þÿAn Effective Weapon for the Weak? : Digital M
þÿInterest Groups Media Success

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An Effective 'Weapon' for the Weak? Digital Media and Interest Groups' Media Success

The equalization-normalization debate concerns whether the Internet equalizes politics by empowering resource-poor organizations, or whether it further strengthens the position of resource-rich organizations. We address this debate by studying how interest groups' utilization of digital media is associated with their success in influencing news media. We suggest digital media is characterized by the coexistence of old and new media logics that benefit resource-rich and resource-poor groups in different ways. Analyzing a dataset of 1,127 Finnish interest groups, we found that groups' utilization of digital media is positively associated with their news media success, yet traditional ways of influencing the news media remain more effective. Among resource-rich groups with larger public relations staff, blog publishing is positively associated with both media access (media visibility) and agenda-building success (influencing news topics). In contrast, utilization of digital media among resource-poor groups only correlates with agenda-building success, and audiovisual content is more effective than other content. We suggest that while resource-poor groups benefit from network media logic in which the flow of information is initially based on popularity among social media users, resource-rich groups can exploit mass media logic where traditional journalistic gatekeeping is more important. The findings also imply that digital media has not decreased resource-related bias in interest groups' media access.

Keywords: social media, digital media, normalization, equalization, interest groups, news media

Introduction

The rise of the Internet and digital media has been accompanied by optimism and pessimism concerning their potential to democratize politics by empowering political actors and groups that lacked resources to gain a voice in the predigital era. This debate is often presented as a competition between two rival hypotheses: the equalization hypothesis and the normalization hypothesis (Eyal, 2016; Gibson & McAllister, 2015; Hong & Nadler, 2016; Margolis, et al., 1999; Stier et al., 2018; Van Aelst et al., 2017; van der Graaf et al., 2016). Briefly, the equalization hypothesis posits that the low entry costs and nonhierarchical culture of digital media empowers marginalized and resource-poor organizations and groups, consequently democratizing politics. Because digital platforms such as blogs and social networking services (SNSs) are cheap or free to use, they could potentially be "weapons of the weak" (van der Graaf et al., 2016), which resource-poor political groups can use to increase their influence. In contrast, the normalization hypothesis argues that established and resource-rich political actors and groups continue to be more powerful, as they, for instance, can invest in public relations (PR) expertise to use digital media more effectively.

This paper addresses the equalization-normalization debate by studying how interest groups' utilization of digital media tools (such as blogs and SNSs) is associated with success in influencing the news media. In the digital era, gaining visibility in traditional news media—digital or print—continues to be an important goal for interest groups, and studies show that groups use digital media to influence news media (Binderkrantz, Chaqués Bonafont et al., 2017; Chalmers & Shotton, 2016; Fenton & Barassi, 2011, p. 181; Powers, 2016). From the equalization-normalization perspective, it is therefore relevant to ask whether weak, resource-poor groups can use digital media to strengthen their visibility in and impact on the traditional media agenda. If so, digital

media utilization might reduce bias in interest groups' media access (Binderkrantz, 2012; Danielian & Page, 1994; Thrall, 2006). Alongside other factors such as collective action problems (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; Olson, 1965) and framing (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015), interest groups' resources (such as staff numbers) cause bias in media access; resource-rich groups are cited by journalists more frequently (Andrews & Caren, 2010; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Thrall, 2006). Because digital media's promise lies especially in its potential to empower resource-poor actors and organizations (Gibson & McAllister, 2015, pp. 530–531; see also Van Aelst et al., 2017), this paper focuses on resource-related bias in interest group media success, and considers whether digital media utilization can reduce this bias.

Why should we care about resource-related bias in interest groups' media success? From a normative perspective, it is desirable that different societal viewpoints are reflected in media debates, because this allows citizens to formulate informed opinions (Danielian & Page 1994, p. 1057; see also Binderkrantz, 2012) and prevents select interests having undue influence on policy-making via the media. Because narrow but wealthy segments of society are more likely to join interest groups and can afford higher membership fees (Lowery et al. 2015, p. 1224; Olson, 1965; Schattschneider, 1960, pp. 30–35, 47), interest groups gain resources disproportionate to the size of the societal groups they represent. Thus, if interest groups with larger resources have more media visibility that resource-poor groups (Andrews & Caren 2010; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Thrall, 2006), the opinions of different societal groups may not be heard in public debates in proportion to their size and significance in society.

This paper contributes to the abovementioned literature on interest groups' media access and extends research on interest groups' use of social media from the equalization-normalization perspective (Chalmers & Shotton, 2016; Scaramuzzino &

Scaramuzzino, 2017; van der Graaf et al., 2016). While these studies focused on the extent that interest groups use social media tools, we study how the use of these tools is associated with success in influencing news media. This shift of focus accords with the broader equalization-normalization literature that increasingly gives attention to the effectiveness of digital communication (Gibson & McAllister, 2015; Van Aelst et al., 2017). Some important small-N studies have already examined the association between interest groups' digital media use and news media success (Eyal, 2016; Thrall et al., 2014), but have not explicitly tested the equalization-normalization hypotheses by comparing resource-rich and resource-poor interest groups.

