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Changing priorities, hybrid campaigns: Interest groups' perceptions of gains and risks in the new media landscape¹

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Abstract

Interest groups depend on visibility for political influence and organizational growth. The current hybrid media landscape presents both opportunities and constraints for visibility and influence. For organized interests, if, when and how to use established media involves a continuous evaluation of different media strategies, as well as evaluations of how to best combine media and non-media platforms for efficient, multi-platform advocacy campaigns. Through qualitative interviews with 39 health interest organizations, representing a broad spectrum of group types, resources and access to decision-makers, this study analyses evaluations of the perceived gains and risks associated with media strategies. Although all interviewees value media visibility, their actual access to the established news media varies significantly. In the current media landscape, which is characterized by hyper-competition and hybridity, we find that it is primarily the well-resourced organizations, with storytelling expertise, which gain and prioritize visibility in the established media. Other organizations, independent of other group characteristics, seek visibility by increasingly becoming networked content distributors to bypass established media and target specific publics to promote organizational aims.

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Introduction

‘You need to be visible, but there’s a balance, right? You cannot be in the media too often without coming across as all panicky. It is a pity if the media is your only communication channel [...] Public attention is always needed, but it’s about striking a balance and using the media strategically’ (Patient Org4, 2018). This quote from the head of communications at a Norwegian health interest group illustrates interest groups’ often ambiguous approach to using the media in today’s rapidly changing media landscape. Digital technology has altered the production, distribution and consumption of media content, resulting in a hybrid media system where established news media and newer digital media platforms interact and compete (Chadwick, 2013).⁴ For interest groups, this represents an opportunity to circumvent the established media, as all organizations can now produce and publish their own content (Lloyd and Toogood, 2015). However, attention is elusive in the current high-choice media landscape (Webster, 2014) and organized interests must compete with each other – and an increasing number of other political actors – for attention. For the established news media, the technological disruption and networked social media platforms have fragmented news audiences and increased competition for attention, audiences and advertisement. The prospect of falling revenues and failing business models has prompted a push towards cost-effective production and popularized, user-engaging output (Karidi, 2018). Digital shareability has also become more important for established news organizations (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017; Lischka, 2018). Taken together, these changes are altering the context for outside lobbying (i.e. Thrall, 2006; Kriesi, Tresch and Jochum, 2007) and pushing interest groups to rethink their strategies to influence decision-makers by mobilizing public opinion.

The present study is an in-depth analysis of how interest groups strategize and reflect on media advocacy in this hybrid media landscape. With regard to theory, the analysis is informed by insights from the literature on interest group representation, media campaigning and political actors’ media strategies. Although industry handbooks consistently promote cross-platform advocacy campaigns (e.g. Esbensen, 2012), there has been a lack of studies which analyse how interest groups combine, integrate and evaluate media strategies in contemporary lobbyism. Existing studies within political science of interest group’s *outside lobbying* provide valuable insights into which groups use the media channel for political

⁴ We define ‘established news media’ as news media organizations run by professionals, following editorial principles and professional norms, producing news and views for a mass audience. We define ‘networked media’ as non-editorial social media platforms where multiple users can produce and distribute content within their networks (i.e. Facebook) (see Klinger and Svensson, 2015).

impact (e.g. Baumgartner et al, 2009; Binderkrantz, 2012; Kriesi, Tresch and Jochum, 2007). However, these studies have predominantly mapped interest group representation quantitatively on a strategy-by-strategy basis, only indirectly studying the media (see Halpin, Baxter and MacLeod, 2012, for a critical discussion). Media and communication scholars, on the other hand, have focused primarily on groups' media strategies, largely ignoring how they are combined with non-media platforms for political impact (see Eskjær, 2016, and Powers, 2014, for further details). This study addresses this gap by exploring how a broad spectrum of interest groups operating within the same policy field combine various media platforms with other organizational aims, and to illuminate how organizational characteristics influence viable channels for influence. To further contribute to the literature, we stress that this takes place in a hybrid, competitive media context, which we conceptualize as *a hybrid media logic*. To give substantive insights into how contemporary media advocacy is seen by interest group professionals, we conducted 45 in-depth interviews with executives and heads of communication in 39 Norwegian health interest groups which represent different groups in terms of membership types, sizes, economic resources and cultural status. The groups encompass labour unions, patient (citizen) organizations, umbrella organizations, and industry (business) organizations. Most of the groups in our study represent specific interests rather than causes (Grant 2004). Within the Norwegian public health care system, where the government is the main purchaser, employer and provider of health care, all groups have an interest in affecting government priorities, but competition for attention is steep. If, when and how the groups use and combine different media and non-media platforms involves a continuous evaluation of potential gains and hazards in terms of desired or unfavourable outcome. We aim to provide insights into these evaluations and practices, as seen by interest group interviewees, by answering the following research question: *How do interest groups evaluate and prioritize media advocacy in the hybrid media landscape?* Taking into account the multiple organizational demands which affect organizational media use, we further seek to identify *which factors condition media strategies in the current hybrid media landscape*.

A number of explanations and rationales behind interest group media advocacy, based on the existing literature, is synthesized and discussed in the next section.

Analytical framework: Explaining interest groups' mediated advocacy

A large number of studies within political science has studied interest group representation within different arenas and systems (e.g. Binderkrantz, Christiansen and Pedersen, 2015). In

the following, we combine insights from the existing literature in political communication and political science on key organizational logics – the logic of influence, the logic of membership and the logic of reputation (media visibility; see Berkhout, 2013, for further discussion). We argue that the influence of these three logics on organizations are altered by dramatic changes in the media landscape, as interest groups today are facing what we label *a hybrid media logic*.

