and the latter’s presumed loyalty towards the former.

The results of the study show that the strength of the independent media by far exceeds any effort of the politically-owned media. As such, the political parties are investing a lot of time and money in their own media organisation where they not only are preaching to the converted, but also only to a fraction of those loyal party supporters.

It is argued that the political parties need to invest in new and innovative means to assist them in addressing the independent media which are crucial in their quest to increase voter support.
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Chapter 1 – The Scenario

1.1 Introduction

The research in this Dissertation focuses on the rather unique situation in the Maltese media, where the two major political parties each have their own media organisations which are used to spearhead their ongoing public relations activity.

1.2 The Background

The media model which has predominantly evolved in the Maltese Islands is the Polarised Pluralist Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: p.67), which is also aptly called “Mediterranean” (ibid.), wherein

“Freedom of the press and the development of commercial media industries generally came late...Political parallelism tends to be high; the press is marked by a strong focus on political life, external pluralism, and a tradition of commentary-oriented or advocacy journalism persists more strongly than in other parts of Europe. Instrumentalisation of the media by the government, by political parties, and by industrialists with political ties is common.”

(ibid.: p.73)

This epitomises the situation in Malta which has a system which Lijphart (1984, 1999 cited in Hallin & Mancini, 2004: p.50) describes as a majoritarian democracy. Malta is a good example of this with key elements, such as a two-party system, a plurality voting system, the concentration of power lying with the party which wins the elections, a dominance by Cabinet, and above all, a clear distinction between government and opposition (ibid.: 51).
There are two main political parties in Malta. The *Partit Nazzjonalista* – PN (Nationalist Party) – is mostly centre-right, with a conservative and Christian-Democrat policy. It is currently enjoying a third consecutive mandate, won in March 2008. The Opposition party *Partit Laburista* – PL (Labour Party) – is centre-left, with a self-acclaimed\(^1\) progressive and moderate policy. Barring 22 months in government between 1996 and 1998, the PL has been in Opposition for 23 years (since 1987).

These two parties are the only ones represented in Parliament and approximately equally share the following of the local electorate, with a maximum of a two-point swing determining election winners every five years or so. There are a number of other very small parties, the most sizeable one being *Alternattiva Demokratika* (AD) – the local Greens – with 1.3% of votes obtained in the 2008 General Elections\(^2\).

This polarised situation\(^3\) is exacerbated further as both the PN and the PL each have a media organisation comprising of a TV and radio station – (*NET TV & Radio 101 Digital* for the former, and *One TV* and *One Radio* for the latter). The TV stations are on free-to-air terrestrial platform, digital terrestrial as well as cable distribution. None of the very small parties own any media operations.\(^4\)

The PN publishes a daily and a Sunday newspaper – both in Maltese – whereas the PL publishes a Sunday newspaper, also in Maltese. However, another daily

\[^1\] http://www.mlp.org.mt
\[^3\] See http://www.maltadata.com/loyal.htm for background reading into Maltese political scene and electoral results
\[^4\] See http://www.aboutmalta.com/news/MediainMalta.htm for background reading into Maltese media scene
newspaper and a Sunday newspaper in Maltese, published by the General Workers’ Union (GWU), overtly lean towards the PL. Both parties have an online presence with a real-time news-portal – the PN’s www.maltarightnow.com (which is both in English and Maltese) and the PL’s www.maltastar.com (which is in English).

The media scene in Malta has undergone tremendous changes over the past 20 years, mostly due to the coming into force of the Broadcasting Act in 1991, which effectively liberalised the sector. The shift from a monopolised State broadcasting corporation (comprising of one TV channel and two radio frequencies) to a wide-range of TV and radio stations was the catalyst for the way media ownership and operation had evolved.

In the case of State broadcasting, again, the Mediterranean model is clearly depicted wherein “political logic tends to play a large role in broadcasting... particularly in news and public affairs programming... the news agenda is not considered to be governed purely by journalistic judgements of “newsworthiness,” but is a question of political policy” (ibid.: 109).

There are various other media – both print and broadcast – which can be considered as ‘independent’ – the term ‘independent’ being used purposely as a direct contraposition to those media owned by a political organisation. Indeed, “no serious media analyst would argue that journalism anywhere in the world is literally neutral... commercial media can be politically partisan, and non-

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5 From 1978 to 1992 the GWU was statutorily joined with the MLP and even had a representative on the Cabinet of Ministers (Campbell, 1992: 294-296)
7 http://www.ba-malta.org/the-authority
commercial media – even those supported by political parties – can adopt norms of political balance” (ibid.: 26).

1.3 The Research

This research aims to examine whether the party-owned media as part of a wider PR strategy works as well as the political parties expect it to or would like it to work. It will be addressing whether the politically-owned media organisations are addressing all the publics which their owners need to focus on as a political party; as well as delving into whether the journalists working with these politically-owned media organisations feel part of the owning party’s PR effort.

Moreover, this research will be analysing whether the parties could be ‘preaching to the converted’, whilst not focusing enough on other publics, such as alienated party supporters, floating voters and disillusioned supporters of the opposing party.

In other words, the political parties could be adopting the simple transmission model of communication (McQuail, 2005), thus implying that their media is so powerful that they can shoot or inject, as it were, their messages directly into the mind of the ‘weak’ and ‘powerless’ audience.

Indeed, the Usage and Gratification Theory – where audiences “play an active role in choosing and using the media” (Lane, 2001) – is already taking place. This implies that those loyal to their party are seeking their party’s media to obtain news and information. Should this be the case, as will be argued in this research, there are no gains for either party as they are literally ‘preaching to the converted’, and mostly addressing those who are already within their fold.
The problem which the political parties could be facing is that those who are floating voters and/or without any particular party allegiance are also seeking a media source which best fulfils their needs, with the possibility – and probability – that the media source they are seeking and finding is not a party-owned one. The narrow gap (1,580 votes) with which the PN won the last general elections in 2008 with 143,468 votes (49.3%) against the PL’s 141,888 votes (48.7%)\(^8\) is evidence enough that both parties need to assess and address the floating voters, their needs and the media sources they choose.

1.4 Conclusion

This research will try to examine the quasi-surreal extension of the notion discussed by L’Etang when she states that “there is often... an overdependence on media within PR strategies and campaigns and a lack of imagination in relation to other media, or to networking and interpersonal communication. But fundamentally, the major flaw seems to arise from a lack of understanding of the media environment, its pressures and its autonomy” (L’Etang, 2008: 119-120). The two major political parties in Malta are taking this notion to a new extreme.

This is due to the inherent editorial control stemming from ownership, leading to the political party exerting pressure to eliminate autonomy even at the expense of objectivity. This, in turn, is negatively affecting the public’s perception of the party-owned media and should the evidence point in that direction, their credibility is being whittled away for the benefit of independent media.

\(^8\) http://www.doi.gov.mt/EN/press_releases/2008/03/pr0453.asp
In the next Chapter, one can find a Literature Review on the various theoretical aspects of the Dissertation. Chapter 3 then deals with the Research methods adopted whereas Chapter 4 is a detailed account of the findings. This is followed by a discussion on the findings in Chapter 5, and the concluding remarks in Chapter 6.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter will explore the theoretical aspect of this research, and will discuss various literatures on the thematics which affect the issues being discussed in this Dissertation. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, the questions underpinning this research focus on three main topics, namely whether all publics are being addressed by the politically-owned media – including issues of credibility and legitimacy; the role of the journalists who work with this media: and whether the independent media are being exploited enough by the political parties in their PR strategy.

In this Review, issues such as changes in media landscape; power structures affecting media behaviour; the credibility, legitimacy and reputation of the media; Political PR strategy and the floating voter and the issue of loyalty, will be tackled.

2.2 Changes in Media Landscape

The media landscape in Malta is unique because it underwent singular events which shaped the small island state and consequently its media. In the 1980s, Malta’s media landscape was very poor, both in quality and quantity. Before 1991 – due to legislation which prohibited pluralism – there was only one television station, i.e. state broadcasting.

Coupled with this, Malta had only one daily newspaper in English and two in Maltese, apart from other weeklies. It is this vacuum which first prompted the political parties to enhance their existent print media portfolio and invest in their
own radio and TV station, once legislation was enacted, in 1991, to permit such initiatives.

Needless to say, Malta was not immune to changes brought about by the digital era. Fidler argues that the new media have not emerged independently and spontaneously but from what he terms as the mediamorphosis. In other words, the change from within, which ‘old media’ are going through (Fidler, 1997: p.23). Technological advances in the digital age have brought about the fusion of TV with internet, where news portals have become the order of the day and the first to break the news. In this regard, Malta is no exception, and the overwhelming success enjoyed by news portals such as www.timesofmalta.com⁹ — attest to the relevance these have for the public.

2.3 Power structures affecting media

It is within the particular context of this media landscape that it is important to discuss the way certain powers affect media behaviour. The liberalist-pluralist approach “represents the media as independent of state and political, economic and social interest” (Williams, 2003: p. 86), and makes a distinction between private and publicly owned media organisations in so far as the relevance and demands of advertising and consumption on their operations.

This distinction leads to the notion that in the case of privately-owned media, the importance of the audience is paramount when it comes to the determination of media content. This view of what ultimately makes the media act in the way it does is also supported by journalists themselves who argue that the decisions taken by

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⁹ ranked no.8 in Malta (first website hosted in Malta) by Alexa:
http://www.alex.com/topsites/countries/MT
the media “would be nothing without the ratification of readers” (Whale, 1980; as cited in Williams, 2003: p.86).

On the other hand, Marxist theorists argue that “public and private media may be differently constituted but they are both subject to the pressures of the market” (Williams, 2003: p.87), as they have to compete within that same market, no matter how much public media is state-funded.

In the case of the Maltese media, the latter is more or less the case, as confirmed by the then Chairman of the Broadcasting Authority10, Chief Justice Emeritus Dr Joseph Said Pullicino, in his message for the 2004 Annual Report, who had commented thus:

“Apart from some notable exceptions, the approach is still essentially populist both in choice of subject and in treatment. Economic considerations remain the overall determining factor in programming and this inevitably begets sensationalism and a general lowering of standards.”\(^{11}\)

This is because, notwithstanding the pressures of balancing the books and making ends meet, the party-owned media are ready to incur losses in order to continue their mission. This has been the case for a number of years. Moreover, it is of great consequence at this juncture to point out that the fact that political parties in Malta have their own media organisations has also affected the debate on state-funding of political parties, wherein the financial situation of the respective media organisations is often interchanged with that of the owning political party.

10 The national broadcasting watchdog was established on September 29, 1961. Its independence “was then further safeguarded through a number of constitutional provisions when Malta became independent in 1964.” - http://www.ba-malta.org/the-authority
This somewhat-complicated setting shifts the balance, i.e. powers that affect any media organisation from the outside, are now in control from within. All over the world, politicians employ staff, professional consultants and advisors to find ways and means through which they can obtain coverage, time on air and newspaper column inches which talk about them, their political achievements as well as help them circumnavigate any unpleasant issues stemming from their work (Negrine, 2008; p.71-72).