Importantly, this paper also contributes more broadly to the equalization-normalization literature by hypothesizing that different media logics benefit resource-poor and resource-rich groups in different ways. Recent studies suggest that digital media is not a monolith that simply favors strong or weak players (Gibson & McAllister, 2015; Stier et al., 2018). Instead, some forms of digital media (such as Web 2.0 versus Web 1.0) may benefit marginal groups, while others may benefit established groups (Gibson & McAllister, 2015). We extend this line of inquiry by hypothesizing that online communication is characterized by the coexistence of "mass media logic" and "network media logic" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015), which benefit resource-rich and resource-poor groups in different ways. Thus, our study contributes to the discussion about the coexistence of new and old media logics within the hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

To analyze the association between groups' digital media use and media success, we employed a dataset combining a survey of 1,127 Finnish interest groups and an investigation of their visibility in two leading national newspapers. Finland is an interesting case for two reasons. First, as the country is highly digitalized (Eurostat,

2020), it is a likely context for interest groups' digital media utilization to be effective. Second, the tradition of corporatism in which select resource-rich groups have a privileged position in policy-making (Author et al., XXXX) means that patterns of media visibility may be particularly biased according to resources, making our investigation relevant from the normative perspective.

Literature Review

We define interest groups as "membership organizations working to obtain political influence" (Binderkrantz, 2012, p. 119). A distinction is commonly made between inside strategies of influence that target policy makers directly, and outside strategies that place indirect pressure on policy makers by using media and other public channels of communication and mobilization (Dür & Mateo, 2016; Kollman, 1998). These strategic orientations are not mutually exclusive, and many interest groups combine inside and outside strategies (Binderkrantz, 2005).

The news media is an important arena of outside strategies; thus, interest groups use various channels (such as press releases and social media messages) to influence news media content (Dür & Mateo, 2016). Often, the initial aim is to gain media access (Author, forthcoming). This means that interest groups enter the news media by "passing a threshold" controlled by journalists (Binderkrantz, Pedersen et al., 2017, p. 310) and are thus cited or mentioned in the news. Access enables groups to voice their views and influence how issues are framed in public debates, which may ultimately influence policy decisions (De Bruycker, 2019). Especially for public interest groups such as human rights groups with large numbers of potential members, media access is also important to recruit new members and retain current members (Dür & Mateo, 2016; Johansson et al., 2019, p. 370). Moreover, groups may gain first-level agenda-

building success, which means they increase the salience of particular issues on the news media agenda (Cobb et al., 1976; Pamerlee, 2014). Agenda building is important for interest groups because media attention may increase the public salience of an issue (see Kollman, 1998) and ultimately influence political agendas and decisions (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006).

Factors at three levels determine why some groups have more media success: mobilization, strategy, and journalistic gatekeeping. First, owing to collective action problems such as free riding, some societal groups (especially small ones) are more likely to mobilize into formal organizations (Olson, 1965). Therefore, interest groups representing narrow interests, such as business owners, typically have a strong presence in interest group systems (Lowery et al., 2015; Schattschneider, 1960), reflected in their high media visibility (Aizenberg & Hanegraaff, 2020; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). Second, some groups, such as public interest groups (Dür & Mateo, 2016) and groups opposing governments' policy proposals (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015) have stronger incentives to use media strategies frequently, which increases their media access (Binderkrantz et al. 2015; Grömping, 2019; Oehmer, 2017). Third, journalistic gatekeeping is primarily based on journalistic norms and routines, such as news values and objectivity (Grömping, 2019). For example, privileged groups in policymaking are attractive as news sources because elite actors' views have a high news value (Binderkrantz et al., 2015).

Interest group strategies and journalistic gatekeeping mostly explain why groups with larger resources acquire more media access. Resource-rich groups can use media strategies more actively and produce higher quality PR material that conform with journalistic routines (Binderkrantz, 2005; Gandy, 1982; Grömping, 2019). Further, resource-rich organizations tend to have higher political status and therefore higher

news value (Binderkrantz et al., 2015). For these reasons, resource-rich interest groups typically have more media access (Andrews & Caren, 2010; Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Thrall, 2006; but see De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015).

From the equalization-normalization perspective, it is therefore relevant to ask whether resource-poor groups can use digital media to compensate for their lack of news media access, or even to increase their visibility and impact on the traditional media agenda. Studies focusing on the extent of interest groups' digital media use have largely supported the normalization hypothesis by showing that resource-rich groups use digital media tools more actively (Chalmers & Shotton, 2016; Scaramuzzino & Scaramuzzino, 2017; van der Graaf et al., 2016). However, a focus on the extent of digital media use instead of its effectiveness disregards the possibility that groups' digital media use may increase their influence on traditional media and potentially equalize patterns of traditional media success (Eyal, 2016). This is a plausible scenario because groups tend to tailor social media messages to attract the news media's attention (Powers, 2016).

Mass Media Logic vs. Network Media Logic

What are the mechanisms by which interest groups' digital media use may lead to success in influencing the traditional news media? We suggest that this influence can happen through two distinct (but interrelated) logics: mass media and network media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). These logics include different "communication norms and practices related to media production, distribution, and usage" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, pp. 1245–1246). Both logics take place in the hybrid media system, and are not limited to certain types of media (Chadwick, 2013, p. 207; Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1251).

For our study, the most relevant difference between the two logics concerns the distribution of content. In mass media logic, professional journalists are the main gatekeepers, who select content based on traditional criteria of newsworthiness and news routines. In contrast, in network media logic, the flow of content depends on its popularity among social media users (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1246), who like, share, and retweet content.