From traditional news to hybrid media. Media scholars have emphasized how various actors are increasingly affected by a media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979), and how the media's production process and formats lead to a specific way of interpreting social affairs, which together make the media a social force.⁵ Broadly speaking, logics can be understood as the *modus operandi* of institutions or smaller cultural and social domains, the 'particular rules and resources that govern a particular domain' – such as for instance the media (Hjarvard 2014). Building on the media logic approach, scholars have distinguished between a broader, generic media logic and a *news media logic* (Asp, 2014; Esser, 2013; Landerer, 2013; Thorbjørnsrud, Figenschou and Ihlen, 2014). Aiming to provide a comprehensive framework, Esser (2013) stressed how news media logic comprises professional aspects, commercial aspects and technological aspects. In recent years, the growing market and audience orientation (Ibid, pp.171-173) has increased an 'audience-oriented commercial logic' (Landerer, 2013).

Zooming in on the *commercial news logic*, Karidi (2018) found evidence of a stronger presence of celebrities, conflict, emotionalization, negativity, opinionated, narrative stories and soft news in the established news media over time. Similarly, Harcup and O'Neill (2017) found that commercial pressures privilege striking, tabloid news (i.e. conflict, surprise, magnitude), news which people engage with and share (i.e. entertainment, drama, good news, audio-visuals) and news which positions news organizations vis-a-vis others (i.e. exclusivity, internal agendas). Consequently, new business models are increasingly promoting infotainment and the popularization of politics, evidenced by growing sensationalism, ordinary citizen perspectives and the privatization of public figures (Umbricht and Esser, 2016).

⁵ The media logic approach has been criticized for being simplistic and linear (i.e. Brants and van Praag, 2017; Landerer, 2013), for lacking longitudinal empirical evidence, lumping different media together, and for emphasizing media format over social interactions, thus falling into the trap of media determinism (see Brants and van Praag, 2017). In this paper we address this criticism first by elaborating on the different, emerging logics rather than one 'media logic' and second by discussing it in relation to other organizational logics (the logic of influence and the logic of membership).

In recent years, scholars have also sought to outline what characterizes *social media logic* (i.e. van Dijk and Poell, 2013) or *networked media logic* (i.e. Klinger and Svensson, 2015). Researchers have therefore stressed the need to study (commercial) news logics and networked media logics together (i.e. Asp, 2014; Finneman, 2011), particularly in relation to interest groups and political organizations (Donges and Nitschke 2016). For this study, how these emerging logics influence established news organizations' production and how this is perceived by interest groups is especially important (for a comprehensive discussion on interest groups' networked advocacy, see Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019). As stressed in the introduction, the increased competition from social and digital media have pushed established news media towards cost-effective production and popularized, engaging output (Karidi, 2018). Moreover, it has become increasingly important for established newsrooms to engage audiences on multiple platforms, and shareability has become crucial (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017; Lischka, 2018). To compete in the hybrid media landscape, established newsrooms must employ more user-engaging storytelling: news stories which arouse emotions (particularly hope, surprise or anger) and have a large societal impact, and stories which privilege opinionated news over balanced, informative news (Beckett and Deuze, 2016; Kilgo, Lough and Reidl, 2017; Lischka, 2018). In essence, what we label a *hybrid media logic* is the sum of the particular practices and prioritizations in the current media landscape which push the media and everyone who aims for media visibility towards popularized, engaging and shareworthy stories which work well in both established news media and networked media.

Adapting to the news logic: The news logic is founded on the premise that news is and should be important and significant – that the news media offer a description of reality which matters and has consequences for those described (i.e. Carlson, 2017). Media scholars have studied to what extent being visible and present in the established media is indeed prioritized in organizations, often analysing the extent to which they seek to adapt to media logic(s) to promote their organizational aims (e.g. Cottle and Nolan, 2007; Fenton, 2010; Waisbord, 2013). Overall, these studies have found that organized interests have largely sought to adapt rather than challenge established news media norms, and have often been criticized for cloning, adopting and even over-promoting issues that are already in the media spotlight (i.e. Fenton, 2010; Waisbord, 2011).

Adapting to news media logic can also involve risks for interest groups and organizations. Insider groups with close connections to decision-makers (Grant, 2004) are often invited into the established news media as credible experts, offering authoritative and

impartial analysis of events, new research reports, mappings and statistics (Halpin, Baxter and MacLeod, 2012; Albæk, 2011). Outsider groups, on the other hand, must often rely on publicity stunts and protests to attract media attention (Manning, 2001; Thrall, 2006). Those organized interests which adopt an opinionated, negative position vis-à-vis policy proposals often attract more media attention than those who voice a milder, supportive or unclear position (de Bruycker and Beyers, 2015), while organizations which stress conflict, human interest and entertainment gain media attention (de Bruycker and Beyers, 2015; Imison, 2013). It is primarily organizations with strong marketing departments and project-based funding models dependent on mobilising the public which seek visibility in the popularized media (Powers, 2014), although this has also been characterized as a broader trend (Frölich and Jungblut, 2018). Such news attention can also undermine organizational aims (Berkhout, 2013), as publicity stunts and protests may garner short-term attention but can delegitimize groups in the longer run vis-à-vis both decision-makers, members and the public (Koopmans, 2004; Manning, 2001; Vromen, 2016). In the following, we outline how the news media logic has been found to correspond with other key organizational logics in existing studies and discuss how this may change in the hybrid media landscape.