In the case of the PL and PN, they have their own media which they can rely on to do exactly what politicians in other countries have to pay PR consultants and gurus to do for them.

Indeed, these political parties are using their own media, on a daily basis, to try and influence public beliefs, preferences and choices. This can be tantamount to propaganda, which Elliott (1975) describes as “a statement which is believed to be insincere or untrue, and designed to impress the public rather than to reach the truth or bring about a genuine understanding between opposing governments or parties” (Elliott, 1975; as cited in Oliver, 2007: p.120).

This epitomises what the Maltese political parties are doing, as they have the tools at their disposal to shape reports and coverages suit their message, allowing them to choose what to report, how to report and when to report it.

This propaganda role which is being carried out by the party-owned media can be easily summed up in American journalist Joe McGinness’ words, as a “powerful
means of seducing voters to vote for images of candidates rather than the candidates themselves” (Aronson & Pratkanis, 2004: p.140).

This runs contrary to the way political PR should be carried out in contrast to the propaganda model. It is here that the notion of persuasion sets in:

“Propaganda is a form of communication that is different from persuasion because it attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist. Persuasion is interactive and attempts to satisfy the needs of both persuader and persuadee.”

(Jowett and O’Donell, 1986; as cited in L’Etang, 2008: p.33)

The possibility of exerting this type of control in a very small country like Malta is exacerbating the political debate. In an environment where a political party has the ability within its structures to “seduce voters”, the political messages being used for political PR are not only taking place in the run up to an election campaign, but on a regular basis, seven days a week. Oates describes election campaigns as times during which the media, candidates and the public “intersect... when politics become defined more as a ‘horse race’... than as a way of organising political institutions for the long-term good of society” (Oates, 2007: p.89-90). The political scene in Malta is in this kind of state on a perpetual basis, and most of it is due to the high politically-biased content in the party-owned media.

This contrasts sharply with how the media works and operates in other countries. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, the media model in Malta is predominantly the Mediterranean Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: p.73); as opposed to the Democratic Corporatist Model (ibid.: p.74) and the Liberal Model (ibid.: p.75).
The Democratic Corporatist Model is characterised by early development of freedom of the press, a consensus government and organised pluralism (ibid. p. 68) highlighted by the fact that in the past there were strong party newspapers. The media in Malta could be straddling this model too. The country which can be considered as closest to Malta, in terms of political influence on media operations, is Italy. The situation in Italy has relevance for the Maltese media model, as one needs to keep in mind the proximity of Italy to Malta, as well as the fact that Italian TV channels could – and can still – be seen by Maltese viewers.

In so far as the Liberal Model (ibid.: p.75) is concerned, this is only partially applicable to those media in Malta which can be termed as ‘independent’. The “internal pluralism” (ibid.: p.75) which is associated with this model is mainly present in State television and a number of newspapers. In the case of State television, the internal pluralism is more of an internal balance – a *par conditio* of sorts – which is more concerned with equality in timings afforded to each of the two political parties and less with political content.

It is interesting to note that the delayed development of liberalism in the Maltese media scene could also be attributed to the “*strong role of political parties once the transition to democracy*” was achieved, “*a continuing importance of clientelism, and a weaker development of rational-legal authority*” (ibid.: p.74). The

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12 The *lottizzazzione* (party-sharing) of state broadcaster RAI’s three TV stations between the three most popular political parties (Hibberd, 2008: p.101) in the 1980s, made it possible for the Italian political parties, namely the *Democrazia Cristiana* for RAI UNO, *Partito Socialista* for RAI DUE, and *Partito Comunista* for RAI TRE (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: p.108) to actually have control over editorial policy and content.

13 Equal terms

14 The role to oversee such matters lies with the Malta Broadcasting Authority as it is tasked to ensure “*the preservation of due impartiality in respect of matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy, and fairly apportion broadcasting facilities and time between persons belonging to different political parties*” www.ba-malta.org/home
omnipresent role played by the political parties in the media world to this very day, makes Malta a unique variable to the Mediterranean media model.

As far as print media is concerned, four newspapers, namely The Times of Malta, The Malta Independent, MaltaToday and Illum are the only ones which have elements that are reflective of the Liberal Model, such as journalistic autonomy which tends to produce items which are more information-oriented and less of a commentary (ibid.: p.75).

2.4 Credibility and reputation of media

The predominant media model in Malta and the power structures affecting it lead the discussion to an important consideration on the way they operate: on their credibility and reputation. If the political class is directly or indirectly involved in the management of the newsroom, how credible is the information being communicated and how reputable is the media organisation in question?

“Accessible information for most people is what is presented by news media... this is the basis of the priming hypothesis.” (Price Dillard & Pfau, 2002: 71) Priming here means that in any given news report, some data and considerations are stressed, including timing and repetition, at the expense of others (ibid.: p.69).

The consideration of the power of persuasion, which is directly available to the political parties through their own media, is crucial, as in turn, it will affect: (a) the way journalists and editors in their employ will behave; (b) the work carried out by journalists, (c) the consequential credibility or lack of which their same work triggers in their readers/audience; and (d) their reputation as professionals. As
already mentioned afore, persuasion denotes a two-way communication rather than the one way propaganda model. But what is persuasion?

L’Etang (2008) argues that persuasion “is the intention to achieve a particular response... this, according to many theorists... distinguishes persuasive communication from communication, although some see communication and persuasive communication as synonymous (Miller, 2002)” (L’Etang, 2008: p.141). Indeed, Miller (1989, as cited by Messina, 2007) opines that persuasion is simply how we manage “our environment to achieve preferred outcomes. He refers to control in an amoral sense, ‘just as breathing and eating is amoral; it is an inevitable aspect of being alive’”.

Moreover, Messina opts to separate persuasion from propaganda by qualifying it as “ethical persuasion” and adopts Marlin’s definition as “an attempt through communication to influence knowledge, attitude or behaviour of an audience through presentation of a view that addresses and allows the audience to make voluntary, informed, rational and reflective judgements” (ibid.).

The ‘ethical’ qualification underlined by Messina seems to be needed as even Grunig and Hunt (1984, as cited in Tench & Yeomans, 2006; p. 271) are convinced that persuasion is not the best model possible and in fact insert it in their asymmetrical model, which is a kind of second best. Moloney (2000, ibid.) concurs with this interpretation, whereas Jaksa and Pritchard (1994, ibid.) insist that “it cannot be seriously maintained that all persuasion is bad and undesirable” (ibid.).
This debate affects the issue of political communication as persuasion is considered as an integral part of it. Perloff (2002) states that “if we want to understand political campaign persuasion, we must appreciate that it is a two headed beast that is part politics and part persuasion.” (in Price Dillard & Pfau, 2002: p.606). He goes on to argue that persuasion in politics is different to persuasion in other “arenas”, as politics involves assumptions about the relationship between citizens and leaders, “assumptions that theoretically transform individuals from message recipients to participants in a democratic deliberation about policies and people” (ibid.).

In the case under review in this study, the communication model being adopted by the political parties through their own media is still more that of propaganda rather than that of persuasion. Negrine (2008: p.22) argues that “political parties are organisations that change over time” in the way they deal with their members, the media and society in general. He quotes Norris’ typology of the evolution of campaign communications (ibid.: p.24) where the role of the media has developed over time from being partisan, up to the 1950s, to the post modern era of electronic means. This contrasts sharply with the Maltese scene where part of the media is as unabashedly biased due to it being completely owned by the political parties themselves.

This consideration leads us back to the issue of credibility. O’Keefe (2002) identified two key elements as useful terms when discussing credibility, which are ‘expertise’ and ‘trustworthiness’ (O’Keefe, 2002: p.182). Both these elements can suffer bias: the former is a bias due to lack of information, whereas the latter “refers to the belief that a communicator’s willingness to convey an accurate version of external reality is compromised” (ibid.: p.183).
Franklin discusses what he terms as “strategic complementarity of interests” (Cottle, 2003: p.47) as the media fulfils a priceless role for politicians and vice-versa. But in our case, the interests of politicians and their own media are one and the same. Consequentially, these same considerations will impinge on the credibility and reputation of the media organisation itself. This is due to the fact that the media have a very important role to play in reporting objectively as “objectivity, and the related concepts of impartiality and balance, became the means by which to assess the provision of news” (Williams, 2003: p.125). McNair (2007) states that as political communication is mostly mediated communication, “the media alter the message, in their roles as reporters and commentators on it. They are, therefore... political actors in their own right” (McNair, 2007: p.27). By means of this role, liberal democratic theory assigns a key role to the media, where “historically, the mass media were heralded as the ultimate instruments of democracy” (Nimmo and Combs, 1992, as cited in McNair, 2007: p.46). But how can this be the case in Malta if part of the media is owned by a political party and it is thus used to control the political environment?

Wolfsfeld (2003) discusses the three variables through which the political class can control the political environment: “the ability to initiate and control events; the ability to regulate the flow of information; and the ability to mobilise elite support” (Wolfsfeld, cited in Cottle, 2003: p.87). Political parties in Malta are trying to achieve this through their own media, to the detriment of independent media and consequently to the floating voter (see 2.5 hereunder) and as a result, they are found to be inadequate on the issue of ‘trustworthiness’. When discussing credibility, one must also refer to legitimacy, in other words, the justification of a particular behaviour according to a given set of rules. Two of the most important roles which
should be carried out by the media, i.e. gate-keeping (the sifting through all the raw data at the news desk and deciding what is to be broadcast/printed) and access (to important networking and coverage) (Rosengren, 2006: p.146-149) are in direct control of those who usually seek to obtain them, namely the political parties.

Thus, biased and partisan reporting might be eroding the credibility and legitimacy of the media organisation in question and so, having a negative effect on the political party which owns it. This leads one to ponder on whether the political party’s adopted PR strategy, part of which makes use of the party’s own media, is achieving the desired aim, as it should be constantly managing and boosting its reputation and not undermining it.

2.5 Political PR Strategy and the Floating Voter

Brissenden and Moloney (2005) carried out a study after the 2005 General Elections in the UK, exploring the role of the media in so far as ‘spin’ is concerned. It is argued that the UK in recent years has seen the media respond to political Public Relations with so-called 'meta-communication', wherein, the media not only report the political content, but also the way this content has been transmitted to them. This frames the information in a particular context, via which, the media is disclosing the scenario and enabling audiences and readers to know more about the background, thus empowering them to be able to make a better value judgement. Whilst this is also occurring in Malta in certain instances with the non-politically owned media, one cannot say that it is happening in the case of the party-owned media as the selection criteria of who and what to report is traced back to the interests of the political party which owns that medium.
Williams argues that “the absence of objectivity came to be equated with bias” (Williams, 2003: p. 125). Notwithstanding the much sought journalistic dictum that “Comment is free but facts are sacred”\textsuperscript{15}, the situation of the politically-owned media in Malta is clear \textit{a priori}, and no matter how biased, reporting on that media is clear for the viewer/listener/reader in so far as the agenda of the owning party is also evident.

