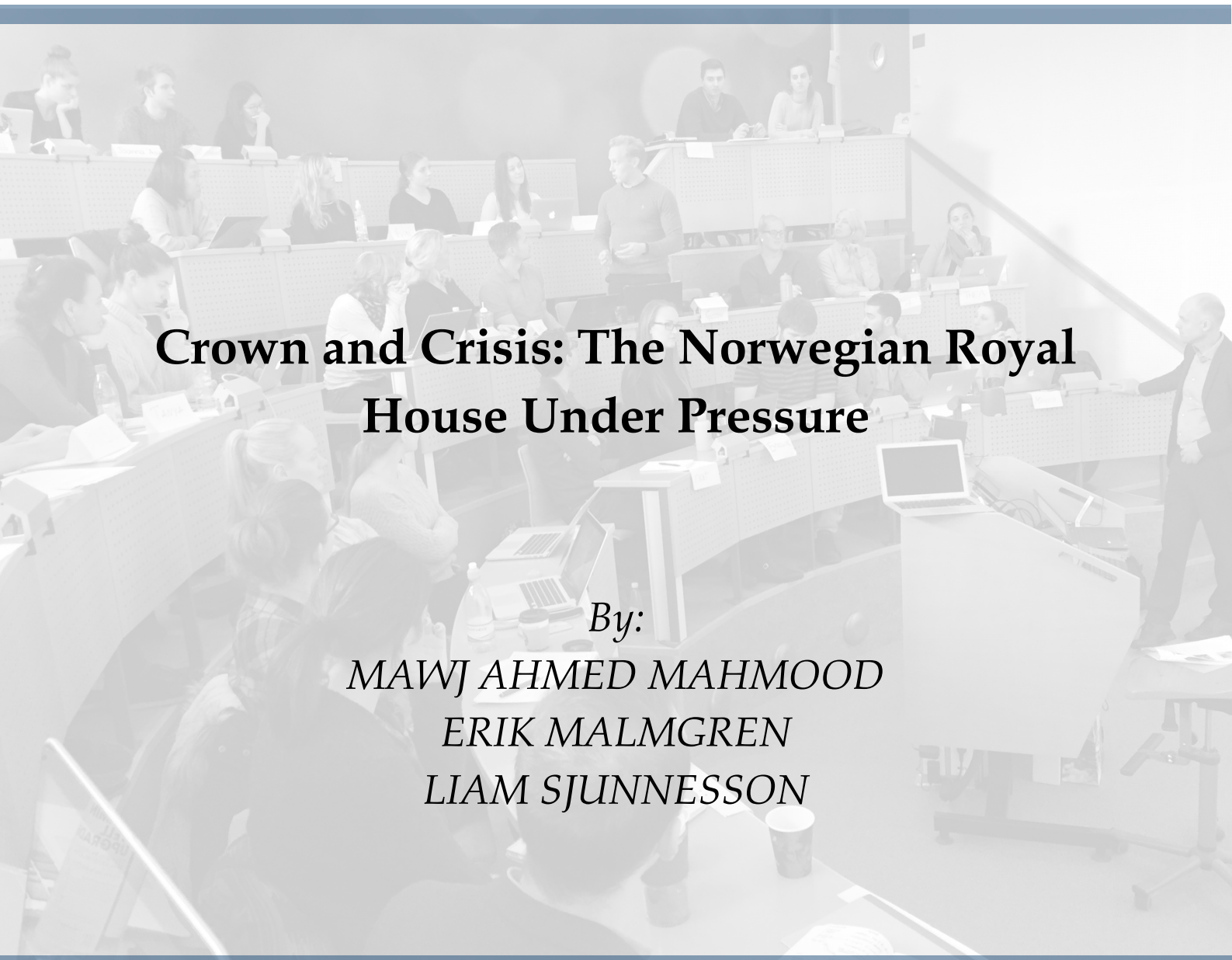


CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT AND REPUTATION

MASTER CASES



Crown and Crisis: The Norwegian Royal House Under Pressure

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Thirteenth Edition
Master Student Case Papers

2026

Corporate Brand Management and Reputation: Master's Cases

The "Corporate Brand Management and Reputation: Master's cases" is a case series for applying the case method of teaching and learning in higher education. The cases are relevant to brand strategists in private and public sector organizations, as well as academics and students at universities, business schools, and executive education.

The cases are written by groups of master's students as a course project. The specially developed case format is defined as: *"A management decision case describes a real business situation leading up to a question(s) that requires assessment, analysis, and a decision reached by discussion in class. The alternative approaches and recommendations from the class discussion are followed by a description of the choices made by the case company. This description is then discussed by the class."*

The student groups select the topics of their case, providing updated and relevant insights into corporate brand management. The cases can be used as "written cases" (handed out and read in advance, later to be discussed in class) and/or as "live cases" (presented by the teacher following a discussion in class). Each case includes teaching notes, visuals with speaker's notes, learning objectives, board plans, and references.