Media strategies and organizational logics. In contrast to the media-oriented approaches, political scientists have largely studied interest group media strategies according to an organizational *logic of influence* (Schmitter and Streeck, 1999), where media practices are seen as outside lobbying to mobilize support and engage citizens outside of the policymaking community (Kollmann, 1998, p. 35). From this perspective, only groups with limited access to decision-makers were pushed to use the media to gain influence (an approach often labelled the compensation thesis) (e.g. Kriesi, Tresch and Jochum, 2007; Powers, 2014). At the same time, other studies have shown that both insider and outsider groups use the media (e.g. Kollmann, 1998; Beyers, 2004). Furthermore, newer studies have found that groups do not necessarily use the established news media to target the general public (Jentges et al., 2013), but rather seek to strengthen ties with policymakers in order to secure insider access – so-called *boosting strategies* (Trapp and Laursen, 2017). Most relevant studies have confirmed the privileged access thesis – that well-resourced, established groups which are closely involved in the decision-making processes also have systematically higher media access, and thus better opportunities for media advocacy (Binderkrantz, Bonafont and Halpin, 2017; Thrall, 2006; van Leuven and Joye, 2014).

Academic debates on outside lobbying and group resources were revived with the emergence of networked media, as many hoped that they would enable resource-poor interest

groups to communicate directly with public and political authorities (see van der Graaf et al., 2016, for elaborations). Overall, empirical studies have found that the most well-resourced organizations also have the most comprehensive digital strategies (e.g. Powers 2016b; Thrall, Stecula and Sweet, 2014; van der Graaf, Otjes and Rasmussen, 2016; see Chalmers and Shotton, 2016, for a critical discussion).

Given that most groups use both inside and outside arenas for influence, there are multiple reasons for employing media strategies to gain political impact. Group type, such as membership type and organizational goal, is believed to affect groups' ability to mobilize public opinion and signal issue salience to decision-makers (Kollmann, 1998). For instance, groups representing public interests are more inclined to address the media than groups representing specific interests, such as labour unions and business interests (Dür and Mateo, 2013). However, business groups, which generally prioritize inside lobbying, tend to be dependent on public support when lobbying in unison on more general issues (Smith, 2000). Others have found that institutional context is more decisive for choice of strategy than either group type or resource level (Beyers, 2004). Furthermore, the specific sector and issue characteristics are found to be central determinants of interest group strategies (Kollmann, 1998; Beyers, 2008; Smith, 2000; Mahoney, 2007; Berkhout, 2013).

In addition to influence, interest groups use the established news media for organizational maintenance, to recruit members and obtain funding. Such a *logic of membership* (Schmitter and Streeck, 1999) includes all efforts to communicate with, mobilize, gather support and represent members, including visibility of their issues and actions (Berkhout, 2013 p. 234). In recent years, many studies have maintained that emerging digital media have radically changed how groups communicate with members, such as information-sharing, creating awareness, building community, and listening to the sentiments of supporters and members (e.g. Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019; Briones et al., 2011; Guo and Saxton, 2014). Powers (2016a), however, found that due to donor appreciation of news media visibility, groups continue to target the established news media. Similarly, Hanegraaff et al. (2016) found that organizational resource competition is a central driver for interest groups' media strategies. However, media visibility efforts to satisfy members and donors can also potentially conflict with backstage processes for influence (Berkhout, 2013).

In sum, the established news media have been central for interest groups' pursuit of both political influence and organizational maintenance. Within the context of hyper-competition and hybridity, we argue that long-standing perceptions of the established news media as central to political communication are being challenged. To adapt to a hybrid media

logic, political actors must be willing to employ popularized, engaging formats and styles. We therefore aim to contribute insights into how groups with different characteristics prioritize and strategize how they handle the media in pursuing organizational goals. By mapping which Norwegian health interest groups gain visibility in the established news media as a starting point, we analyse how interest group leaders and heads of communication perceive the benefits and disadvantages of media advocacy today. We outline the context and field specificities in the next section, followed by an elaboration of the interest groups and methodology.

The Norwegian context: The Nordic welfare and media model

In Norway, public authorities and politicians decide on regulations, laws, resource allocations and priorities within the healthcare sector. Built on the Beveridge/NHS model, key characteristics of the Norwegian health care system are tax-based funding and comprehensive coverage,⁶ publicly owned and operated hospitals and universal access based on residency (Magnussen, Vrangbæk and Saltman, 2009). From the 2000s onwards, a range of reforms has promoted centralization and a greater role for the state, and hence politicians at the national level are increasingly blamed for health system irregularities and poor performance (Ibid.). Norway has traditionally had strong corporatist structures, providing organized interests formal insider representation, but the proliferation of new organizations has weakened inter-organizational unity. Membership numbers are declining and memberships are less stable, and new organizational types – such as ad hoc and single-issue organizations – are more influential (Sivesind et al., 2018). Both direct lobbying and indirect communication through the media have become concurrent priorities for organizations aiming for political influence (Rommetvedt, 2017). In the health sector, since the 1990s the many patient organizations have become markedly active in lobbying and mobilizing public opinion to influence health policy (Magnussen, Vrangbæk and Saltman, 2009).

This development is reflected in the expansion of the communication, public relations and public affairs sectors in Norway since the 1990s. The Norwegian media system represents Hallin and Mancini's democratic corporatist model (2004), which is characterized by professional journalism, an inclusive press market, powerful public broadcasting and

⁶ As a high-income country, Norway was one of the top spenders on health per capita in 2017 (EUR4653 per capita) and spent more than the European average of its gross domestic product (10,4 per cent) (OECD/EU, 2018, 132-5).

generous press subsidies, in combination with low levels of ownership regulation and low levels of political parallelism (Brüggermann et al., 2014, p. 1057). The latter likely increases the importance of the media for interest groups (Berkhout 2013). Today's media landscape has been affected by international trends such as falling revenues, increased global and digital competition, commercialization of the newspaper market and deregulation of the broadcasting sector (Allern and Blach-Ørsten, 2011). The vast majority of Norwegians read online news (84 per cent weekly) and over half the population use social media as a news source (54 per cent weekly). Traditional offline news sources are still important but are in decline (64 per cent weekly for TV and 27 per cent weekly for print) (Newman et al., 2019).