Based on these logics, we postulate two mechanisms through which organizations' use of digital media may translate into news media influence. First, interest group activity on digital platforms may provide media access through mass media logic because journalists use digital media platforms (such as Twitter) to search for citations and interviewees (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Pamerlee, 2014; Paulussen & Harder, 2014). Interest groups may thus employ digital media messages like traditional press releases and other information subsidies that provide ready-to-use text to busy journalists (Gandy, 1982; Metag & Rauchfleisch, 2017). Hence, groups that participate in social media debates may gain media access if cited in the traditional media as a relevant source of information or as a suitable actor in the news narrative.

Second, groups may use digital media to gain agenda-building influence through network media logic (Nelimarkka et al., 2016). In this case, digital media messages first become popular on social media leading to increased attention on a specific issue. Next, increasing social media attention increases the issue's salience in the news agenda (Conway & Kensk, 2015; Neuman et al., 2014) because journalists use social media to look for news topics (Weaver & Willnat, 2016) and may cite social media discussions as evidence of public opinion (Beckers & Harder, 2016).

Hypotheses

We have postulated two logics that interest groups may use to achieve media success, and next we use these theoretical ideas to formulate hypotheses. A natural starting point is to assess the strength of association between interest groups' digital media utilization and media success (H1). If the utilization of digital media is weakly associated (or not associated) with media success, no substantial equalization effect can emerge. A useful point of comparison involves traditional ways of influencing the news media. Then, we hypothesize how different media logics benefit resource-rich and resource-poor groups. First, we expect differences between groups in terms of types of media success obtained (H2, H3). Second, we expect that different forms of digital media content benefit resource-rich and resource-poor groups differently (H4).

Effectiveness of Digital Media

An abundance of information on the Internet makes competition for journalists' attention difficult (Thrall et al., 2014). As Klinger and Svensson (2015, p. 1248) elaborate, "Distribution of content is asymmetric on social media platforms. Only very little information or few posts receive attention, most remain unnoticed," Indeed, studies show that the impact of social media on news sources and news topics is limited (Conway & Kensk, 2015, p. 364–365; Neuman et al. 2014; Paulussen & Harder, 2014, p. 549).

Focusing on interest groups, the existing evidence is mixed. Eyal (2016) found a robust correlation between NGOs' digital media utilization and media success. However, other studies found that NGOs' use of Twitter had limited impact (Harder et al., 2016; Thrall et al., 2014). In contrast, evidence of the effectiveness of a traditional news media strategy is more consistent, and it is a strong predictor of interest groups'

access to the media (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014; Grömping, 2019; Oehmer, 2017). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

> **H1**: A traditional news media strategy (e.g., publishing press releases) is more strongly associated with interest groups' media access and agenda-building success than a digital media strategy (i.e., publishing content on digital media).

Types of Media Success

We suggest that network media logic can be successfully exploited by resource-poor groups in agenda building. In network media logic, the distribution of content initially depends on popularity among social media users rather than on traditional criteria for newsworthiness (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). This means that interest group resources and status may matter less for spreading information successfully. While resource-rich groups may have more followers on digital platforms, issues become popular on social media because the messages resonate with social media users, not because of the high status or PR resources of an organization that initiated or contributed to the issue. Here, resource-poor interest groups may benefit from the culture of "connective action," a form of individualized online advocacy in which the role of collective identities and established organizations is downplayed (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). This culture may be conducive to nonprofessional groups' messages, which may strengthen their ability to increase attention on issues. Finally, increased social media attention may encourage journalists to cover the issue (Conway & Kensk, 2015; Neuman et al., 2014; Weaver & Willnat, 2016).

Resource-rich groups may also be able to succeed in this kind of networked agenda building. They typically have many social media followers (Hong & Nadler, 2016), and their digital media messages likely spread broadly across social media

platforms. Therefore, we expect that both resource-rich and resource-poor groups can use digital media for successful agenda building.

> **H2**: Digital media activity and agenda-building success positively correlate among both resource-poor and resource-rich interest groups.

However, agenda-building success of resource-poor groups does not necessarily translate to enhanced levels of media access. Thousands of actors may participate in social media discussions, and journalists may need to rely on traditional news values and routines when deciding whom to cite. As Paulussen and Harder (2014, p. 544) write, "the increasing workload and time pressure in combination with information abundance may require journalists to fall back on old (and safe) routines of news production." Thus, mass media logic probably plays a particularly strong role when journalists select sources, which benefits resource-rich groups. As outlined in the literature review, resource-rich groups are better able to produce PR material that fits into journalistic routines (Gandy, 1982), and typically have higher political status and therefore greater news value (Binderkrantz et al., 2015). Indeed, Lecheler & Kruikemeier suggest "the rise of social media has by no means ended the dominance of elite sources" (2016, p. 157). Furthermore, journalists tend to network on Twitter with professional actors, such as professional lobbyists, whereas volunteer-based organizations and activists may fall outside these elite networks (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013). This leads to our third hypothesis.

> **H3a:** The more resources a group possesses, the stronger the positive correlation between the group's activity on digital media and its media access (a linear interaction effect).

However, the most resource-rich and influential groups may enjoy high levels of media access (Binderkrantz, Chaqués Bonafont et al., 2017) irrespective of the extent of digital media use. In a corporatist system such as Finland's in particular, the most resource-rich groups have a semi-official status in policymaking (Author A et al., XXXX). Journalists use them as sources because of their high status, even when they do not actively approach journalists. Furthermore, as policy insiders, the most resource-rich groups have close relationships with key journalists, which they use to influence news media effectively. Thus, utilizing digital media cannot be expected to be great for the most elite of the resource-rich groups when their reliance on traditional media strategies and other relevant factors are held constant. Accordingly, as an alternative hypothesis, we expect the interaction effect to be non-linear.