The mission of the series is *"to develop cases for discussion providing insights into the theory and practice of corporate brand management and reputation, with the intent of bridging the gap between academic teaching and managerial practice."*

The series is a result of co-creation between students and teachers at the elective course Corporate Brand Management (BUSN35 – five-credit course/eight-week half-time studies), part of the master's program International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund School of Economics and Management, Sweden. The cases represent the result of the intellectual work of students under the supervision of the head of the course.

Although based on real events and despite references to actual companies, the cases are solely intended to be a basis for class discussion, not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. The cases are free to be used and should be cited in accordance with international conventions.

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WRITTEN CASE

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Crown and Crisis: The Norwegian Royal House Under Pressure

The winter morning of early February 2026 in Skaugum, the official home of the Crown Prince family in Asker, Norway, was unusually chilly. Guri Varpe, the Royal House's Head of Communications, sat in her office, staring at a file that appeared to get heavier with each news update. On her desk was the research from Norstat for Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK)'s new public opinion poll, which sent chills down her spine: support for the monarchy had dropped from 70% in 2025 to a historic low of 60%. More startling was the figure next to it: 47.6% of respondents said Crown Princess Mette-Marit should not become Queen, and, on the other hand, only 28.9% of Norwegians now believe that she remains fit to be their next Queen. In a month, trust in Mette-Marit had shifted from 7.4 to 3.7 on a ten-point scale.

The pressure cooker had reached its breaking point. Just 24 hours ago, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, a long-standing close friend of the Crown Prince pair, broke the government's usual protective silence. In a remarkably sharp statement, the Prime Minister told reporters that he anticipated the Crown Princess Mette-Marit would shed light on the hundreds of newly released emails linking her to Jeffrey Epstein, noting that she had demonstrated 'poor judgment' and failed to meet the expected high ethical standards of those representing Norway.

As Guri stared out the window, she realized the situation was quickly deteriorating. The Epstein files discoveries came just days before the trial for Marius Borg Høiby, the Crown Princess's eldest son, who faced 38 criminal counts, including violent assault. Although Marius had no formal royal function, the public made no distinction; the media was already referring to it as a 'formidable crisis of confidence' that jeopardized the institution's legitimacy.

Guri's phone rang with another alert, snapping her out of her stare. A major humanitarian organization was allegedly meeting to consider withdrawing the Crown Princess as their royal sponsor. For years, the Palace's philosophy has been

based on the conviction that remaining above the conflict maintains dignity. However, in an era of 24-hour news headlines and easy online access to media, remaining silent began to resemble a confession of guilt or, worse, indifference.

For Guri Varpe, the dilemma was clear: should the Royal House preserve its traditional, dignified distance, or was it time to abandon the 'playbook of silence' in favor of a modern, transparent communication plan to restore its image with the public? With the trial entering its second week and the Prime Minister's expectation of the Crown Princess hanging in the air, Guri needs to figure out what practical measures she must suggest to the Crown Prince pair to mitigate the erosion of public trust before they, or worse, the Norwegian monarchy, becomes an epoch of the past.

Background

The Royal House of Norway operates within a constitutional monarchy structure. The King, King Harold V, holds a formal position as the Head of State; however, his role is primarily symbolic, representative, and ceremonial. Thus, the legislative and executive powers derive from the elected political bodies. The Royal House's legitimacy does not derive from a democratic election, but from heritage and continuity.

The order of succession to the throne follows a linear structure. This means that only the child of the King or Queen, or someone who is entitled to inherit the throne, may succeed to it. The line of succession follows the order presented in **Exhibit 1**, where the current successor is Prince Haakon, the son of King Harald V and Queen Sofia. His wife, Princess Mette-Marit, would, in the succession order, assume the title of Queen. Since she married into the Royal Family in 2001, she has no direct heir to the throne, other than being the wife of Prince Haakon. Together, the Royal couple has two children, including Princess Ingrid Alexandra, who is the successor to Prince Haakon.

Mette-Marit was an outsider and a commoner with no aristocratic heritage, similar to Queen Sonja; however, she possessed a more unconventional past. This resulted in Mette-Marit being scrutinized by the media concerning her background. Nicknamed as Cinderella due to her previous work as a waitress, she was considered to lack the proper stature for the role of a Princess. At the time of the engagement, critics questioned her preparedness to face the future responsibilities. Not only was she critiqued based on her professional life, but her personal life became the primary focus of media discourse. Her involvement in the Oslo party scene often included relationships with men involved with drugs. In addition, she was also a single mother to a child, Marius Borg Høiby, whose father had a criminal record for drug-related offenses. Although Marius holds no royal title, he was raised within the royal household. Because of this, he is often referred to as 'the bonus prince' in the media.