Method

Aiming to study how interest groups strategize and value campaigns on multiple platforms in a changing media landscape, we conducted in-depth interviews with 26 top leaders and 19 heads of communication in a total of 39 Norwegian health interest groups. The interviews were conducted in 2015 (pilot study, 3 interviews) and 2017–2018 (main study, 42 interviews) by a team of four researchers. The interviewed groups were selected to include different characteristics: membership base (representing professional, citizen and business interests), symbolic resources (e.g. the cultural status of a medical condition or profession, position within the journalistic sourcing hierarchy) and economic resources (which indirectly influence the other forms of resources (Ihlen, 2007)). All pertained to the Norwegian health field, including nine labour unions (representing nursing assistants, nurses, midwives, physicians, dentists, physiotherapists and psychologists), 26 patient and umbrella organizations (representing various medical conditions) and four medical industry clusters and organizations (representing only, or partly, pharmaceutical companies).

Within the context of a strong welfare state, all have an interest in influencing public policies and the distribution of public health resources. Most receive some level of state funding, and all are dependent on membership fees or sponsorship and donations. Within each category, the selected groups thus represent different comparative strengths in relation to the media, political decision makers, and public opinion. While all groups have some degree of insider access, the groups range from having close ties to the political establishment and public management, to less routinized access, particularly several minor patient organizations which struggle for political, public or medical recognition (see Grant, 2004).

As a point of departure for the analysis, we mapped these groups' media visibility in terms of the number of mentions in national and regional newspapers, throughout 2017 and 2018, measured through a digital media archive (Retriever). In addition, we mapped the degree of social media outreach in terms of number of followers on Facebook and Twitter. To inform the discussion on how resources can explain interest groups' choice of strategy, two research assistants mapped revenue, size of the organization and communications/public relations staff to create a resource index.⁷ The organizational characteristics, organized according to established media presence, are summarized in Table 1 below.

The semi-structured interviews covered a broad range of issues related to topics of organizational communication, reactive and proactive media strategies, lobbying and political campaigns, and social media. The transcribed interviews were coded in HyperResearch. In this paper we analysed all statements related to media advocacy (strategies to promote organizational aims through the established news media). In a second round of coding we analysed the interviewees reflections on the risks and gains of media advocacy for their organization, as well as the interdependent rationales behind such strategies.

Interview statements primarily give insights into interviewees' reflections and sentiments (Jerolmack and Khan, 2014). A critical approach to interview statements is particularly pertinent when interviewing political and communication elites (Dexter, 2006/1970). The majority of interviewees in this study are skilled communicators and experienced public speakers and are thus better able to control and frame the interviews than the others. Aiming to reduce formulaic, well-rehearsed statements, the interviewers prepared follow-up questions, asked for practical examples and asked interviewees to evaluate previous successful and unsuccessful media campaigns, cases and practices. All direct quotes were approved by interviewees. To preserve the interviewees' anonymity, only the professional categories to which the interviewees belong are provided.

Analysis: Organizational logics in the commercialized, hybrid media landscape

Regardless of group characteristics, most interviewees in this study agree that news media

⁷ These data must be interpreted with some caution. First, annual incomes do not equal budget, nor do they indicate relative fortune or debt. Second, communication staff is primarily indicative, as some have professional full-time communication staff, whereas others rely on lay part-time volunteers. Furthermore, several see communication as being the responsibility of all employees.

visibility is central for both political influence (logic of influence) and organizational maintenance (logic of membership). One head of a patient organization explained how media visibility is key to recruiting members: ‘we hope that, if more people knew who we were, we will have more members [...] and we would get a stronger voice’ (Patient.Org.10, 2018). The perception of the media as a reinforcing positive spiral is echoed by most interviewees; appearing in the media is thought to attract members and resources, thereby increasing political impact, which in turn can spur more media visibility.

Although the interviewees largely shared a perception of the established news media as important for organizational aims, they also acknowledged that the ability to impact the news agenda varies markedly between groups. To map this variation, and to relate media visibility and social media presence to key organizational traits, we provide an overview below of groups’ news and social media visibility, membership type and size, income, communication staff, level of access to decision-makers⁸ and main source of income (summarized in Table 1. in appendix).

The mapping revealed some key characteristics of the interviewed organizations’ media visibility which serve as a contextualization and starting point for the analysis of interest groups’ media evaluations and strategies. First, media visibility is strongly associated with income levels and expertise, as those organizations with high levels of income and numerous communication staff gain most media visibility, and substantial social media reach (in line with the privileged access thesis, i.e. Binderkrantz, Bonafont and Halpin, 2017; Thrall, 2006; van Leuven and Joye, 2014). However, there are some groups with relatively high levels of income and staff which have little media presence, and vice versa. Second, for the interviewed groups in this study, neither group type, size nor level of backstage access appeared to be decisive for news media visibility. However, in accordance with the literature, the groups representing business interests had less media presence (i.e. Smith, 2000). In terms of income source, the groups most dependent on donations, sales or membership fees, generally have higher media visibility and social media reach (largely corresponding with the literature connecting economic model and media strategies, i.e. Powers, 2014). Although the groups with limited or few resources varied in terms of news media visibility, they all had relatively limited social media outreach, indicating that social media strategies are also a drain on resources. In sum, except for resource levels and staff, and to some degree income source,

⁸ Based on self-reported access to decision-makers.

the listed variables did not fully explain the differences in news media visibility and social media reach between the studied groups.

The main analytical contribution of this paper is the interest group interviewees' evaluations and prioritizations of established media in a media landscape characterized by hyper-competition, popularization and hybridity. The following explains how and why groups seek to obtain media coverage through personalized storytelling, how they negotiate the need for visibility with other organizational needs and lastly, how groups prioritize the established media vis-à-vis other platforms to secure gains and opportunities in the current media landscape.