> **H3b (alternative):** The positive correlation between digital media activity and media access increases with interest groups' resources but then decreases again among the most resource-rich groups (a non-linear interaction effect).

Forms of Digital Content

Finally, different message formats may benefit resource-rich and resource-poor interest groups differently. To succeed in utilizing network media logic, resource-poor groups need to attract the attention of social media users, for which audiovisual content may be especially effective. Studies show that videos are an important feature of NGOs' online campaigns (Vromen & Coleman, 2013). In contrast, resource-rich interest groups, benefiting from mass media logic, may be able to use digital media in a similar way as traditional information subsidies, such as press releases (Gandy, 1982; Metag & Rauchfleisch, 2017). Textual information may be especially useful in this regard

because it provides busy journalists with ready quotes and raw text that can easily be incorporated into news stories (Lewis et al., 2008).

> **H4**: Audiovisual digital content is more effective for resource-poor interest groups, while texts are more effective for resource-rich interest groups in gaining media access and agenda-building success.

Data and Methods

Survey and Media Data

We started by mapping the entire population of nationwide membership associations in Finland using a combination of top-down and bottom-up sampling (Berkhout et al., 2018). The top-down portion of our sample included groups that had appeared in two leading newspapers within a one-year period, responded to government consultations, participated in hearings of parliamentary standing committees, and were members of ministerial committees or working groups (Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2019, p. 83). Finland does not have a lobby register, encyclopedia of associations, or similar usable register. Therefore, we compiled the bottom-up data from various sources, following the example of the INTERARENA project in Denmark, a similar corporatist country (Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Christiansen, 2012). In corporatist countries, many interest groups are organized hierarchically under umbrella groups (Christiansen, 2012). Therefore, various group listings exist, and we added all lists we found online. We also undertook an extensive and systematic Google search to identify interest groups, using different economic sectors as search terms, for example. We included only those groups whose email addresses we found.

Consequently, this resulted in a list of 3,271 interest groups. A survey was conducted between November 2015 and January 2016, and 1,794 groups responded.

Because our focus was on nationwide groups seeking political influence, we filtered out local groups (n = 74) and those who stated they did not to seek any kind of political influence (n = 299). We also filtered out groups reportedly disinterested in influencing the media agenda (n = 58), which included mostly small professional associations, business associations, unions, and leisure groups. After applying these filters and the listwise exclusion of groups with non-responses, the final sample included 1,127 interest groups.

Media analysis was based on data generated by newspaper investigation, whereby research assistants investigated news stories from two leading Finnish newspapers, *Aamulehti* and *Helsingin Sanomat*, for a one-year period (July 2013–June 2014). All interest group appearances in the newspapers were coded (Binderkrantz, Chaqués Bonafont et al., 2017). During this time, we studied the news and business sections in two-week periods, alternately (except for the first spread of the news section, which we studied for each period).

Dependent Variables and Analysis Methods

We used two dependent variables, one measuring interest groups' media access and the other their agenda-building success. A count of media access (see Online Appendix 1 for descriptive statistics) was based on the newspaper analysis. Because we defined media access as the success of interest groups' media strategies, we filtered out some clearly negative media appearances, such as scandals centering on group leaders. To test the reliability of manual coding and the temporal stability of our measure of media access, we constructed a random sample of 300 groups and used an automated string-based search to count their appearances in one of the studied newspapers in 2015. A strong correlation (r = 0.92) between the manual and the automated test coding indicates

the reliability of our coding approach. Media access is a count variable, and its variance is much higher than its mean. Due to strong over-dispersion, we used negative binomial regression when predicting media access (Binderkrantz, Chaqués Bonafont et al., 2017).

The other dependent variable measured agenda-building success and was based on the interest groups' self-assessment. Groups reported how often their advocacy work had been successful "within the last year" in the sense that "the media have taken up an issue," rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *very often* to 4 = *never*), as described fully in Online Appendix 3 (Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2019). A self-reported measure makes it easier to study a large sample of groups (Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2019, p. 84). However, even if we report the survey results anonymously, respondents from resource-rich elite groups in particular may overestimate their influence (Lyons et al., 2019), which should be accounted for. Our measure for agenda-building success was measured on an ordinal scale; however, the assumption of proportional odds was not met, ruling out ordinal regression. Therefore, we used multinomial logistic regressions.

Independent Variables

The main independent variables measured use of digital media. These indicated the extent to which interest groups published (1) blog texts, (2) other texts or pictures on social media, and (3) videos on social media to gain political influence during the previous year, rated on a scale from 1 to 4 (1 = *very often* to 4 = *never*, [reversed for analysis]). When answering H1, we used the mean of these responses, while the remaining hypotheses were answered by including three separate items in the models.

Because we compared resource-rich and resource-poor groups, a solid measure of resources was required. We used the self-reported number of employees involved in advocacy work, referred to as "staff advocacy" (Binderkrantz, 2005; Chalmers &

Shotton, 2016). Advocacy work was defined broadly, including contact with politicians and journalists, advocacy-related research, and monitoring of policy processes. This variable reflects both groups' PR resources and their political status, because groups' position in policymaking correlates strongly with the number of political staff (Binderkrantz et al., 2015; Author et al. XXXX).