This apparent bias might also be adversely affecting the reputation of the political parties which own them – especially with the floating voter. Thus, whereas it is clear that the parties’ PR strategy is relying on its own media to address the general public and to communicate its message; this PR strategy has to address the repercussions of such a course of action.

In spite of the uniqueness of the situation of party-owned media organisations in Malta, one must also put this political PR strategy in a wider context to understand it from a broader perspective. Pfetsch identifies four possible types of political communication cultures coming out of the different permutations possible through “the combination of differences in the self-image of political communication actors (distance versus proximity) and the orientation of political public relations (media logic versus political logic)” (Pfetsch, 2004, cited in Esser, 2004: p.353). The first one is a media-oriented culture wherein the rules of the games are based on media exigencies, the second is based on the parameters set by public relations requirements, the third one is based on the rules set by politicians, and the fourth one is that where political spokespersons use media rules to achieve their own goals. As already mentioned, proximity between the political communicator and the

\textsuperscript{15} \url{http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2002/nov/29/1}
media is crucial in all these four models. In the case under discussion, this proximity is totally non-existent as the politician and the media form part of one organisation.

This biased content on the party-owned media is giving rise to another relevant consideration, i.e. the reliance of Maltese political parties on independent media organisations to address key sectors of the electorate. Bugelli’s study of 2005 highlights the fact that the independent media in Malta is crucial for the political parties to reach the floating voter in an intelligent and credible way. His hypothesis – which was supported by the evidence carried out in his study – was that “in the Maltese political media environment, there exists a strong relationship between the English language independent print media, and the loosely bound floating voters, whose periodical swings determine the course of elections” (Bugelli, 2005: p.42). In my opinion, this confirms that the party-owned media is not succeeding in dealing properly with the independent media.

McQuail insists that what one has to discover is not whether the media has power and how it works, but “who has access to the use of this power” (Graber, 2007: p.33). He substantiates his statement by probing into the ownership and control of the media, whilst insisting that control over a medium does not necessarily confer power over people (ibid.).

The case under review will provide enough evidence that control over the media does not necessarily mean that people – mostly the floating voters referred to in Bugelli’s research – are being convinced by what the party-owned media is saying.
In other words, party media control does not automatically bring about the much-needed credibility and trustworthiness to convince voters.

This is important for our discussion as it facilitates the analysis of whether the choice of the political parties to utilise their own media in their PR strategy is as effective as they want it or wish it to be. L’Etang (2008) discusses political communication as

“carried out by political parties in and out of power both internally and externally. It encompasses media relations, personal public relations..., speech writing and political marketing... Media relations is sometimes confusingly referred to as media management, thus implying the nefarious spin-doctor or even connoting the magical work of the witch doctor, whereas in fact media management is a distinct sub-discipline of media sociology and management... Political public relations cuts across all these activities and intersects with public affairs work on behalf of political parties.”

(L’Etang, 2008: p.114-115)

My interpretation of the way the two Maltese political parties tackle their PR strategy is that there is an over-reliance on their own media. This is more evident in the case of the PN – which is in government – whereas the PL is aware of the fact that it cannot disregard what its former Leader Dr Alfred Sant called “the power of incumbency”\(^{16}\), i.e. the financial and administrative strength associated with those parties in government. But Malta is not an isolated case. In the two years following the 1997 general elections in the UK, Tony Blair’s Labour administration had issued 20,000 press releases, i.e. 80% more than those issued in the same timeframe by John Major’s Conservative administration after the 1992 elections; whereas “the launch of 172 new campaigns during the first three months of 2001 (just ahead of

the general election), cost £62million and made the government the largest purchaser of advertising in the UK” (Cottle, 2003: 47-48). The PL is more conscious of the fact that it needs independent media to attract new voters and speaks publicly about it when it feels that it is being left out of the ‘independent’ media scene.\(^{17}\)

**2.6 Loyalty**

Another consideration which has contributed to the party-owned media system is that loyalty, allegiance and sense of belonging to one’s political party created a culture of party support – a kind of fan-base, which now, more than ever before, has the means to communicate its views via blogs, online comments, etc.

Hills refers to this complete change in fandom, and he states that “*cult audience... threatens to switch from enduring a poverty of communication, to suffering its exact antithesis: a welter of opinions, fan expression and debate which cannot be subjected to any controlling or synthesising gaze*” (Hills, 2002: 174).

This fan base culture fanned by the political parties has now found a new medium through which the party faithful are being asked to manifest their support. Over the past year, the PL has launched its own virtual mobile network operation (VMNO), aptly called ‘redtouch fone’\(^{18}\) (as red is the colour historically associated with the PL) as a subsidiary of its media operation, whereas at the time of writing, the PN is also preparing to launch its own VMNO, also aptly called ‘PING’\(^{19}\) (playing on the PN acronym) also as part of their media holding company.

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Party supporters – either through conviction or self-obligation – are continuously asked to support, through their viewership, membership, subscription and annual fund-raising marathons, their party’s media, and thus, the political parties are using their media to reinforce the political message with their grassroots.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this Chapter offers a vast array of theories and definitions which are the cornerstone on which the results of the research carried out will be discussed in order to understand better whether the political class is or should address the needs and concerns of those audiences/readers who consider themselves free thinkers and who form their political opinion by sifting through various media sources.
Chapter 3 - Research design and methods

3.1 Introduction
As already outlined in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to determine whether voters are opting for party-owned media as their first choice for news and consequentially, whether these same media are achieving their aims when seen as part of a wider PR strategy by the political parties.

3.2 The Approach
The two main research paradigms which can be used to achieve the aims set out for this study are the quantitative and the qualitative methods. The former is mostly based on the collection and analysis of data and is considered to be objectivist, implying that “social phenomena confront us as external facts that are beyond our reach or influence” (Bryman, 2008: p.18) whereas the latter is based on open-ended questions, interpretation and most of all constructivism, which is “to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2009: p.8).

There are limitations which can be identified for both methods. In the case of quantitative research, although claiming to be more accurate with no space for subjective interpretation, it is also limitative in so far as it reduces any issue into small rigid parts (ibid.: p.7). On the other hand, qualitative research is more interpretative and is able to analyse more complex issues without being simplistic, but this can also lead to bias and subjectivity (Bryman, 2008: p.13-15).
There is a third method, which has been adopted for this research: the Mixed methods approach which combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative research methods as the best way to tackle the issue being investigated (Creswell, 2009, p.204). Indeed, the mixed method approach taken to perform this study is better defined as “concurrent mixed methods” approach wherein there is a merging of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The mixed methods approach adopted in this study was based on the idea of achieving both ‘complementarity’ – as described by Hammersley wherein “two research strategies are employed in order that different aspects of an investigation can be dovetailed.” (Bryman 2008: p.607) as well as ‘completeness’, i.e. “a more complete answer... can be achieved by including both quantitative and qualitative methods” (ibid. p.612), thus assisting in achieving a better comprehensive analysis of the issue set out to be investigated (Creswell, 2009, p.14).

The Research Questions for this Dissertation are the following:
1. Are the politically-owned media organisations addressing all the publics which their owners need to address as a political party?
2. Do the journalists working with these politically-owned media organisations feel part of the owning party’s PR effort?
3. Are the parties aware that they could be ‘preaching to the converted’, whilst not focusing enough on other publics, such as alienated party supporters, floating voters and disillusioned supporters of the opposing party?
3.3 The Sources

In order to evaluate whether party-owned media are assisting the PR efforts of the political party in gaining new ground with the estranged or floating voters, three data sources were identified:

   a. The Secretary-General of the two political parties to gauge the way they see the party-owned media as part of a wider PR strategy.

   b. The editors and journalists working with party-owned media to see whether they feel part of the party’s PR strategy; and

   c. The general public to test whether the strategy being adopted by the political parties is finding fertile ground.

The data gathering was carried out through a qualitative approach for the first source, with direct questions sent via email to the Secretary-General of each political party (PN & PL). The reason for choosing email was that although face-to-face interviews would have been richer and more engaging, a level playing field needed to be maintained for both, so that the replies could be compared on a like-with-like basis, without any influence from the interviewer, which would have surely been different from one to another. This is more important when it is put in the context of the heavily polarised scenario described in Chapter 1. One acknowledges that the disadvantage of email interviews is that the replies can be carefully crafted and deeply guarded. The questions (see Annex 4) addressed a number of issues such as:

   i. whether they consider the resources (both human and financial) invested in their own media as money well spent;

   ii. what other means are being used to address other publics (including floating voters, sectoral interests etc),
iii. whether they have any means of confirming they are reaching their targets, and most of all; and

iv. whether they would consider winding down their media operation if the other party pledges to do the same.

For the second source, a quantitative method was applied, through a questionnaire sent out by email to 36 Editors, News Editors and all journalists working for the party-owned media organisations. The response rate was 25%. The questionnaire included two open-ended questions. The questions centred on whether:

i. they feel part of their respective employer’s PR grand design; as well as

ii. they feel that their reputation and credibility as journalists is being jeopardised or eroded.

Once again, the decision not to opt for face-to-face interviews was based on the need to maintain a level playing field for all replies for better comparison and to safeguard the anonymity of respondents to express their views freely.

The third set of data was achieved through a quantitative approach by a questionnaire by email filled in by 310 people (i.e. c. 0.077% of the Maltese population). The non-probability sampling method used was the ‘convenience’ one (mainly due to financial constraints), i.e. a sample which “is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility” (Bryman, 2008: p.183). The questionnaire was sent by email to 118 people, who in turn were asked to forward it to more people on their contacts list, thus creating a kind of ‘snowball’ sampling (ibid.: p. 184). Notwithstanding the limitations that both the ‘convenience’ as well as the ‘snowball’ sampling could give rise to, fears of possible unreliable data are

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20 Full list of names and email addresses was obtained from the respective News Editor
put to rest when one considers that 50.9% females of total respondents of the survey reflects the 50.1% of females from the total population of the Maltese Islands\textsuperscript{22}. Notwithstanding this, it is important to acknowledge that this sample is not representative of the Maltese population, and as such, this consideration needs to be kept in mind. This means that the results obtained are not definitive, but can be used as a starting point for future studies on the same subject (ibid.: p.184).

Questions in this questionnaire made an attempt to establish the respondents’ political allegiance – if any – as well as other data such as establishing – where possible – from which local media organisation they obtained their information, news etc.

### 3.4 Key Criteria

This study is also concerned with ensuring that various criteria applicable to both qualitative and quantitative research are espoused and adhered to (Bryman, 2008: p. 31-32).

#### 3.4.1 Reliability

The first criteria made sure was respected was that of reliability. In other words, ensuring – as much as possible – that should the study be repeated within a week, the same results would be obtained. This was done through a meticulous preparation of the questions asked as well as through proper auditing of the whole process (Creswell, 2009: p.190). This attention to detail is fundamental – not only for a proper analysis of the results, but also to ensure the validity (see point 3.4.3 hereunder) of the whole study.