Attracting media visibility through user-engaging storytelling. When the interviewees were asked how their organizations strategized to gain media attention, most emphasized the importance of captivating storytelling, regardless of the membership type they represented. Patient groups in particular, as well as some labour unions, stressed the importance of demonstrating the need for policy change through personalized accounts of struggle or hope. A compelling story engages the audience to care and identify with their members and can serve to promote a sense of community and moral urgency for change. The following quotation, in which the head of communication in a major labour organization explained how they seek to narrate their opposition against budget cuts and layoffs as *a story*, serves as a starting point here:

We try to humanize our message...to show that there are actually 20 women in the community who risk losing their job. Those affected are your neighbour, those you know from the café, the nursing home, those you meet at school [...]. It makes it more difficult to cut the positions of the people you know from the budget [...] we need to illuminate the human consequences and focus on compelling stories. The more intimate, the closer, the better. (Prof.Org.3, 2018)

Following a hybrid media logic, stories which arouse emotion and identification are more likely to attract media attention. Hence, most of the organizations in this study are seeking to apply such stories systematically (see also Thorbjørnsrud and Ytreberg, 2019), as mentioned in this quote:

We want to push substantial, serious issues, but acknowledge that soft news are easier to pitch [...] We want to communicate the need for more research by trying to emphasize how we can benefit from more research. Then we have this clip of this girl, who survived due to new research, and now she is well enough to play soccer, and she explains how she experienced being seriously ill. That kind of intimate stories. (Patient Org.16, 2018)

Affective stories can also be used to target decision-makers with different arguments than the norm of formal dialogue allows, as indicated in the following quote by the head of communication of a large patient organization:

We strive to use the media the right way to demonstrate our points of view and place our issues on our agenda [...]. When we use the mass media, we reach human beings, whereas in our political work we reach professionals. But in most cases, these will be the same people, so if you can reach a politician as a grandparent through the media first, then that politician will be more open to your political meeting afterwards. (Patient Org.8, 2017)

Several interviewees commented that the media demand for personal stories has increased, as media organizations value shareworthiness across platforms. One experienced communication expert said that public engagement in social media is a constant reminder that ‘what matters to people are the fundamental human issues’ (Patient Org.4, 2017). Another interviewee said that ‘I see what people want – it’s ‘patient stories’. They are completely inexhaustible reading about other people’ (Patient Org.3, 2018). Similarly, interviewees explained that political posts on social media hardly stir any reactions, whereas tales of individual suffering and hope can mobilize and engage thousands. Many explained that stories published in the media or on an organization’s websites are reposted on social media platforms, to inform, build community and mobilize political and popular support (see Figenschou and Fredheim, 2019, for an in-depth analysis).

However, providing narratives that the media will publish requires access to engaging, media-attractive stories. A few groups are fortunate to represent conditions or groups which can attract public attention without applying extensive resources. For example, one group in the study had few available resources and no direct access to decision-makers. However, as it represents a rare but highly severe condition, it has been able to attract significant attention across media platforms due to the emotional appeal of the stories it can provide. For the groups which do not represent such storytelling capital, it can be resource-demanding to gain the competence and means needed to compose the right narrative elements. Several interviewees representing well-resourced organizations described how they construct media stories by combining the various elements required to obtain the desired coverage: new facts, a field expert to comment and an illustrative, compelling example, as described in this quote:

It’s about the good stories, or maybe the painful ones. It’s about finding statistics, the numbers and facts, and then you need the people behind the statistic [...]. So, we send out a request [to our members]: ‘Who would like to be in the media in relation to this issue?’ Then you get a

long list of names from North to South with people wanting to share their story to increase acceptance and understanding. (Umbrella Org.2 2017)

The interviewees described their media strategies (personal, affective storytelling) as a necessary evil to attract the media engagement necessary to convey their broader policy aims. They agreed that such compelling exemplars serve as an efficient ‘news hook’. In sum, the ability or willingness to communicate in the media is closely connected to the relative cultural status of the groups, level of resources or membership size. In accordance with the hybrid media logic, storytelling capacity can function as a new, central group characteristic which can determine groups’ abilities to attract media or social media attention. Nevertheless, for groups lacking access to user-engaging, empathic individuals, conveying their perspective in the media can be difficult. This is particularly pertinent for organizations representing controversial or stigmatized conditions. Other groups are not dependent or willing to be associated with emotional accounts at all. A few interviewees representing labour unions and the medical industry were hesitant to use patient cases, due primarily to professional norms or image, but also to the potential untoward impact on the patients. Interviewees’ perceptions of a lack of control over their media representations and the lack of impact from media visibility are discussed in the following sections.

Negotiating conflicting logics with pragmatic visibility. Most interviewees expressed a need to be visible, both to demonstrate efficiency to their members and to secure funding (the logic of membership), and to secure influence in the political arena (logic of influence). The importance of maintaining organizational integrity as membership organization is a key concern for the interviewees, an aim which sometimes implies criticism of those in power:

Even if we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the health minister one day, if there is something the next day [...] then we are loud and clear in the media: ‘That they don’t make the necessary decisions, that there is not enough money, and so on. So, our integrity is very important, we do not always agree [with the politicians in charge]’. (Interest Group.2, 2015)

Several interviewees, except those representing industry interests, found that members expected them to publicly defend their interest through public demands for action. Due to the inherent emphasis on conflict and opinionated statements, media attention is perceived to be as easier to obtain for those offering strong statements, as illustrated in this quote:

We have to be visible for our members and potential members, to show them that we are on our guard – that is important! But it is not enough to influence an issue, it is one of many different tools [...]. Sometimes we have to bark a bit, be the watchdog, and then come with

the solution. Because the watchdog gets media attention, but the good solutions do not, unfortunately. Patient Org.13, 2018