We used several control variables. First, we controlled for the extent that groups used traditional means to influence the news media (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2014; Grömping, 2019). The variable of "news media strategy" is the mean of the items ascertaining how often groups tried to gain political influence by (1) contacting journalists and (2) issuing press releases or holding press conferences (Cronbach's α = 0.788; Binderkrantz, 2005). Second, we controlled for the extent that groups seek to influence the news media agenda, which was indicated by the variable "media influence as a goal."

Third, because Finland is a corporatist country where unions and business associations have a strong position (Author et al., XXXX), we included a dummy for these. Fourth, we included a dummy for public interest groups because these typically have high levels of media access (Binderkrantz, Chaqués Bonafont, et al., 2017). The dummies were based on coding groups into eight categories. As a reliability test, 100 groups were coded by another researcher familiar with the coding scheme. The Cohen's kappa value was satisfactory at 0.83.

Fifth, we controlled for the extent that groups were active in policy areas where we could expect interest groups to be most visible in the media. A three-country study found that groups appeared in media coverage most often for the following issues: macroeconomics, labor market policy, legal and justice policy, and social and family policy (Binderkrantz, Chaqués Bonafont et al., 2017). The surveyed groups reported

their level of activity in 19 policy areas (Binderkrantz, 2005), and the variable "media-attracting policy areas" indicated the groups' relative activity across the above-mentioned four policy areas (Online Appendix 3).

Results

In H1, we posited that traditional news media strategy would predict interest groups' media success more strongly than digital media strategy. Table 1 presents multinomial logistic regressions predicting agenda-building success, and Table 2 shows negative binomial regressions explaining media access. Model 1 includes the variable of digital media strategy, which is the mean of the three digital media utilization items (blogs, other texts and pictures, and videos) measured on a four-point scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.763).

Digital media strategy was significantly and positively associated with agenda-building success (Table 1). A one-point increase in digital media strategy increased the likelihood of a group answering that they "occasionally" succeeded in agenda building by 46% (Exp(B) = 1.46; CI 95% = 1.11–1.92) and "often" succeeded by 78% (Exp(B) = 1.78; CI 95% = 1.28–2.47). However, the traditional news media strategy, measured on the same four-point scale, was more strongly associated with agenda-building success. The odds ratio for the outcome "occasionally" was approximately twice as high (Exp(B) = 2.89; CI 95% = 2.02–4.12) and approximately four times higher for the outcome "often" (Exp(B) = 7.29; CI 95% = 4.81–11.05) than that of the digital media strategy. Furthermore, it is evident (Table 2) that digital media use did not have a statistically significant main effect on media access (Exp(B) = 0.94, CI 95% = 0.72–1.22). In contrast, a traditional news media strategy was strongly associated with media access,

with a 1-point increase improving the levels of media access by approximately 104% (Exp(B) = 2.04; CI 95 = 1.54–2.71). In summary, we found strong support for H1.

[Table 1 about here]

[Table 2 about here]

H2 posited that digital media activity and agenda-building success are positively correlated among both resource-rich and resource-poor groups. Because we expected different forms of digital media content to be effective for groups with different staff sizes (H4), we included interactions between staff size and all three digital media items separately (Table 1, Model 2). The model showed that the coefficient for the interaction between staff and blogs was positive and significant when estimating the outcome "often." A marginal effects plot (Online Appendix 2) shows that for the outcome "often," publishing blogs had no effect among the groups with smallest staff; however, the effect sharply increased for more resource-rich groups. To assess effect sizes, we repeated the interaction model with the staff size coded into two groups (maximum of two employees and more than two employees). We found that among resource-rich groups (with more than two employees involved in advocacy) the odds ratio for blogs was clearly above 1 (OR [odds ratio] = 7.19; CI 95% = 1.15–44.88; $p < 0.05$) when estimating the outcome "often."

The interaction between staff size and publishing other texts and pictures on SNSs was not significant. However, the figure in Online Appendix 2 shows that the marginal effect on the outcome "occasionally" was positive and significant for the most resource-poor groups only. Among the groups with a maximum of two employees involved in advocacy, a one-unit increase in the variable measuring publication of other texts and pictures on social media increased the likelihood of succeeding "occasionally" by 23% (OR = 1.23; CI 95% = 0.99–1.53; $p < 0.1$).

Finally, the interaction between staff advocacy and publishing videos on SNSs was negative and significant (Table 1, Model 2). Consistently, the negative coefficient was lower with the outcome "often" rather than with "occasionally." Online Appendix 2 shows that publishing videos only had a positive effect for the most resource-poor groups. Among groups with a maximum of two employees involved in advocacy, a one-unit increase in publishing videos increased the likelihood of succeeding "often" compared to "never" by 46% (OR = 1.46; CI 95% = 1.01–2.11; $p < 0.05$).

Taken together, the findings reported in Table 1 support H2. Because publishing blogs increased the likelihood of reporting success in agenda building among the resource-rich groups, and because publishing videos, texts (other than blogs), and pictures on SNSs increased this likelihood among the resource-poor groups, we concluded that digital media activity and agenda-building success positively correlated among both resource-poor and resource-rich interest groups.