\textsuperscript{22} http://www.nso.gov.mt/statdoc/document_file.aspx?id=2550
3.4.2 Replication

Another important criteria addressed was that of replication and replicability (Bryman, 2008: p.32), wherein the parameters adopted in the questionnaires - especially those in the quantitative method used for the public’s perception of the party-owned media – are mostly applicable should this study ever be carried in the future for a comparative analysis over a given period of time. This would give the possibility of detailed comparisons without the need to factor in changes due to an inexact structure of my previous study.

3.4.3 Validity

One of the means by which validity was ensured was that the two political parties were promised access to the results of this study once it is finished. Another method to ensure validity is that of triangulation, which for the same political parties is more than possible due to the regular polls they carry out to gauge their performance; as well as through other independent surveys of media usage and popularity in the Maltese Islands.23

3.5 Limitations

One of the major problems envisaged when preparing the questionnaires was that of facing lack of cooperation from the political parties and the journalists in their employ, when it came to airing their views on certain methodology being adopted strategically in their PR campaign.

A complication already factored in this analysis from the outset was the fact that at the time when the questionnaires were sent out, the researcher was employed as an

official within a Ministerial Private Secretariat. Thus, this could have an effect on the results – or lack of – as one may not have been perceived as impartial. There was a concern that both the officials of the party in Opposition as well as its journalists might have found it difficult to trust one with any information considering the employment related to the opposing party in government. On the other hand, those officials and journalists from the party in government might have thought that one was trying to criticise their work unnecessarily and for hidden reasons.

Indeed, my assessment proved out to be partially accurate. The questions sent out to the Partit Nazzjonalista remained unanswered for weeks and terse replies were only received after several attempts to obtain them. For a better understanding of the scenario in which this study was carried out, one must report that the Partit Laburista kept its replies on hold as it wanted to ascertain that even the PN had sent in their replies. As for the journalists’ questionnaire, from the 36 emails sent out, only 9 journalists sent back the questionnaire duly filled.

In so far as the general questionnaire to assess the link between the public’s political affiliation and the public’s source for news, one has to highlight that respondents could have had difficulty replying due to the local perception that one’s personal political leanings and opinions are not to be made public 24.

This attitude is mainly due to Malta’s recent political history where polarisation reached extreme heights with incidents of violence, vandalism, mob assault and

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political violence in the late 70s and early to mid-80s. My assessment from the outset was that there was more of a risk that respondents would refuse to give an answer to those questions on their political affiliation and voting preferences rather than that replies given do not reflect the truth. In fact, from the replies handed in, this was more or less proven correct.

3.6 Conclusion

In the following Chapter, there will be an analysis of the results and a discussion on the outcome of these questionnaires to enable a comparison of the respondents’ assessment of political-owned media with their self-declared political allegiance, and consequentially a trend can be identified and discussed.

Chapter 4 – Research findings

4.1. Introduction

This Chapter is divided into three main sections according to the three sets of surveys conducted as explained in Chapter 3, i.e. one with the general public on their first choice for news, one with journalists employed with party-owned media and questions to the political parties. The aim is to delve into the findings and produce an accurate interpretation of the outcome.

4.2 The General Survey

The general survey – of which 310 replies were received – was divided into three parts. The first one dealt with general information relating to the respondents, the second addressed the media sources for news whereas the third targeted their political views.

4.2.1 Demographics

The male/female portioning of the respondents was that of 49% males and 51% females (see Fig.1), which is also reflected in the latest national distribution as published by the National Statistics Office (NSO) of 49.77% males and 50.23% females.

26 NSO (2009): pg. 8
60% of the respondents were married, 33% were single, 6% separated and 1% indicated their marital status as annulled/divorced. This is also more or less in line with the national trend where 30.6% are single, 59.3% are married, 3.3% are separated and 0.7% annulled/divorced 27.

Almost 99% of the respondents were Maltese nationals and out of the remaining 1%, half had been in Malta for over 10 years and the other half had been in Malta for less than five years.

The age of respondents contrasts somewhat with the national statistics. Whereas in the survey a total of 67% are between the ages of 26 and 45 (see Fig. 3) the average for that age group in both Malta and the EU stands at 35% (see Fig.4) 28.

28 Ibid.
This sharp contrast is mostly evident in the 66+ category, which constitutes 14% of the Maltese population, but only 3% of the survey respondents. In my opinion, this divergence is mostly due to the fact that the survey was carried out by email. This is supported by national data which states that an average of 66% of internet users in Malta are aged between 25 and 54\(^{29}\) and, in fact, 83% of the survey respondents fall within the 26 to 55 age bracket.

The academic background of respondents reflects the fact that this questionnaire was email-based. The fact that 38% of respondents have post-graduate level of

\(^{29}\) ICT usage by households and individuals: 2009
education and 28% are University graduates by far exceeds the national average of 9.7%.\(^{30}\)

### Education

![Education Chart]

Fig. 5

Regarding the geographic distribution of the respondents, there are various qualifications one must make. An exact comparison cannot be done as the Census 2005 uses a geographic distribution which is slightly different from the Local Plans drawn up by the planning regulator which was used as the basis for the questionnaire.\(^{31}\)

Notwithstanding this consideration, there are considerable differences which cannot be attributed to the difference in classification of regions. The first one is the data on Gozo and Comino, where NSO states that this region represents 8% of the population (see Fig. 6)\(^{32}\) whereas only 3% of the questionnaire respondents hail from this region (see Fig. 7). Data for the North and North West varies too, from 28% of national representation to 20% of respondents. Data for the North Harbour region varies from 29% of the national distribution to 39% of the respondents;

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\(^{31}\) The major difference is that the ‘Centre’ region is missing from the NSO classification and is absorbed within the other regions.

whereas data for the Southern parts of the island varies from the 35% of national representation to the 20% of respondents.

In relation to employment, the data from the questionnaire shows that the highest three categories are professionals and people in top or middle management positions (see Fig.8). This could also be a direct result of the fact that the questionnaire was email-based.
4.2.2 Media Sources for News

The second part of the questionnaire focused on the respondent’s preference for their news sources.

In the first question, (see Fig. 9) respondents were asked to choose their preferred medium and 40% stated that they preferred online news portals, whereas newspapers and TV almost shared the preference with 28% and 26% respectively. Radio as a source for news trailed behind with 6%.
When asked to state where they were most likely to read newspapers, 94% of respondents said that they read newspapers either at home (55%) or at the office (39%) with the remaining 4% stating that they read newspapers at a bar or restaurant, 1% at relatives and 1% at other places (see Fig. 10). This trend is somewhat replicated when it comes to access to online news portals.

When it comes to daily newspapers, it is amply clear that the independent newspapers have the absolute majority of following with a total of 94% (see Fig. 11), and most strikingly, *The Times of Malta* on its own is the first choice for news for 90% of those respondents who chose newspapers as their first choice as a source for news. On the other hand, the Nationalist Party owned *Nazzjon* and the Labour leaning *Orizzoni*[^33] are only the first choice for news for 6% of the respondents.

[^33]: as the Partit Laburista does not have a daily newspaper
The same scenario is repeated when analysing the results of Sunday newspapers. Due to the larger amount of newspapers published on a Sunday (seven), one would have expected more fragmentation. But the results show that once again, *The Sunday Times of Malta* on its own garners 86% of preferences, which, when added to the other independent newspapers, i.e. *MaltaToday* (7%), *The Malta Independent on Sunday (TMIS)* (2%) and *Illum* (1%); brings that total percentage up to 96% of preferences for independent media.
It must be stated that various respondents highlighted the fact that they read more than one newspaper on Sundays and during the week, but the fact that there are high percentages of respondents who prefer an independent source for news – in particular *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* - is very indicative.

In so far as radio stations as a source for news, this is the only medium wherein the politically-owned media have shown some following with a collective 34% (PN’s Radio 101 – 27% and PL’s One Radio – 7%) – (See Fig. 13).

In television, once again, the independent media – in this case State television (TVM) – garnered 81% of the respondents’ first choice for news, with the politically-owned TV stations trailing behind at 11% and 7%. (see Fig. 14).
When one considers that 40% of respondents said that their first choice for news was the internet, it is once again indicative that more than half access the internet at work (53%) and 44% said that they access it at home. Only 2% access the internet for news from their mobile. (See Fig. 15)

![Pie chart showing internet access locations](image15)

Fig. 15

The independent news portals in this relatively new segment of the media strike a big blow to the politically-owned portals, with the latter only succeeding in being the first choice for news for just 3% of the respondents (See Fig. 16).

![Pie chart showing online newsportals](image16)

Fig. 16
Even here, the performance of timesofmalta.com with 90% of first choice preferences and consistently being selected as the second preference for the remaining 10%, shows the inroads the politically-owned news portals need to make to start competing with this independent medium.

4.2.3 Political Views

There were two questions in the questionnaire which dealt with the political views of respondents. The first one asked them to state which party they had voted for in the last general elections (2008). The replies show that 60% chose the PN, whereas only 17% stated that they had voted for the PL (see Fig. 17). This contrasts with the election results when the PN obtained 49.34% and the PL obtained 48.79%.\(^{34}\) One also needs to take into account that 17% of respondents chose not to reply, with another 5% stating that they did not vote. It is interesting to note that insofar as the third party (AD), the questionnaire reveals – more or less – the same amount of popularity, i.e. 1%, as that attained in the general elections, i.e. 1.31%.\(^{35}\)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Voting_Preference_in_2008_General_Elections.png}
\caption{Voting Preference in 2008 General Elections}
\end{figure}

\(^{34}\) http://www.doi.gov.mt/EN/press_releases/2008/03/pr0453.asp

\(^{35}\) Ibid.
The second question in this section dealt with the respondents’ current political opinion (see Fig. 18). The first point that needs to be highlighted is that support for the PN goes down to 46% when compared to the 60% who stated that they voted for the party in 2008. The support for the PL goes up to 20% from the previous 17% who had voted for it in 2008, whereas AD doubles its tally to 2%. One of the more interesting facts arising from the replies is that those not interested in politics are more than double those who stated that they did not vote in the 2008 elections. More than one fifth of respondents (21%) have refused to reply – a fact which must be put in the context of the reticence people have to speak about their political leanings.

4.3 Journalists

The second questionnaire was sent to 36 journalists who work in the newsrooms of the two politically-owned media organisations. Only 25% (i.e. nine) of these questionnaires were returned. Once again, the questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first one dealt with general information relating to the respondents, the second addressed their political views whereas the third targeted issues of media ownership by political parties.
4.3.1 Demographics

The male/female proportion of respondents for this questionnaire runs counter to the national situation, as 56% of respondents were males and 44% were females. All of them were Maltese, with a total of 89% aged between 18 and 35 (see Fig. 19).