While strong opinions increase the likelihood of media attention, most interviewees also expressed concern that such conflict-oriented media coverage could be counterproductive, possibly hampering effective political advocacy. Groups therefore continuously weigh the costs and benefits of when and whether to use the media in their day-to-day practice. Interviewees representing both trade unions and patient groups explained the need to balance members' expectations for them 'to yell and fight through the media' (Prof.Org5, 2018) and pragmatic back-stage compromise. Some, particularly those from smaller patient organizations, stressed how they are generally careful with 'shouting in the media' and make an effort to communicate their criticism to decision-makers outside of the public eye, thus avoiding 'risking their relations' (Patient Org.2, 2017). Moreover, whether interviewees seek to communicate positive or more critical media stories can depend on how an issue is positioned on the political agenda, as illustrated by this statement from the head of a professional organization:

We are more concerned about telling stories about what works than what doesn't work. It depends what you seek to achieve. If you want to put something on the agenda, that no one has thought about [...] you have to find the good stories about what works, what made a difference. However, if you want to influence something that is already a priority, or something that's already on the agenda, then you can also tell what doesn't work. (Prof.Org.1, 2017)

In line with this, many interviewees saw mediated criticism first and foremost as a Plan B strategy, to be implemented if advocacy efforts on backstage arenas fail to materialize:

If we take the discussion out in the media, we've sort of missed the opportunity to have a dialogue with those writing [policy proposals]. Or, not missed, but they should not feel forced to write something because we say it in the media, they should write it because it's sensible. [...] If, when it comes out, we disagree strongly, or it lacks nuance, then of course, the media would be a place to go out and comment. But so far, it is much better to meet with them and find good solutions. (Industry Org.1, 2018)

However, some of the most experienced interviewees representing well-connected insider groups see the mediated conflicts as a form of symbolic interplay which can be constructive to drive policy forward. According to a head of communication in a patient organization, mediated conflict can build networks:

People do not necessarily have to be happy every time we're in the media, sometimes there is a bit of conflict, and for us that's good [...]. I believe it's a good way to build relations, in the

longer term. When you have conflicts, you bump into each other, so giving a few sharp media comments is really a good thing. (Patient Org.4, 2018)

Related to this, the leader of a large interest group saw mediated conflict as an opportunity to strategically grant decision-makers a bargaining chip and greater momentum in policy negotiations:

I believe there is an understanding that we have different roles and that we each have to maintain our own integrity. Because we have different roles, I can do other things that the industry or politicians cannot. So in sum, it's quite good. Very often, I put pressure on the minister of health, for instance, and I'm not so sure he's bothered that I put him in a situation where he can go to the minister of finance and say, 'we actually need to spend more money on this area'. It is a kind of [political] game (Interest Group.2, 2015)

Several interviewees also feared that negative media attention could be harmful to the public image of these organizations and their issues. Some interviewees explained how they attempted to stay out of mediated conflicts because it does not harmonize with their organizational image. As one head of communication said, 'We must balance our strategies for media attention with our core values – of being knowledgeable and trustworthy. We cannot 'water down' our brand' (Interest Group.2 2017). Several interviewees said they feared losing control over how their issues are framed and that the coverage might spur negative reactions, such as social media trolling. Loss of control is particularly relevant for groups with the least resources and those associated with stigmatized or politicized diseases, as exemplified in the following quote:

We are better positioned outside the media, or [if we participate] we need to strictly control the debate. These debates are never-ending and we have very limited impact on them [...] Our point of view is not listened to! [...] We are somehow always brought to heel in these debates [...] We are only invited in after the terms are set and our diagnosis is already framed as 'questionable'. (Patient Org.5, 2017)

More often than the representatives of other groups, these interviewees expressed that they pay a high price for media visibility and prefer communicating on platforms with higher content control, such as in-house publications, websites or Facebook.

Resource prioritization and changing priorities: Interviewees from all groups in the study frequently evaluated the time and resources required to obtain mainstream media visibility, based on whether they felt that the effort paid off in the current high-choice media landscape. Monitoring, and seeking to anticipate, the running media agenda is deemed important to maintain a media presence, and thus often serves as a point of departure for internal

discussions on media initiatives. All the major organizations subscribe to professional monitoring services, as illustrated in this elaboration from the leader of an umbrella organization, which is worth quoting at some length:

We get the media clips at eight in the morning, and from that we decide whether to comment on any running stories either by contacting the national news agency or at least to do something on social media [...]. Should we aim for wider distribution, or more limited distribution of in-depth coverage? [...] We evaluate continually throughout the day. When we are busy, we can have three-four stories in the loop at the same time, running decisions and having corridor meetings on framing, news angles, whether or not we have a good individual example, illustrations, experts or new statistics. (Umbrella Org.1, 2017)

The representative of one particularly well-resourced organization explained that they use the clip services to be ‘ahead of the media’, keeping track of other actors and relevant events in order to anticipate and prepare for upcoming media coverage: ‘If the health minister has a press conference, or if the decision-makers communicate something – we have to know about it! Then we have something produced on the minute, or we can send a press release, or call (a newspaper) and give a comment. We have to be first, we can’t wait, we have to be active. And quick’ InterestGroup.2, 2015). The organizations’ need to keep track and react to the media agenda is a drain on resources and affects internal organizational priorities and structure. The patient groups with the least resources are therefore less likely to do so, concentrating instead on what they present as key organizational tasks.