Despite having a shaky start in the Royal House due to her background, Mette-Marit eventually managed to charm the people of Norway by keeping a low profile.

The institution is funded by the public, primarily through the civil list and government grants to cover the Royal Family's official duties and maintenance of properties. As Norwegian taxpayers fund the institution, the Royal House is subject to expectations of transparency and high ethical conduct. This financial link ties the Royal House's reputation to its right to exist in a modern democracy.

Historically, the Norwegian Royal House has experienced high trust in comparison to other European monarchies. King Harald V has earned great admiration by speaking about national unity. Enhancing public admiration, he worked to modernise the Royal House, supporting progressive views, a compassionate public image, and a down-to-earth lifestyle (e.g., embracing diversity, religions, and LGBTQ citizens). Thus, the King acts as a 'father of the nation' by providing the public with stability. Building on this trust is the central capital of the Royal House, as it allows them to maintain a central place in the Norwegian brand.

The cornerstone of a constitutional royal institution is maintaining a neutral political position. To symbolize all citizens, the Royal Family must not take sides in legislative or partisan debates. This neutrality often dictates a communication strategy of discretion and silence. By remaining silent, the institution avoids being politicized.

The Incident

Culminating in February 2026, the controversies that placed the Norwegian Royal House at the center of both national and international attention had been unfolding for more than eighteen months. In August 2024, Norwegian police arrested Marius Borg Høiby on suspicion of assaulting a woman with whom he had been in a relationship. Following the arrest, he stated publicly that he struggled with substance abuse and several mental health disorders. This initial allegation was followed by further police intervention, with Borg Høiby being detained multiple times and additional accusations emerging as ongoing investigations continued. By the time of his trial, he had been arrested four times.

On 3 February 2026, Borg Høiby faced 38 criminal charges, including four counts of rape, which he denies, along with allegations of drug-related offences, assault, abuse, violating a restraining order, and speeding. State prosecutor Sturla Henriksbø stated that the offences Borg Høiby is accused of carrying a potential imprisonment sentence of up to ten years. Henriksbø further emphasized that it is essential that all individuals are equal before the law, and that Borg Høiby's connection to the Royal Family should neither result in harsher nor more lenient treatment by the court. With regards to the high risk of reoffending, the Oslo District Court demanded that he remain in custody for the initial four weeks of the seven-week trial.

The trial opened under extensive media coverage. Giving his defence in court, Borg Høiby struggled to compose himself and stated that he had been 'hassled' by the press since early childhood. During the trial's first few days, Crown Prince Haakon acknowledged that 'a lot was going on' within the family and explained that the immediate priority had been to 'take care of the flock'. He added that they supported Marius in his situation while also ensuring the care of the Crown Princess and their children.

Beyond the courtroom, renewed scrutiny emerged concerning Crown Princess Mette-Marit's past connections to the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. In early 2026, hundreds of emails, dated from 2011 to 2014, were released as part of published documents by the U.S. Department of Justice. In the so-called 'Epstein files', Mette-Marit's name appears over 1.000 times. She has also visited Epstein's private residence in Palm Beach, Florida. The news fuelled public debate and raised questions regarding the nature and extent of the contact, with growing concerns expressed about her suitability to become queen (see Exhibit 2). Following the release of the files, several organization ended their collaboration with the Crown Princess.

Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre openly stated that the Crown Princess must answer for herself and clarify the extent of the connection, adding that she had shown 'poor judgement', which marked the first time a Norwegian Prime Minister had publicly criticized a member of the Royal family. On 6 February 2026, King Harald V, who, together with Queen Sonja, has yet to comment on the matter, met with the Prime Minister alongside Crown Prince Haakon. After the meeting, Haakon told reporters that his wife wanted to speak to the public, but explained that "right now she can't, and I also tell her she is not allowed to." ¹

Today, 9 February 2026, Guri Varpe, the Head of Communications, sits in her office, in front of a pile of reports and news, considering how to reason about and approach the emerging crisis onwards.

As a communication and branding consultant to the Head of Communications at the Norwegian Royal House, how would you reason in this situation, *and what actions would you recommend in the short, medium, and long term?*

¹ Kirby (2026).