Another interesting aspect of the replies regards the academic background of respondents (see Fig. 20). All of the respondents have a University degree with 22% of them also having a post-graduate level of education.
In so far as the geographic representation is concerned, there is an even spread across the Maltese Islands (see Fig. 21)

![Geographic Representation](image)

All the respondents stated they were journalists, except one who stated that his role was that of News Editor.\(^{36}\)

### 4.3.2 Political Views

In the second section of the questionnaire – which dealt with the journalists’ political views – all respondents stated that they had voted for the political party which owns the media organisation they work for. The same replies were given when asked whether they consider themselves of the same political persuasion of the political party which owns the media organisation they work for. On the other hand, when asked whether they think that their work forms part of the party’s Public Relations Strategy, only one of the respondents stated that he does not consider his work as such.

\(^{36}\) The male pronoun is being used purposely as there are only two News Editors and both are males.
4.3.3 Media Ownership by Political Parties

In the third section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to give their views on various aspects related to the fact that the media organisation they work for is owned by a political party.

The first question asked them to rate the news value of the overall reporting by their media. Two-thirds of the respondents said it was average, with the remaining third stating it was good. When asked whether there was political influence by the owner in the reporting of news items, all respondents replied yes. When it came to qualifying this influence, a third said that this was very strong, with over half (56%) stating that it was average (see Fig. 22).

![Political Influence by Owner](image)

In so far as credibility is concerned, it is very interesting to note that 78% think it is average, with only 22% of the respondents considering that it is good (see Fig. 23).
When asked to substantiate their answer, the respondents who claimed that it was average gave various reasons for this, but all of them referred to the political content in one way or another. One of them said that this is because “it is politically oriented and tends to deviate from people’s expectations”. Another attributed this average credibility to their “natural bias and also lack of in-depth reporting”.

The same theme of political bias can be found in other replies, like “people automatically associate the news item with the political party – which is not necessarily so” or “the news emanating from my organisation is already perceived as having its tint from the word go. The credibility of the news is inextricably linked to the credibility of the party owning it in the viewer/listener’s opinion”. Another respondent stated that this is “because, though we try to be objective, we cannot really always be” whilst one was very short but to the point when stating that “extent of political content affects credibility”.

The reasons given by those who consider that their media organisation’s credibility is good are also insightful. One respondent claims that “when the media is
politically-owned, people with opposing political views will always doubt the credibility of the news items, that is, in my opinion, unavoidable. However I believe that on the whole our media is credible, although it of course gives much more weight to issues which are in line with its political goals”. The other respondent said that their media’s credibility is good because “we try to be as factual as possible”.

When asked whether they think that political parties should have their own media organisations, as expected – considering that all the respondents earn their living from a politically-owned media organisation – all respondents agreed that this should be the case. The reasons given for this all refer to, in some way or another, the party’s need to communicate its political message. One respondent said that political parties should have their own media “so they can transmit their message as freely as possible” whereas another added that “it is the only means of getting your message across to the public on a daily basis, rather than only in the run-up to elections”. One respondent qualified his reply by saying that he believes “there is a role for advocacy journalism. The independent media normally take a softer approach towards the politician than journalist (sic) from the opposing parties’ media”. One respondent – through his reply – shows which media organisation he/she’s employed with when he states that “having all media bias towards the PN, PL can’t live without his media arm (sic)”.

The final two questions in the questionnaire asked journalists whether they think that the local media scene would perform better, produce more newsworthy items and inform objectively if political parties were to divest themselves of the role they have assumed through the ownership of media organisations. Considering the
replies given to the previous two questions, one would have thought that all respondents would have replied ‘No’. However, it is interesting to note that this is not the case and that two journalists replied yes, and another two stated they did not know (see Fig. 24).

**Do you think local media scene would be better without politically-owned media?**

![Pie chart showing responses](image)

When asked to give the reasons for their reply, those who answered no, once again focused their replies on the need for political content. One respondent said “I cannot imagine the local news without politics involved. Politics tends to be part of the local culture”. Another insisted that “party ownership of the media does not mean that other media are stifled. In fact, the best-selling newspaper is independently owned and the most popular current affairs, discussion and news programmes are produced either privately or by the journalists of the state broadcaster”.

One respondent even goes as far as saying that “if political parties do not transmit their political message through their media, then it would not make sense for them
to have a media organisation at all. Therefore I believe that without political media, the local media scene would actually be much poorer”. Another insists that “political parties are part of the Maltese daily lives so they represent a lot of people, basically all people”. A very interesting comment came from another respondent who claimed that “the local media scene depends on the quality of journalism produced rather than anything else”.

From those who stated that they did not know whether the local media scene would perform better, the reason given was that he/she “cannot imagine local news without politics involved (sic). Politics tends to be part of the local culture”.

On the other hand, the two respondents who replied that the local media scene would perform better without the direct involvement of political parties, focused their replies on quality. One said that “content will automatically be more balanced” and the other said that “if both parties could do without their media outlets, we would have more credible and objective news”.

### 4.4 The Political Parties

The third and last part of this Chapter is dedicated to the replies obtained from the two political parties which own a media organisation, i.e. the PN and PL. The questions were sent by email to the Secretary General – who is the Administrative Head – of both parties. The PN replies were authored by the Secretary-General Dr Paul Borg Olivier, whereas the PL replies were signed by the President and Secretary-General ad interim, Dr Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi.37

37 Dr Zrinzo Azzopardi has taken over the role of Secretary-General ad-interim of the Partit Laburista in September 2009 following the resignation of incumbent Mr Jason Micallef: http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/2009/09/30/t1.html
4.4.1 The politically-owned media and PR

The first question to the political parties was how they see their own media organisation, especially the news and current affairs programmes, as part of the Public Relations effort of their party.

In his reply, the Secretary-General of the PL said that their media organisation was “founded by the Labour Party to ensure a constant means of communication of its policies and to sustain its campaigns while providing a good service to the general public with programmes covering various sectors and themes.” He also refers to the philosophy on which the editorial policy is based, namely that of providing “good news services” for their viewers. He concludes by saying that “moreover it ensures that the main themes that Labour is promoting are prioritised”.

The PN Secretary-General’s short reply to this question is that the PN considers its own media organisation as “an efficient means of Communication”.

4.4.2 Resources

When asked whether they regard the resources (both human and financial) invested in their own media as money well spent, the PL Secretary-General said that for them to be able to achieve the goals set out in his reply to the first question, “there must be a continuous investment in the infrastructure of the company as well as the personnel that runs the company”. He insists that they cannot run their media properly unless their staff is “given adequate training and the opportunities to exhibit their capabilities and skills”; and that investment the company has done in the recent past is bearing fruit. He concludes by stating that they believe this is “a continuous project” they have to sustain.
The PN Secretary-General referred to the party’s media organisation as serving “as a learning Media Institution in Malta giving opportunities to a large number of individuals to learn, grow and develop their skills and personality”, not only for the benefit of their company but also for other media organisations. He also referred to the cost aspect when he said that “Human Resources and Media in general cost money, and all money spent in media and its human resources is money well spent”.

4.4.3 Other publics

The third question to the political parties tackled the issue of what other means are being used to address other publics such as floating voters and sectoral interests. The PL’s reply referred to their commitment in making use of all “possible forms of communication, whether new or traditional in order to connect with all the sectors in society”. They added that they are believers in the fact that their “communication with the people has to be consistent and constructive. It is evident that one of the best forms of communication is inter-personal communication and people expect political leaders to be accessible”, concluding that they make sure that they sustain this accessibility.

Once again, the PN opts for a short reply and states that it “uses all means of communication necessary to communicate effectively in the modern world”.

4.4.4 Reaching the desired targets

When asked whether the political parties have any means of confirming that their media is reaching the desired PR targets, the PL implies that they have these means
but opts not to mention what they are. It stated that the setting of targets “is a major decision”, and achieving them and ensuring that they are achieved “is a major task”. It concluded by stating that it would be pointless to set targets “when mechanisms that ensure success are not in place”.

The PN’s terse and very categorical reply to this question was it “has always reached its desired targets”.

4.4.5 Are they ready to close down their media?

One of the crucial questions posed to the political parties was whether they would consider winding down their media operation if the other party pledges to do the same. In its replies, the PL said that the argument has to be tackled from a different perspective: “what is the current situation in the public broadcasting services? Is it acting impartially and providing all the sectors and political forces in our country an equal chance?”. It adds that before answering whether they would close down their own media, one must also analyse the general scenario in the Maltese media.

Yet again, the PN reply skirts the issue by stating that the party “does not follow others for any of its decisions but takes those same decisions in the strategic interest of the Party”.

4.4.6 A proper PR set up?

The last question was about how the political parties rate the possibility of replacing the current set up with a PR team to address the ‘independent’ media. In his reply, the PL Secretary-General said that they “constantly address all forms of media”
and that they ensure they maintain the best possible relations with both the traditional as well as new media.

The PN Secretary-General’s reply insisted that “one does not see a link between one and the other” as the independent media “acts on its own steam and it is only political substance that gives credibility to the Party being reported by that section of the media”.

4.5 Conclusion

The findings of the questionnaires have given an overview of how these can assist in the discussion on whether the politically-owned media organisations are addressing the party faithful and whether the political parties are aware of the role played by the independent media in addressing the floating voters.
Chapter 5 – Discussion of practical implications

5.1 Introduction
In this Chapter, one will find a discussion on the implications resulting from the findings tackled in the previous Chapter. The main thrust of the discussion will be based on the three-pronged method used for the collection of data, i.e. public questionnaire, journalists’ questionnaire and questions to political parties; as well as tackling the three research questions set out for this Dissertation.

5.2 Implications of Survey Results
The results emanating from the public survey give an insight into the way (a) voters are seeking their sources for news; (b) the people working within it consider their own work, (c) the political parties perceive their own media organisation.

5.2.1 The Public’s Choice for News
If one had to summarise the results of the survey carried out with the general public, by far the most important outcome would be that of the overriding strength and penetration of the independent media in all three types i.e. print, broadcast and online. The high percentages – reaching 90% – of people choosing independent media in general and Times of Malta in particular (both printed and online), as their first choice for news, is a datum which cannot be overlooked.

The implication of such a result is that, irrespective of which party they have voted for in the past or which party they currently support, the absolute majority of respondents is not opting for party-owned media as its first choice for news. Indeed,
except in the case of radio, party-owned media always ranked last or was the respondents’ penultimate choice. In other words, there are PN and PL supporters who do not show trust in their own party’s media and are choosing to obtain their information from independent sources. When one views these results from the perspective of Bugelli’s (2005) conclusion on the importance of independent media for the floating voter, the concern for the political parties becomes quite evident.

The issue at stake is not whether the political parties’ media are only preaching to the converted, but is far more fundamental than that. From the results of the questionnaire, it is quite evident that they are not preaching to all the converted but only to a part of them – and if one sifts through the data, it appears that this part is quite an insignificant one. This group of ardent supporters adds up to around 12% (on average) across all media (TV, radio, print and online).

The internet is the medium which is leading the way through its popularity, and as such, it is offering a big challenge to the political parties. When one considers that 40% of respondents chose the internet as their first choice for news, and all of these opt for independent media as their number one choice, in my opinion it is manifestly clear that the party-owned media in this regard is simply not performing.