Succeeding with media visibility requires advanced insider knowledge of journalistic requirements and the ability to provide high-quality content and effective storytelling. Due to steep competition and high production pressure in contemporary newsrooms, interviewees generally see the threshold of media visibility as increasingly challenging, and therefore evaluate the outcome of media attention more critically. Affecting the national news agenda is perceived as particularly demanding, causing interest groups of all types to approach the established media agenda through alternative, indirect strategies. A common strategy is to first target local or regional media, popular magazines or specialist publications, which offer a lower threshold to publication and stronger control over representation. Several interviewees also increasingly rely on their own media channels, such as their own publications, blogs and social media, thereby in effect becoming semi-professional media publishers able to predictably communicate their preferred content. Groups representing industry interests in particular, lamented their inability to promote positive stories in the established news media.

The head of communication of one such organization described how this influences their communication strategy:

We spend less and less time on traditional media, and more on social media and our own platforms [...]. We use (Twitter) a lot, we are very active: Political messages, tweets from our seminars [...] and our blogs are also important. I have to admit we have used the blogs less and less, though, maybe because our messages have become quicker, when you want something out quickly, it is often in a tweet rather than a long blog post. (Industry Org.2, 2017)

As long as a story is 'shareworthy' it can easily spread from such 'local' publications on the organizations' own platforms or from local media, attracting the attention of larger audiences as well as potentially reaching the national media agenda. One recurrent *media catching strategy* (Waters, Tindall and Morton, 2010) is to mobilize local representatives to set the agenda in local media and then let the story 'grow organically'. Another is to use social media, as illustrated by the following statement by a head of communication of an influential labour union:

You no longer necessarily set the health agenda with a front page in the most renowned national newspaper [...]. Now you can start a debate on Twitter, which in itself can trigger mass media interest. A few years ago, our leader posted a tweet, then the Minister of Health engaged and they ended up debating on national television that same evening. (Prof.Org.2, 2017)

The following quote by the leader of another labour union provides insight into why some organizations prioritize their own platforms over the established news media:

We work a lot to get our op-eds published in newspapers, but it is very demanding! Because the media have high demands, of course, and there are so many who send them material [...]. Often our material is returned to us with the reply that we have to cut it down to half, or to one third, or something. Then it is easier to publish it on my blog, or the website. Because then we get it out anyhow [...]. And then we actively use social media, Twitter and Facebook, to spread the message. (Prof.Org.1, 2017)

In the digital media landscape, numerous platforms and rapid news cycles continuously affect headlines. Even if an organization manages to get the attention of major established news media, many interviewees question whether it is worth the effort. These interviewees argue that the political impact of media visibility seems to be diminishing. The head of communication at one of the most well-resourced patient organizations, who has extensive experience in proactive media work, is worth quoting at some length:

The media agenda is increasingly fragmented [...], and we need to be more purposeful in timing our media initiatives. We cannot simply fire a shotgun; we need to use a rifle and aim for a precise shot [...]. Headlines make less of an impression and there is no such thing as a news agenda anymore – after ten seconds there is a new issue on social media that will take our attention. What you thought would be the issue of the day when you woke up has already been replaced by ten other stories before lunch. (Patient.Org.14, 2018).

Although all interviewees underlined the continued political significance and agenda-setting function of national news media, several interviewees also expressed ambivalence regarding its continued impact. All organizations stressed that they found social media and in-house media platforms beneficial as a means of sharing their information. Corresponding with the impression from the mapping of media visibility (above), it is primarily the organizations with the best resources which can afford to strive for media visibility and aim to combine it with other advocacy channels. Among those interest groups which strategize to gain both established media and social media visibility, we found a preponderance of well-resourced groups.

Conclusion

Departing from the notion that media visibility has become a key organizational aim (Berkhout, 2013), this study provides new, in-depth insights into how different interest groups evaluate and prioritize media visibility in the current hybrid media landscape. Specifically, it explores how prioritizing media visibility affects other key organizational aims (the logic of membership and the logic of influence) and what characterizes groups' ability to take advantage of the hybrid media logic. Three main findings with significance for the current state of knowledge on what motivates and affects interest group visibility strategies are highlighted below.

First, it is primarily the most established insider organizations which have the competence and resources needed to promote their interests in the hybrid media landscape, a finding which corresponds to the privileged access thesis (Binderkrantz, Bonafont and Halpin, 2017; Thrall, 2006; van Leuven and Joye, 2014). In contrast to assumptions in the literature that mainstream media attention conflicts with policy efforts (see Berkhout, 2013, p. 242), several of the most established and well-resourced groups in this study strategically apply media to support backstage efforts. As stressed by Berkhout (2013), contextual factors can in part explicate the weight put on established news media for these otherwise well-connected

groups. On the one hand, while corporatist structures facilitate backstage access, the growing number of specialized interest groups increase competition. In addition, health policy is a topic with high public interest, and within the de-politicized media system, alternative policy perspectives are more easily highlighted (Ibid, p.243). Being well-connected, these groups are able to target and communicate with decision-makers on multiple platforms, taking advantage of the different platform affordances by applying rational reasoning in one arena and emotional storytelling in another in multichannel hybrid campaigns. When they do protest untoward policy directions, they primarily demonstrate explicit member advocacy with an implicit, mutual understanding of roles and arena requirements. Groups with less resources or insider access are more inclined to avoid media attention, fearing that negative coverage can hamper their cause, organizational image and fragile relations with central decision-makers. In accordance with the literature (e.g. Kollmann 1998), this study finds that membership type also affects media strategies, as groups representing industry interests are less inclined to target the mainstream media extensively, regardless of resources.

Second, although groups assign continued political importance to the established news media, the steep competition in the competitive, hybrid media landscape induces alternate strategies. Well-resourced organizations still monitor the mainstream news media systematically to identify opportunities for attention, but regardless of resources and membership type, organizations increasingly become semi-professional media producers, prioritising their own digital platforms to reach targeted audiences (members, funders and decision-makers). In particular, groups representing industry interests and smaller patient groups tend to prioritize their own platforms and publications. Well-resourced groups representing conditions and professions with high cultural legitimacy, on the other hand, use both social media and established news media for political influence.