Exhibits

Exhibit 1 Royal Family of Norway Throne Succession

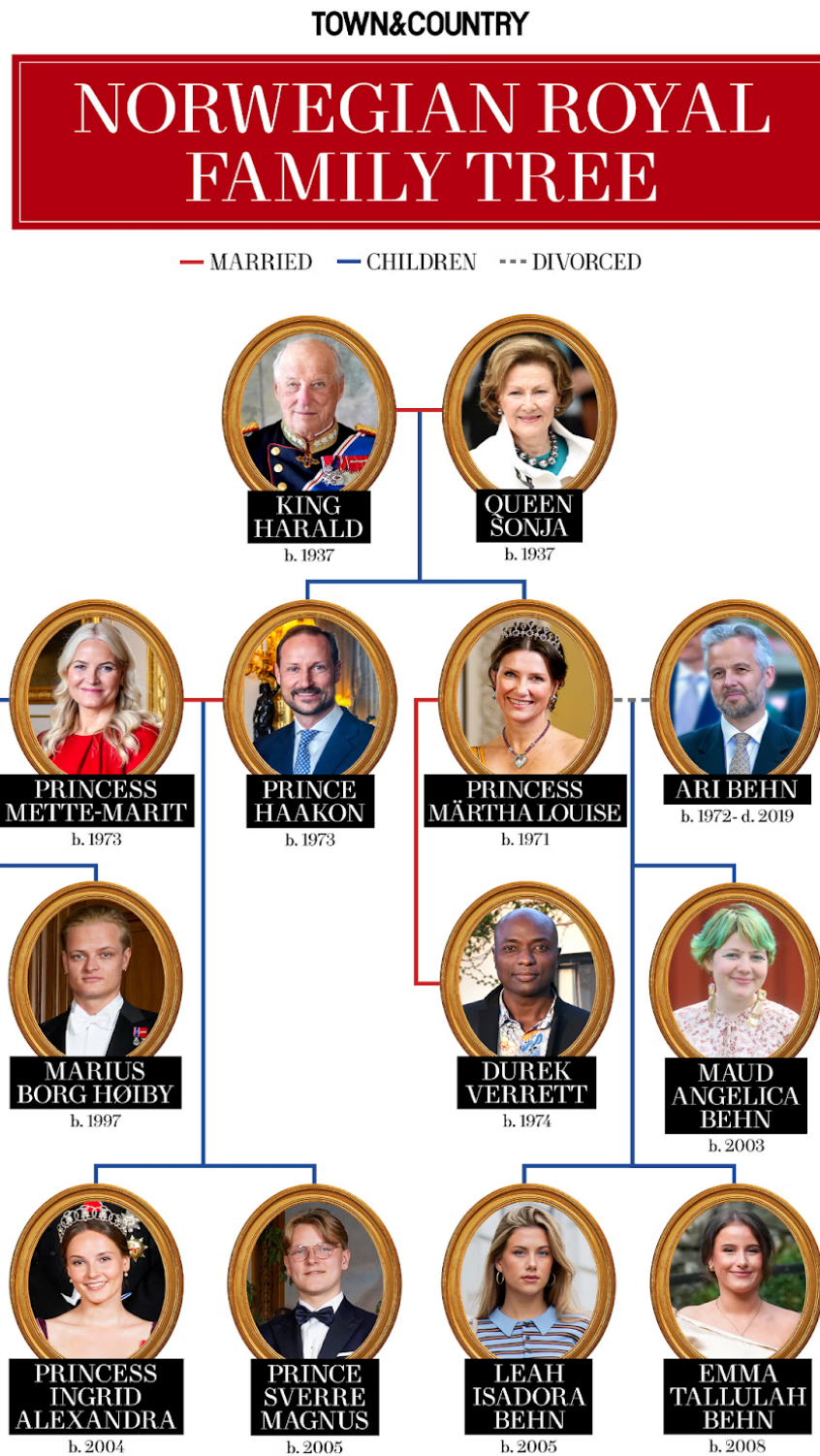


Exhibit 2 Social Media Critique Towards Mette-Marit



RoyalistSupporter 🇬🇧 @ProRoyalFamily · 2 feb.



Princess Ingrid must stay far away from her mother's influence. I hope and pray she's nothing like her. My heart goes out to Norway and their loyalists to the crown. It's a difficult situation. I pray for the soul Mette-Marit and pray she repents but goes nowhere near the crown.



497



ghostwhat • 18d ago

I cant speak for all of Norway, but Marius and Mette-Marit aren't exactly well liked. It was only the media who seems, or rather - seemed - to hold them in high regard. This enabled Marius to wreak havoc among the up-and-coming influencergirls-scene, while Mette-Marit was enjoying herself on/with Epstein (Island).

Not my queen. Ever.



Starfield00 • 18d ago

I think its not too late for Kronprins Haakon to find a new wife.

References

Kirby, P. (2026). Norway's crown princess apologises after pressure over Epstein friendship, *BBC*, Available Online:
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c78v8wx6jjxo>
[Accessed 20 February 2026].