The same scenario applies – more or less – to both broadcast and print media. The only exception is radio, wherein the party-owned radio stations garner a collective 34% – although one must stress that this needs to be seen in the context that only 6% chose radio as their first source for news.
When it comes to the political leanings, it is important to focus on two aspects of the results. The first is directly related to the increase in the number of those who state they are not interested in politics as opposed to those who state they did not vote in 2008. Although one can be disinterested in politics but still vote when the time comes, this highlights the floating or disillusioned voter group which the political parties need to address.

The second aspect which needs to be given due consideration is that one-fifth of the respondents refused to reply. This does not mean that they do not have an opinion, but that they want to keep this opinion to themselves. When one considers that (as described in Chapter 1), elections in Malta go down to the wire for just a couple of thousand votes, a high percentage of reticent respondents need to be addressed by the political parties as their silence cannot in any way be interpreted as concurring with either party’s policies or an eventual vote for either of them. Once again, Bugelli’s (2005) proven theory of the role of independent media with floating voters comes to the fore.

### 5.2.2 The Journalists

One of the salient points arising from the research carried out with the journalists working with the politically-owned media organisations is that the absolute majority feel part of their party’s PR effort. This raises questions on whether their role is more that of their ‘master’s voice’ rather than of journalists. This seems to be an issue even they are aware of. One of the replies explicitly given to the questionnaire by one of the respondents tries to justify this by stating that “there is a role for advocacy journalism” adding that there is a need for their politically-biased journalism so that they can inflict hard hitting questions to the politicians
from the opposing party. This is in line with the priming hypothesis of the media choosing what to report and when to report it (Kosicki, G. M. in Price Dillard & Pfau, 2002: p.69).

What is baffling is that there is a kind of dichotomy within these party-paid journalists. On one hand they all agree that political parties should have their own media organisations and, as already mentioned, this response was to be expected – considering they earn their living from it. But the replies to questions on the news value and credibility of their own media belie this notion, and show that there is a concern on these issues from within the ranks. This situation leads to the Cognitive Dissonance Theory where any two elements, which are directly linked, are also opposed to each other (O’Keefe, 2002: p.78). In my opinion, this dissonance is being resolved by the dominance of the cluster which supports the fact that party-owned media should continue to exist, otherwise, these journalists would not do this work.

This dissonance resolution is further attested by the fact that whilst they all admit that the content of their news is politically influenced by the owning party, at the same time, they tacitly accept it. This echoes the issue of proximity between the politicians and the media raised by Pfetsch (in Esser, 2002: p. 353).

Two-thirds of them state that the news value of their reporting is ‘average’. More than three-fourths of them think that their credibility is ‘average’ and all replies give political content as the reason for this average credibility. It is quite evident, from these replies, that the journalists themselves are not very clear about whether what they are producing is trustworthy or not (O’Keefe, 2002: p. 182).
The political content is seen by those who are “in the trenches” as undermining the
credibility and the news value of their media. So would not the local media scene
perform better and produce more newsworthy items without the party-owned
media? The same journalists are not all convinced about this, and there are those
who stated that it would be inferior.

One particular reply clearly manifests the struggle these journalists face on a day-
to-day basis. One respondent’s statement that “the local media scene depends on
the quality of journalism produced rather than anything else” is strengthening the
argument that it would indeed perform better without the party-owned media as this
would address the issue of bias raised by Williams (2003: p.125). The reason is
quite simple. If – as this respondent states – credibility depends on the quality of
journalism, why is political content – according to the journalists themselves – the
reason, or indeed the cause, for the ‘average’ credibility of the party-owned media?

This question leads onto another issue. If the political content is affecting
credibility, the solution implied – even by some respondents – is that political
content is either decreased or eliminated. This confirms that content should be
based on what the audience wants (ibid.), and as this study shows, the audience is
opting for something different from what the party-owned media is offering.

But, should this occur, it would defeat the whole aim of having party-owned media
in the first place (see 5.3.3 hereunder). So this creates a vicious circle as long as the
political parties decide to maintain the status quo, highlighting the lack of a
completely liberal media scene and the strong role the parties want to keep their
hold on (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: p.75).
5.2.3 The Political Parties

From the majority of replies by both political parties, it is evidently clear that both are interested in maintaining the status quo. These replies, while aiming to justify the need to have their own media, in my opinion, fail to tackle the crucial question of whether their own media organisations are addressing all the publics they need to focus on as a political party. This is reminiscent of McQuail’s (in Graber, 2007: p.33) argument on the access to media power which the political parties think they have through their own media outlets.

The most important aspect of the replies given by the political parties, in my opinion, lies in those replies given to the question which asked whether they would consider winding down their media operation if the other party pledges to do the same. While the PN states that it “does not follow others for any of its decisions but takes those same decisions in the strategic interest of the Party”, the PL raises a very important consideration while it avoids a direct answer.

This consideration is the reference to the issue of State Broadcasting and the PL implies that the party – being in Opposition – is not meted out the same treatment on the national station as the PN in government. While it is not the intention of this Dissertation to enter the merits of whether this statement is correct or not, this consideration raises two important factors.

The first one is that this statement implies that should this alleged imbalance on the national stations be addressed, the PL would consider closing down its media operation. The second refers to the other implication that once elected, the PL would address this imbalance and create a situation that would make the PN feel it
is being unjustly treated, and as such make the latter feel stronger about the need to have its own media, and consequently maintain the *status quo*.

In 5.2.1, the need for political parties to address other publics was discussed, such as alienated party supporters, floating voters and disillusioned supporters of the opposing party. This was argued in line with Perloff’s (in Price Dillard & Pfau, 2002: p.606) assertion that the audience are also voters. The PN opts to give a stock reply, in the sense that it “*uses all means of communication necessary to communicate effectively in the modern world*”. This reply gives no insight into whether the party has identified these publics and more importantly whether it has identified the means to address them. This is understandable as no party would publish its strategy of how to increase its popularity. On the other hand, the PL’s reply focuses on the need for it to maintain interpersonal contact with the public, something which in a small country like Malta is still doable and is considered as a very effective means of communicating with the voters.

The PN’s condescending attitude continues when it replies to the question regarding its methods – if any – of gauging success or otherwise, on whether party support has increased. The categorical statement that it “*has always reached its desired targets*” may be attributed to the fact that it has been in power since 1987 – save for 22 months between 1996 and 1998. The result of the questionnaire wherein support for the PN has dwindled down from the 60% in 2008 to 46% after two years (see pgs 41-42) should give rise to concern. The PL’s reply is more realistic as it states that they have these gauging mechanisms in place but for obvious reasons refrains from mentioning them.
Even when discussing the investment in both the human and financial spheres of their media operation, the PN churns out the highhanded reply that their media organisation is contributing to the improvement of media standards in Malta. Once again, the PL’s reply is more level headed and discusses the way the party feels the need to sustain this investment as it is imperative for quality. But what both parties seem to miss in this equation is that their replies assume they should own a media organisation in the first place.

In my opinion it is not the role of a political party to raise the standards in media and broadcasting, and as such, the financial investment being made in this regard can be improved by investing in methods which can better attain the basic aim of a political party, i.e. that of getting itself elected and safeguarding its popularity levels. Considering the overwhelming success being achieved by the independent media – especially online – the financial investment being made by the parties in their media, could and should be redirected towards PR setups and initiatives which address those existing and popular independent media platforms.

Indeed, when asked about the possibility of replacing the current set up – which is financially burdensome – with a PR team to address the independent media, both parties imply that this is not needed, as they already enjoy good relationships with the independent media. The PN’s reply that “the independent media acts on its own steam and it is only political substance that gives credibility to the Party...” ironically shows how much a proper PR set up is badly needed. The statement that independent media “acts on its own steam” shows little or no knowledge of the PR profession and of how it can help in managing the reputation of a political party. The notion that “it is only political substance that gives credibility to the Party” is,
in my opinion, short-sighted and naïve. While one concurs that political substance is crucial for a political party to achieve credibility – as discussed by McNair (2007: p.27) – it is surely not the only thing, and it is the role of PR to promote ideas and suggest strategies which can assist the shaping of the agenda to be taken up by the independent media.

5.3 Conclusion

To conclude, the research carried out has shown that the publics being addressed by the political parties through their own media not only could be already ‘won over’, but that even the party faithful are seeking independent sources for news.

As such, the parties could be utilising the same financial and human resources, currently being invested in their respective media operation, on PR initiatives to address other publics, such as alienated party supporters, floating voters and disillusioned supporters of the opposing party which could be crucial in the run up to a general election.
Chapter 6 - Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

In this concluding Chapter, the main findings of the research carried out are highlighted in direct relation to the research questions set out for this Dissertation, as well as referring to the limitations of the study and what the next steps for any future studies on the subject could be.

6.2 The Research Questions

The research questions for this Dissertation dealt with three aspects of the politically-owned media in Malta. The first was whether these media organisations are indeed addressing all the publics which their owners need to address as a political party. The results show that this is not the case and that the issue of ‘trustworthiness’ (O’Keefe, 2002: p.182) is not only a concern for the public, but even more so for the journalists who work within these party-owned media organisations.

The second research question was whether the journalists working with these politically-owned media organisations feel part of the owning party’s PR effort. Although from the questionnaire results, it is amply clear that the journalists surveyed feel part of the PR strategy of the respective party, they also state the relatively low credibility showings by their media organisation are attributed to the political content.

The third and last research question was on whether the parties were aware that they could be ‘preaching to the converted’, whilst not focusing enough on other publics.
In other words, are the political parties gauging the success or otherwise of their own media? The results show that the party-owned media enjoy a limited following. This may be retraced to the fact that political parties are using their own media as part of a PR strategy based on the publicity model in which “communication is one way: no dialogue with the intended audience is required and the main objective is to put forward one particular view of the world – which may or may not be completely truthful” (Tench & Yeomans, 2006: p. 147).

On the contrary, a two-way symmetric model with proper feedback and evaluative research (ibid.: p.147) is what the political parties need to implement as part of a wider PR strategy which makes better use of the independent media. The latter have fared very positively and are held in high regard in the media scene in Malta, be it print, broadcast or online. With the independent media’s high popularity showings the political parties must engage them more seriously and systematically.

The political parties are investing a lot of time and money in their own media organisation for a very poor return because a very small fraction of people choose them as their first source for news. Yet, they are not investing enough in the strong relationship which Bugelli (2005) has proven there is between the English language independent print media and floating voters.

This is further attested in another related conclusion which mirrors McQuail’s idea that it is not about who has the media power but how it is being used (McQuail in Graber, 2007; p.33). The study showed that, notwithstanding the fact that the political parties have their own media setup and consequently have potential
leverage on the Maltese media scene, the following they are garnering is very limited.

6.3 Limitations

Surely, this study has various limitations, some of which were already listed in Chapter 3 in so far as the research methods are concerned. Most of all, the greatest limitation is that neither the media nor the political parties operate in a vacuum and as such, particular incidents, such as the political influence which journalists claim is being exerted on them when carrying out their duties, need to be analysed on its own merits.