Third, while groups are increasingly becoming independent content producers, they vary in their ability or willingness to mobilize culturally resonant, engaging and shareworthy stories which will attract attention across platforms. While some groups have the members or expertise necessary to construct appealing stories, others remain unable to mobilize the required story-formats of any media channel. In particular, groups associated with controversial or stigmatized conditions must take precautions in their communication in hybrid media in order to avoid misrepresentation, harassment or social media trolling. Other groups, such as those representing medical professions or the industry, can be unwilling to apply emotional storytelling, because they already have the desired level of insider access. Groups which produce shareworthy, compelling stories and cases, on the other hand, can

increase their visibility and mobilising power in the hybrid media landscape – beyond what their level of organizational resources would predict. Similar mobilising power has been exerted in digital social movements (see Vromen, 2016), which also stress digital storytelling strategies. Such groups can attract substantive media attention regardless of insider position, resource level or membership size, and for them, the hybrid media logic does indeed represent a ‘weapon of the weak’ (van der Graaf, Otjes and Rasmussen 2016).

However, this study focuses on interest organizations in a specific field (health) in a particular location (Norway). To what extent the communicative strengths and weaknesses identified in this qualitative study are found in other contexts and groups should be investigated more systematically in future comparative or quantitative approaches. Moreover, the present paper is based on the reflections and evaluations of leaders and heads of communication, which is not necessarily identical with what they actually do in ‘the heat of the moment’, or whether they succeed in their strategies. The contribution of this study lies primarily in its elucidation of their professional practices and reflections; the motivations of different types of organizations for targeting some arenas for visibility and how they perceive media strategies in contemporary settings.

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Appendix:

Table 1. Overview of group news media presence, membership type, annual income, access to decision-makers, size, communication staff, social media followers and main sources of income.

News media mentions	Group type	Income level	Access to decision makers	Members	Comm. Staff	Facebook followers	Twitter followers	Main source of income
1357	Labour Union	High	Yes	> 300 000	12	> 30 000	> 5000	Members
815	Labour Union	High	Yes	> 30 000	6	> 10 000	> 10 000	Members
701	Labour Union	High	Yes	> 100 000	6	> 80 000	> 5000	Members

630	Interest Org.	High	Yes	> 100 000	12	> 250 000	> 5000	Donations
220	Umbrella Org.	Medium	Yes	> 30 Groups	1	> 5000	> 2000	(NA)
218	Patient Org.	High	Yes	> 50 000	5	> 25 000	> 2000	Sales
131	Labour Union	High	Yes	10000	6	> 25 000	> 4000	Members
99	Patient Org.	High	Yes	> 20 000	4	> 20 000	> 3000	Donations
87	Labour Union	Medium	Yes	> 2000	1	> 4000	< 100	Members
73	Umbrella Org.	Medium	Yes	> 80 Groups > 300 000	2	> 9000	> 2000	Government
73	Labour Union	High	Yes	> 6000	5	> 4000	< 1000	Members
67	Prof. Group	Limited	Yes	> 1000	1	> 3000	< 1000	(NA)
65	Patient Org.	Medium	Yes	> 10 000	3	> 10 000	< 1000	Government
64	Patient Org.	High	Yes	> 10 000	6	> 15 000	> 2000	(NA)
57	Patient Org.	Medium	No	> 3000	2	> 30 000	< 1000	Donations
55	Patient Org.	Medium	Yes	> 30 000	3	> 30 000	> 3000	Government
54	Patient Org.	Medium	Yes	> 8000	1	> 10 000	< 1000	Government
54	Industry Cluster	Medium	Yes	> 80 Groups	1	> 3000	over 2000	Government
37	Patient Group	Medium	Yes	> 15 000	1	> 6000	-	Other int. org
36	Prof. Group	Low	Yes	> 1000	3	> 1000	over 3000	(NA)
36	Interest Org.	Medium	Yes	0	1	> 10 000	> 2000	Government
34	Patient Org.	Limited	No	> 1000	2	> 5000	> 1000	(NA)
32	Patient Org.	Limited	Yes	> 3000	2	> 1000	< 1000	Other int. org.

29	Patient Org.	Limited	Yes	> 4000	1	> 5000	-	Government
27	Patient Org.	Medium	Yes	10000	1	> 10 000	> 2000	(NA)
25	Patient Org.	Medium	Yes	9000	1	> 5000	< 1000	(NA)
22	Industry Org.	Medium	Yes	> 50 Companies	3	< 1000	> 1000	Members
15	Patient Org.	Medium	Yes	10000	1	> 20 000	< 1000	Government
9	Patient Org.	Limited	Yes	< 500	2	> 1000	< 1000	Government
8	Industry Cluster	Medium	Yes	> 200 Groups	1	> 1000	> 3000	Government
8	Patient Org.	Limited	Yes	< 1000	1	> 4000	> 1000	(NA)
7	Patient Org.	Limited	No	> 1000	0	> 2000	< 1000	Other int. org.
5	Labour Union	Medium	Yes	10000	3	> 5000	> 1000	Members
4	Industry Cluster	Limited	Yes	40 Organizations	1	< 1000	> 1000	Government
4	Patient Org.	Low	Yes	< 500	1	> 1000	< 1000	(NA)
2	Patient Org.	Limited	No	< 1000	1	> 4000	> 1000	Other int. org.
1	Patient Org.	Limited	No	< 500	2	> 2000	-	Other int. org.
1	Patient Org.	(NA)	Yes	< 1000	0	> 1000	-	(NA)
0	Patient Org.	Limited	Yes	5000	2	> 1000	-	Other int. org.

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