H3a and H3b posited that digital media use would be more instrumental for resource-rich groups in gaining media access. Model 2 in Table 2 includes the interaction of digital media utilization and the logarithmically transformed[i] staff size as a continuous variable, which tests H3a's claim that the effect of digital media use would linearly increase together with staff size. A likelihood ratio test showed that adding the relevant interaction terms did not significantly improve the model fit. Moreover, the interaction terms were not significant; thus, H3a was not supported.

To assess the alternative hypothesis (H3b), in which we expected a non-linear interaction effect, we coded staff size into four categories (0–1, 1–3, 3–9, and >9 full-time employees involved in advocacy) and included the relevant dummies, with 0–1 employee as the reference category. As there was a strong correlation between digital

media variables, we added the interaction terms one by one initially to deal with multicollinearity.

We first examined the effect of publishing blogs. Adding the interaction between publishing blogs and the categorically coded staff size in Model 3 significantly increased the model fit ($p < 0.01$). Model 3 shows that the interaction between publishing blogs and having 1–3 employees involved in advocacy was not statistically significant. Therefore, the association between publishing blogs and media access was not stronger for groups with 1–3 employees compared to the smallest groups with 0–1 employee. This finding was not surprising, as these were all relatively resource-poor interest groups, and we expected that blog publication would not increase their media access. In contrast, the positive and significant interaction of blogs and having 3–9 employees showed that for resource-rich groups, the association between publishing blogs and media access was stronger than for the most resource-poor groups. Further, Model 4 shows that the difference between the most resource-poor and the second resource-richest groups was also significant with the interactions between staff and all digital media variables in the same model (with strong multicollinearity). However, the interaction between blogs and the most elite groups with more than 9 employees was not significant. These findings supported H3b. Blogs were more instrumental for the resource-rich groups, but not for the most elite of the resource-rich groups.

To assess effect sizes, we report the relative risk ratios (RR). For the second resource-richest groups with 3–9 employees, a one-unit increase in the variable measuring blog use on a 4-point scale increased the level of media access by 132% (RR = 2.32; CI 95% = 1.25–4.41; $p < 0.01$). The other three reference groups all had a statistically non-significant RR below 1.

Finally, we assessed H4, which posited that audiovisual content is more effective for resource-poor interest groups, and texts are more effective for resource-rich groups in achieving media success. Accordingly, texts (blogs) were effective for resource-rich groups, for gaining agenda-building success and media access (Tables 1 and 2). Among the resource-rich groups, blogs were the only form of digital media use associated with media success; however, blogs were not associated with any type of media success among the resource-poor groups. In contrast, audiovisual content was more effective for the resource-poor groups. Publishing videos, texts (other than blogs), and pictures were positively associated with agenda-building success. Moreover, among the resource-poor groups, the effect of publishing videos was slightly stronger than that of publishing texts and pictures. Thus, our findings supported H4.

Discussion

Departing from the equalization-normalization debate, we investigated how interest groups' utilization of digital media platforms is associated with success in influencing the news media. Our findings suggest that traditional media strategies are more effective than digital strategies. This may appear surprising, given that studies have indicated digital media is important for interest groups—especially as a means to influence news coverage (Chalmers & Shotton, 2016; Powers, 2016). The weakness of the effects suggests that digital media is not an instant game changer that has profoundly changed competition for news media attention. This is an antidote for utopian visions of the potential of digital media to change the rules and power structures of political communication. However, it is possible that the effectiveness of digital media utilization varies among different countries. While our evidence of weak effects are in

line with a study conducted in the United States (Thrall et al., 2014), a study in Israel found strong effects (Eyal, 2016). Thus, more studies in different countries are required.

Although digital media effects were generally weak, the results revealed differing patterns regarding the resource-poor and resource-rich interest groups' digital media utilization, which we believe adds fresh nuances to the equalization-normalization debate. On the one hand, we found weak evidence of equalization because social media activity was associated with better agenda-building success among resource-poor groups. We have argued that resource-poor interest groups may benefit from network media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015), in which groups can raise the media salience of key issues by sparking social media attention.

On the other hand, taken together, our results lend more support to the normalization thesis because the effects were generally weak and because digital media use was positively associated with both agenda-building success and media access among resource-rich groups. Thus, resource-rich groups seem to have the advantage. These findings add to existing evidence on interest groups' digital media use by showing that resource-rich groups not only use digital media more actively (Scaramuzzino & Scaramuzzino, 2017; van der Graaf et al., 2016), but their digital media use may also be more effective. Our findings suggest that digital media use has not decreased resource-related bias in media access (Danielian & Page, 1994; Binderkrantz et al., 2015). On the contrary, it seems that digital communication may deepen this bias. This may be bad news for democracy because interest groups possess resources disproportionate to the size of the societal groups they represent. If resource-related bias deepens, media debates may become even more skewed towards narrow, special interests than previously, hindering pluralistic public debate (see Danielian & Page, 1994).

Our study has limitations. First, the cross-sectional design did not enable a full assessment of the direction of causality. Dynamic time-series analyses could be used to overcome this limitation. Second, studying only one country is an obvious limitation. In particular, the non-linear interaction effect between group size and digital media use may not appear in countries with pluralist interest group systems.

Despite these limitations, we believe our nuanced findings and theorization add to recent equalization-normalization studies that suggest the Internet is not a monolith that simply favors either established or marginal actors (Gibson & McAllister, 2015; Stier et al., 2018). Specifically, we suggest that digital communication is characterized by the coexistence of new and old media logics (Chadwick, 2013; Klinger & Svensson, 2015) that may benefit resource-rich and resource-poor organizations in different ways. Resource-rich organizations may be able to transfer their power to the online realm by simply adopting techniques on the Internet similar to those in the non-digital world, whereas resource-poor players need to be more innovative in their online communication to gain influence.