Another limitation is that the study did not delve into the possible differences between one party-owned organisation and another, the different ways they operate, and most of all the different audiences they are reaching. This is partially due to the actual reticence of the parties themselves to divulge anything that may give undue advantage to the opposing party.

One final limitation is that this study was conducted single-handedly and within a relatively short period of time, thus it could have affected the results due to any incident / political debate or situation which was rife at the time of the study.

6.4 Suggestions

At this juncture, the possible areas of study could include a deeper research into the credibility of the party-owned media to analyse the way the general public consider the news on the party-owned media and juxtapose the results on the respondents’
political views. This should facilitate the process of trying to find further evidence that political parties are there to win elections and not run media organisations.

Another study which could be carried out, but it would depend on the cooperation of the political parties, is that of analysing the PR strategy of the political parties from within the party during an election campaign to investigate the attitude which they take towards their own media outlets.

Additional research could also focus on the role of the journalists in the newsroom of a party-owned media organisation, and look into the relationships between the politician/owner and journalist/employee.

6.5 Conclusion

It is evident that the party-owned media system in Malta is simply not delivering the goods for its owners. What was new and exciting 20 years ago – even because of the emerging scenario back then – today has become obsolete, not credible, financially burdensome and most of all ineffective.

Indeed, the writing for the political parties is on the wall. They need the political courage to take those necessary steps to address the situation and take those decisions which will ultimately make them better equipped to communicate more effectively with their public, i.e. the voter.
Bibliography


Bugelli, M. (2005), *The Independent English Language Print Media and Politics in Malta – An analysis of the relationship between the two*; dissertation submitted to the Centre for Mass Communication Research of the University of Leicester in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an MA (Mass Communications).


Online:

www.ba-malta.org

www.doi.gov.mt

www.maltadata.com

www.mlp.org.mt

www.nso.gov.mt

www.pn.org.mt
Appendix 1

Questions sent by email to the Secretary-General of the Partit Laburista

1. How do you see One Productions (especially the news and current affairs programmes) as part of the Public Relations effort of the Partit Laburista?

2. Would you consider the resources (both human and financial) invested in your own media as money well spent?

3. What other means are being used to address other publics (including floating voters, sectoral interests etc)?

4. Do you have any means of confirming that your media is reaching the desired PR targets? If yes, what are these? If no, why is this so, and would you consider introducing such means?

5. Would the PL consider winding down its media operation if the PN pledges to do the same?

6. How do you rate the possibility of replacing the current set up with a PR team to address the 'independent' media?
Appendix 2

Questions sent by email to the Secretary-General of the Partit Nazzjonalista

1. How do you see Media.link Communications (especially the news and current affairs programmes) as part of the Public Relations effort of the Partit Nazzjonalista?

2. Would you consider the resources (both human and financial) invested in your own media as money well spent?

3. What other means are being used to address other publics (including floating voters, sectoral interests etc)?

4. Do you have any means of confirming that your media is reaching the desired PR targets? If yes, what are these? If no, why is this so, and would you consider introducing such means?

5. Would the PN consider winding down its media operation if the PL pledges to do the same?

6. How do you rate the possibility of replacing the current set up with a PR team to address the 'independent' media?
Appendix 3

Questionnaire sent by email to journalists:

SECTION A - GENERAL BACKGROUND

Please tick (√)

A 1. Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A 2. Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maltese</th>
<th>Foreigner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If Maltese, go to question 4

A 3. If a foreigner, how long have you been resident in Malta?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than 5 years</th>
<th>Between 5 and 10 years</th>
<th>More than 10 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A 4. Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18 – 25</th>
<th>26 – 35</th>
<th>36 – 45</th>
<th>46 – 55</th>
<th>56 – 65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A 5. What is your level of education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Post-Secondary (incl. Diploma)</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
<th>Post-Graduate</th>
<th>Other (please specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A 6. Which area of Malta /Gozo do you consider as your hometown (does not necessarily mean the locality of your residence). (see Key on page 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North area</th>
<th>Central area</th>
<th>North Harbour area</th>
<th>North West area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
A 7. What is your position within your media organisation?

Journalist
Management
Other (please specify)

SECTION B – Political views

B 1. Did you vote for the political party which owns the media organisation you work for?

Yes
No

B 2. Do you consider yourself of the same political persuasion of the political party which owns the media organisation you work for?

Yes
No
Don’t know
Refuse to reply

B 3. Do you think that your work forms part of the party’s Public Relations strategy?

Yes
No
Don’t know
Refuse to reply
SECTION C – Media ownership by Political parties

C 1. How would you rate the news value of the overall reporting by your organisation?

Very good
Good
Average
Poor
Very Poor

C 2. Is there a political influence by the owner of your organisation in the reporting of news items?

Yes
No

C 3. If yes, how would you rate this influence?

Very strong
Strong
Average
Mild
Very mild

C 4. How would you rate the credibility of your media organisation with the general public?

Very good
Good
Average
Poor
Very Poor

C 5. Why?

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
C 6. Do you think that political parties should have their own media organisations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>Refuse to reply</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C 7. Why?

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

C 8. Do you think that the local media scene would perform better, produce more newsworthy items and inform better if political parties were to divest themselves of the role they have taken through the ownership of media organisations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>Refuse to reply</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C 9. Why?

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
Key to Question A6:

<table>
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<th>North area</th>
<th>Bidnija</th>
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<th>Mellieha</th>
<th>Mgarr</th>
<th>Mosta</th>
<th>Mtarfa</th>
<th>St Paul's Bay</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Mdina</td>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>Siġġiewi</td>
<td>Żebbug</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central area</td>
<td>Attard</td>
<td>Balzan</td>
<td>Birkirkara</td>
<td>Iklin</td>
<td>Lija</td>
<td>Naxxar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Harbour area</td>
<td>Birgu (Vittoriosa)</td>
<td>Bormla (Cospicua)</td>
<td>Figura</td>
<td>Isla (Senglea)</td>
<td>Kalkara</td>
<td>Marsa</td>
<td>Paola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Harbour area</td>
<td>Floriana</td>
<td>Gżira</td>
<td>Hamrun</td>
<td>Msida</td>
<td>Pembroke</td>
<td>Pietà</td>
<td>San Gwann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>Birżebbuġa</td>
<td>Gudja</td>
<td>Kirkop</td>
<td>Luqa</td>
<td>Marsaskala</td>
<td>Marsaxlokk</td>
<td>Mqabba</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gozo & Comino
Appendix 4

Questionnaire sent out by email to general public:

SECTION A - GENERAL BACKGROUND

Please tick (√)

A 1. Gender

Male  [ ]  Female  [ ]

A 2. Marital status

Single  [ ]  Married  [ ]

Separated  [ ]  Divorced  [ ]

A 3. Nationality

Maltese  [ ]  Foreigner  [ ]

If Maltese, go to question 5

A 4. If a foreigner, how long have you been resident in Malta?

Less than 5 years  [ ]

Between 5 and 10 years  [ ]

More than 10 years  [ ]

A 5. Age

18 – 25  [ ]

26 – 35  [ ]

36 – 45  [ ]

46 – 55  [ ]

56 – 65  [ ]

66 and over  [ ]
A 6. What is your level of education?

- Secondary
- Post-Secondary (incl. Diploma)
- Tertiary
- Post-Graduate
- Other (please specify)

A 7. Which area of Malta /Gozo do you consider as your hometown (does not necessarily mean the locality of your residence). (see Key on page 6)

- North area
- Central area
- North Harbour area
- North West area
- South Harbour area
- South
- Gozo & Comino

A 8. What is your employment?

- Non-skilled
- Semi-skilled
- Skilled
- Middle Management
- Top Management
- Self-employed
- Professional
- Other (please specify)
SECTION B – Media Sources for news

B 1. Where do you choose to obtain local news information? Please insert a number next to your first TWO preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

Newspapers
Radio
Television
Online news portals
Magazines
Others (please specify) ________________

B 2. If you chose newspapers in question B1, where do you read these newspapers

Home
Office/place of work
Relatives
Friends
Bars/restaurants
Others (please specify) ________________

B 3. Which daily newspapers do you read, in order of preference? Please insert a number next to your first TWO preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

In-Nazzjon
L-Orizzont
The Malta Independent
The Times of Malta
Malta Today mid-week edition
The Malta Business Weekly (Thursdays only)

B 4. Which local Sunday newspapers do you read, in order of preference? Please insert a number next to your first TWO preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

Illum
Il-Mument
It-Torċa
KullĦadd
Malta Today
The Malta Independent on Sunday
The Sunday Times of Malta
B 5. If you chose radio in question B1, which local radio news bulletins do you listen to, in order of preference? Please insert a number next to your first TWO preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

Bay Radio
Calypso Radio
One Radio
Radio 101
Radju Malta
RTK Radio
Smash Radio
XFM
Others (please specify) ____________________

B 6. If you chose television in question B1, which local TV news bulletins do you watch, in order of preference? Please insert a number next to your first TWO preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

Favourite Channel
NET TV News
One TV News
Smash TV
TVM News

B 7. If you chose online news portals in question B1, where do you access the internet most:

Home
Office/place of work
Relatives
Friends
Mobile devices (e.g. Blackberry, iPhone, etc)
Internet Cafes
Others (please specify) ____________________

B 8. Which local online news portals do you access, in order of preference? Please insert a number next to your first THREE preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

www.di-ve.com
www.maltarightnow.com
www.maltastar.com
www.timesofmalta.com
Others (please specify)

SECTION C – Political views
C 1. Which political party did you vote for in the 2008 General Elections? Please tick (√) one of the following:

Alternattiva Demokratika (The Green Party) 
Partit Laburista 
Partit Nazzjonalista 
Others (please specify) ___________________ 
Did not vote 
Refuse to reply 

C 2. Which political party do you feel currently embodies or reflects your principles? Please tick (√) one of the following:

Alternattiva Demokratika (The Green Party) 
Partit Laburista 
Partit Nazzjonalista 
Others (please specify) ___________________ 
Not interested in politics 
Refuse to reply
Key to Question A7:

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Appendix 5

Replies received by email from the President and Secretary-General ad interim of

Partit Laburista, Dr Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi:

From: Dr. Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi B.A. LL.D. <sza@jszalegal.com>
To: Reuben Sciberras <reuben.sciberras@gmail.com>
Date: 3 May 2010 09:39
Subject: The answers to your questions

How do you see One Productions (especially the news and current affairs programmes) as part of the Public Relations effort of the Partit Laburista?

One TV and One Radio were founded by the Labour Party to ensure a constant means of communication of its policies and to sustain its campaigns while providing a good service to the general public with programmes covering various sectors and themes. The editorial policy of news and current affairs programmes is primarily based on the philosophy that our viewers are provided with a good news services. Moreover it ensures that the main themes that Labour is promoting are prioritised.

Would you consider the resources (both human and financial) invested in your own media as money well spent?