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[i] The variable measuring staff advocacy was heavily skewed and, therefore we logarithmically transformed it to make the relationships linear (cf. Binderkrantz, 2005; Chalmers & Shotton, 2016).

Table 1. *Logistic Regressions Predicting Interest Groups' Agenda-Building Success*

	Model 1 (reference Never)		Model 2 (reference Never)	
	Occasionally	Often[a]	Occasionally	Often[a]
Digital media strategy	0.38 (0.14)**	0.58 (0.17)**		
Blogs			0.24 (0.16)	0.29 (0.18)*
(Other) text and pictures (on SNSs)			0.13 (0.16)	0.06 (0.18)
Videos (on SNSs)			–0.17 (0.19)	0.11 (0.21)
News media strategy	1.06 (0.18)***	1.99 (0.21)***	1.07 (0.18)***	2.00 (0.21)***
Media influence as goal	0.59 (0.15)***	1.16 (0.19)***	0.58 (0.15)***	1.16 (0.19)***
Union or business group	0.09 (0.21)	−0.07 (0.26)	0.07 (0.21)	–0.09 (0.26)
Public interest group	−0.44 (0.32)	−0.48 (0.38)	–0.44 (0.32)	–0.51 (0.38)
Media-attracting policy areas	−1.30 (1.07)	0.06 (1.29)	–1.31 (1.09)	0.14 (1.31)
Staff (advocacy) (ln)	1.06 (0.27)***	1.25 (0.29)***	1.15 (0.28)***	1.29 (0.31)***
Blogs × Staff (ln)			0.36 (0.31)	0.56 (0.33)*
Text and pictures × Staff (ln)			–0.19 (0.31)	–0.07 (0.33)
Videos × Staff (ln)			–0.60 (0.36)*	–0.93 (0.37)*
Constant	2.35 (0.34)***	0.95 (0.41)*	2.42 (0.35)***	1.05 (0.41)*
Nagelkerke pseudo R^2	0.41		0.43	
Akaike information criterion	1788.82		1803.83	

Note. N = 1,127. Entries are regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .10$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .00$.
[a]We merged the categories *often* and *very often* because the latter category has a relatively small number of observations.

Table 2. *Negative Binomial Regressions Predicting Interest Groups' Media Access*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Digital media strategy	–0.07 (0.13)			
Blogs		–0.11 (0.11)	–0.22 (0.13)*	–0.20 (0.13)
(Other) text and pictures (on SNSs)		–0.05 (0.11)	–0.07 (0.11)	–0.10 (0.13)
Videos (on SNSs)		0.08 (0.13)	0.08 (0.12)	0.08 (0.16)
News media strategy	0.71 (0.14)***	0.72 (0.14)***	0.80 (0.13)***	0.81 (0.13)***
Media influence as goal	0.15 (0.14)	0.16 (0.14)	0.24 (0.14)*	0.24 (0.14)*
Union or business group	0.49 (0.19)*	0.52 (0.19)**	0.64 (0.19)***	0.62 (0.19)**
Public interest group	1.09 (0.24)***	1.11 (0.24)***	1.06 (0.24)***	1.06 (0.24)***
Media-attracting policy areas	1.60 (0.95)*	1.80 (0.95)*	1.30 (0.95)	1.29 (0.96)
Staff (advocacy) (ln)	0.96 (0.12)***	0.86 (0.14)***		
Blogs × Staff (ln)		0.14 (0.12)		
Text and pictures × Staff (ln)		–0.01 (0.16)		
Videos × Staff (ln)		–0.01 (0.14)		
Staff 1–3			1.12 (0.23)***	1.08 (0.25)***
Staff 3–9			0.69 (0.37)*	0.76 (0.44)*
Staff over 9			2.30 (0.54)***	2.16 (0.58)***
Blogs × Staff 1–3			0.04 (0.21)	–0.01 (0.23)
Blogs × Staff 3–9			1.00 (0.30)***	1.04 (0.34)**
Blogs × Staff over 9			0.29 (0.35)	0.14 (0.43)
Text and pictures × Staff 1–3				0.13 (0.27)
Text and pictures × Staff 3–9				–0.04 (0.46)
Text and pictures × Staff over 9				0.26 (0.63)
Videos × Staff 1–3				–0.00 (0.28)
Videos × Staff 3–9				–0.10 (0.35)
Videos × Staff over 9				0.16 (0.48)
Constant	–2.32 (0.30)***	–2.42 (0.30)***	–2.63 (0.30)***	–2.62 (0.30)***
Akaike information criterion	1528.7	1535.9	1533.5	1544.6
2 × log-likelihood	–1510.70	–1507.93	–1501.51	-1500.65