In order to achieve the goals above described, there must be a continuous investment in the infrastructure of the company as well as the personnel that runs the company. A service cannot be run properly unless the people who run the service are given adequate training and the opportunities to exhibit their capabilities and skills. In the recent past One Productions has invested in its infrastructure which investments are bearing fruit. We believe that is as continuous project which we have to sustain.

What other means are being used to address other publics (including floating voters, sectoral interests etc)?
Labour is committed to utilise all possible forms of communication, whether new or traditional in order to connect with all the sectors in society. We believe that our communication with the people has to be consistent and constructive. It is evident that one of the best forms of communication is inter-personal communication and people expect political leaders to be accessible. We make sure that were sustain this accessibility.

*Do you have any means of confirming that your media is reaching the desired PR targets? If yes, what are these? If no, why is this so, and would you consider introducing such means?*

Setting our targets is a major decision, achieving them and ensuring that they are achieve is a major task. It would be pointless to set targets when mechanisms that ensure success are not in place.

*Would the PL consider winding down its media operation if the PN pledges to do the same?*

One must consider a different premise to such an argument – what is the current situation in the public broadcasting services? Is it acting impartially and providing all the sectors and political forces in our country an equal chance? Moreover, one must also analyse the general scenario in the Maltese media sectors prior to considering the question lodged.

*How do you rate the possibility of replacing the current set up with a PR team to address the 'independent' media?*

We constantly address all forms of media and ensure that we have the best possible relations with all the media whether traditional or new media.

Dr. Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi
Appendix 6

Replies received by email from the Secretary-General of the Partit Nazzjonalista, Dr Paul Borg Olivier:

From: Roderick Agius <RAgius@pn.org.mt>
To: reuben.sciberras@gmail.com
Date: 26 April 2010 17:51
Subject: replies

Reuben,

Please find replies for questions sent to the General Secretary.

Regards
Roderick

1. How do you see Media.link Communications (especially the news and current affairs programmes) as part of the Public Relations effort of the Partit Nazzjonalista?
The PN see these it an efficient means of Communication.

2. Would you consider the resources (both human and financial) invested in your own media as money well spent?
Human Resources and Media in general cost money, and all money spent in media and its human resources is money well spent. Media. Link Communications is proud to have served as a learning Media Institution in Malta giving opportunities to a large number of individuals to learn, grow and develop their skills and personality in the Media beyond the same borders of Media. Link Communications and into other media.

3. What other means are being used to address other publics (including floating voters, sectoral interests etc)?
The PN uses all means of communication necessary to communicate effectively in the modern world.

4. Do you have any means of confirming that your media is reaching the desired PR targets? If yes, what are these? If no, why is this so, and would you consider introducing such means?

The PN has always reached its desired targets.

5. Would the PN consider winding down its media operation if the PL pledges to do the same?

The PN does not follow others for any of its decisions but takes those same decisions in the strategic interest of the Party.

6. How do you rate the possibility of replacing the current set up with a PR team to address the 'independent' media?

One does not see a link between one and the other. The independent media acts on its own steam and it is only political substance that gives credibility to the Party being reported by that section of the media…..
Appendix 7

Sample questionnaire received from journalists.

SECTION A - GENERAL BACKGROUND

Please tick (√)

A 1. Gender

Male √ Female

A 2. Nationality

Maltese √ Foreigner

If Maltese, go to question 4

A 3. If a foreigner, how long have you been resident in Malta?

Less than 5 years
Between 5 and 10 years
More than 10 years

A 4. Age

18 – 25
26 – 35 √
36 – 45
46 – 55
56 – 65

A 5. What is your level of education?

Secondary
Post-Secondary (incl. Diploma)
Tertiary √
Post-Graduate
Other (please specify)

A 6. Which area of Malta /Gozo do you consider as your hometown (does not necessarily mean the locality of your residence). (see Key on page 5)

North area √
Central area
North Harbour area
North West area
A 7. What is your position within your media organisation?

- Journalist  
- Management  
- Other (please specify)

SECTION B – Political views

B 1. Did you vote for the political party which owns the media organisation you work for?

- Yes  
- No

B 2. Do you consider yourself of the same political persuasion of the political party which owns the media organisation you work for?

- Yes  
- No  
- Don’t know  
- Refuse to reply

B 3. Do you think that your work forms part of the party’s Public Relations strategy?

- Yes  
- No  
- Don’t know  
- Refuse to reply
SECTION C – Media ownership by Political parties

C 1. How would you rate the news value of the overall reporting by your organisation?

- Very good
- Good ✓
- Average
- Poor
- Very Poor

C 2. Is there a political influence by the owner of your organisation in the reporting of news items?

- Yes ✓
- No

C 3. If yes, how would you rate this influence?

- Very strong
- Strong
- Average ✓
- Mild
- Very mild

C 4. How would you rate the credibility of your media organisation with the general public?

- Very good
- Good
- Average ✓
- Poor
- Very Poor

C 5. Why?

The news emanating from my organisation is already perceived as having its tint from the word go. The credibility of the news is inextricably linked to the credibility of the party owning it in the viewer/listener’s opinion.
C 6. Do you think that political parties should have their own media organisations?

Yes  √  No

Don’t know  Refuse to reply

C 7. Why?

I believe there is a role for advocacy journalism. The independent media normally take a softer approach towards the politician than journalist from the opposing parties’ media.

C 8. Do you think that the local media scene would perform better, produce more newsworthy items and inform better if political parties were to divest themselves of the role they have taken through the ownership of media organisations?

Yes  No  √

Don’t know  Refuse to reply

C 9. Why?

Party ownership of the media does not mean that other media are stifled. In fact, the best-selling newspaper is independently owned and the most popular current affairs, discussion and news programmes are produced either privately or by the journalists of the state broadcaster.
### Key to Question A6:

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Sample questionnaire received from the general public.

SECTION A - GENERAL BACKGROUND

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A 3. Nationality

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If Maltese, go to question 5

A 4. If a foreigner, how long have you been resident in Malta?

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</table>
A 6. What is your level of education?

Secondary
Post-Secondary (incl. Diploma)
Tertiary **X**
Post-Graduate
Other (please specify)

A 7. Which area of Malta /Gozo do you consider as your hometown (does not necessarily mean the locality of your residence). (see Key on page 6)

North area 2
Central area 1
North Harbour area
North West area
South Harbour area
South
Gozo & Comino

A 8. What is your employment?

Non-skilled
Semi-skilled
Skilled
Middle Management **X**
Top Management
Self-employed
Professional
Other (please specify)
SECTION B – Media Sources for news

B 1. Where do you choose to obtain local news information? Please insert a number next to your first TWO preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

Newspapers 2
Radio 3
Television 1
Online news portals
Magazines
Others (please specify) ______________________

B 2. If you chose newspapers in question B1, where do you read these newspapers

Home
Office/place of work x
Relatives
Friends
Bars/restaurants
Others (please specify) ______________________

B 3. Which daily newspapers do you read, in order of preference? Please insert a number next to your first TWO preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

In-Nazzjon
L-Orizzont
The Malta Independent x
The Times of Malta x
Malta Today mid-week edition
The Malta Business Weekly (Thursdays only)

B 4. Which local Sunday newspapers do you read, in order of preference? Please insert a number next to your first TWO preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

Illum
Il-Mument
It-Torċa
KullĦadd
Malta Today
The Malta Independent on Sunday 2
The Sunday Times of Malta 1
B 5. If you chose radio in question B1, which local radio news bulletins do you listen to, in order of preference? Please insert a number next to your first TWO preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

Bay Radio
Calypso Radio 2
One Radio 3
Radio 101
Radju Malta 1
RTK Radio
Smash Radio
XFM
Others (please specify) ____________________

B 6. If you chose television in question B1, which local TV news bulletins do you watch, in order of preference? Please insert a number next to your first TWO preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

Favourite Channel
NET TV News 3
One TV News 2
Smash TV
TVM News 1

B 7. If you chose online news portals in question B1, where do you access the internet most:

Home
Office/place of work
Relatives
Friends
Mobile devices (e.g. Blackberry, iPhone, etc)
Internet Cafes
Others (please specify) ____________________

B 8. Which local online news portals do you access, in order of preference? Please insert a number next to your first THREE preferences, using number 1 to denote your first preference, and so on.

www.di-ve.com
www.maltarightnow.com
www.maltastar.com
www.timesofmalta.com 1
Others (please specify)
SECTION C – Political views

C 1. Which political party did you vote for in the 2008 General Elections? Please tick (√) one of the following:

- Alternattiva Demokratika (The Green Party)
- Partit Laburista
- Partit Nazzjonalista
- Others (please specify) ___________________
- Did not vote
- Refuse to reply  X

C 2. Which political party do you feel currently embodies or reflects your principles? Please tick (√) one of the following:

- Alternattiva Demokratika (The Green Party)
- Partit Laburista
- Partit Nazzjonalista
- Others (please specify) ___________________
- Not interested in politics
- Refuse to reply  X
### Key to Question A7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North area</th>
<th>North West area</th>
<th>Central area</th>
<th>South Harbour area</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bidnija</td>
<td>Dingli</td>
<td>Attard</td>
<td>Birgu (Vittoriosa)</td>
<td>Birżebbuġa</td>
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<td>Gharghur</td>
<td>Mdina</td>
<td>Balzan</td>
<td>Bormla (Cospicua)</td>
<td>Gudja</td>
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<td>Rabat</td>
<td>Birkirkara</td>
<td>Figura</td>
<td>Kirkop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mgarr</td>
<td>Siġġiewi</td>
<td>Iklina</td>
<td>Isla (Senglea)</td>
<td>Luqa</td>
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<td>Żebbug</td>
<td>Lija</td>
<td>Kalkara</td>
<td>Marsaskala</td>
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<td>Naxxar</td>
<td>Marsa</td>
<td>Marsaxlokk</td>
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<td>St Paul's Bay</td>
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<td>Paola</td>
<td>Mqabba</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| North Harbour area           |                                  |                               |                                        | Birżebbuġa            |
| Floriana                    |                                  |                               |                                        | Gudja                  |
| Gżira                       |                                  |                               |                                        | Kirkop                 |
| Hamrun                      |                                  |                               |                                        | Luqa                   |
| Msida                       |                                  |                               |                                        | Marsaskala             |
| Pembroke                    |                                  |                               |                                        | Marsaxlokk             |
| Pietà                       |                                  |                               |                                        | Mqabba                 |
| San Gwann                   |                                  |                               |                                        | Qrendi                 |
| Santa Venera                |                                  |                               |                                        | Safi                   |
| Sliema                      |                                  |                               |                                        | Santa Luċija           |
| St Julian's                 |                                  |                               |                                        | Xgħajra                |
| Swieqi                      |                                  |                               |                                        | Żabbar                 |
| Ta' Xbiex                   |                                  |                               |                                        | Żejtun                 |
| Valletta                    |                                  |                               |                                        | Żurrieq                |

| Gozo & Comino               |                                  |                               |                                        |                       |