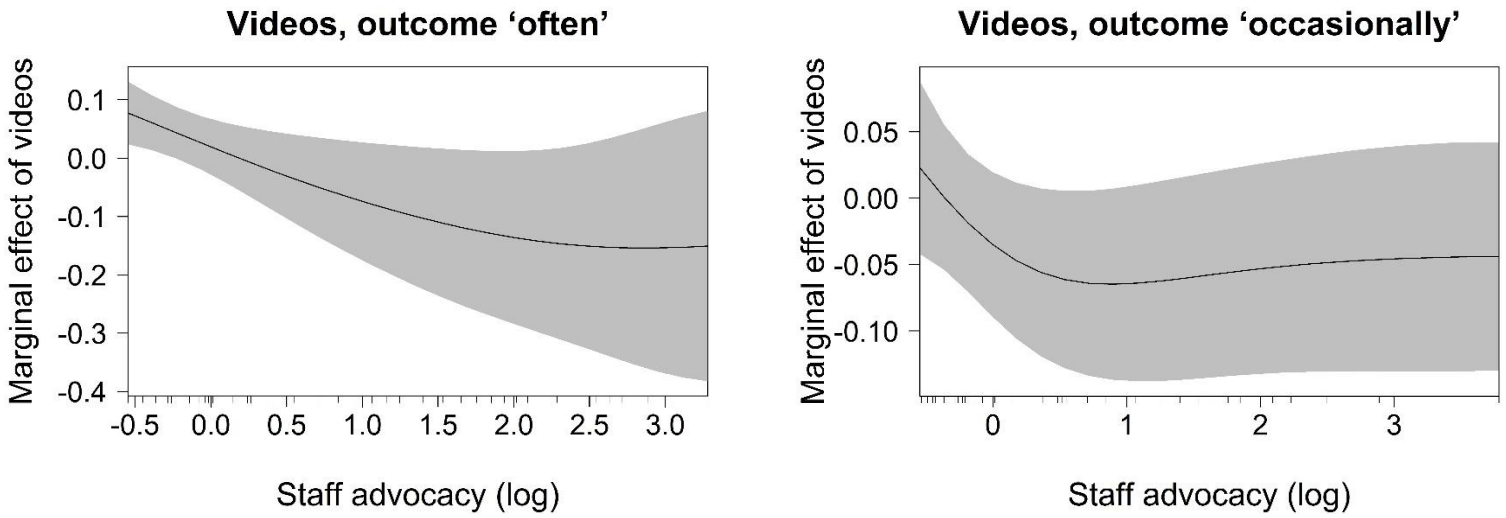
Note. N = 1127. Entries are regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .10$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .0$

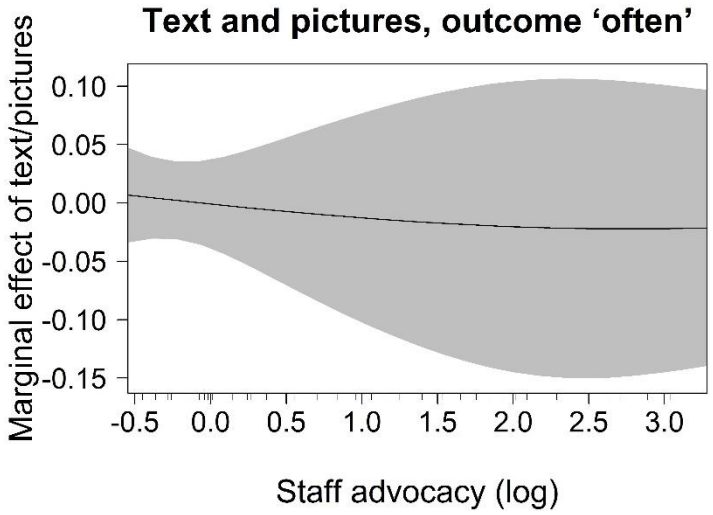
Appendix 1. *Descriptive Statistics*

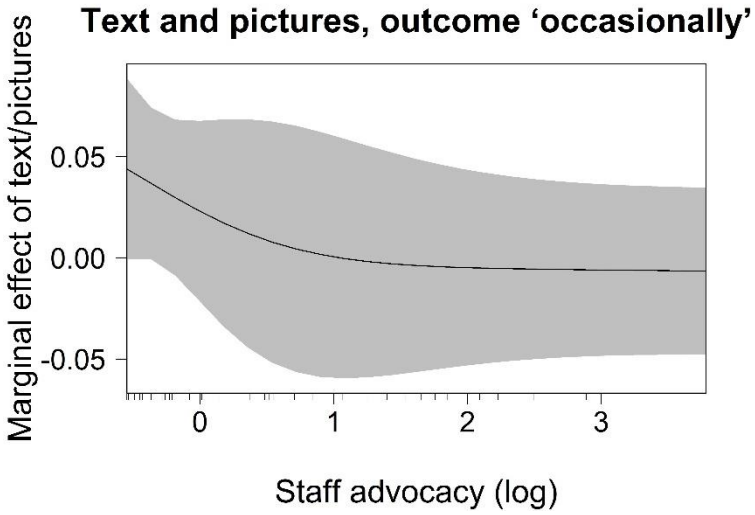
Variable	Mean	Frequency	Standard	Minimum	Maximum
Media access	0.66		3.00	0	41
Agenda-building success					
Never		19.5			
Occasionally		52.0			
Often		28.5			
Digital media strategy	0		0.83	–1.17	1.83
Blogs	0		1.03	–1.01	1.99
Text and pictures (on	0		1.11	–1.74	1.26
Videos (on SNSs)	0		0.86	–0.77	2.23
News media strategy	0		0.81	–1.28	1.72
Staff advocacy (ln)	0		0.72	–0.55	3.78
Media-attracting policy	0.28		0.09	0.12	0.63
Media influence as goal	0		0.69	-0.99	1.01
Staff max 1		77.2			
Staff 1–3		13.1			
Staff 3–9		6.2			
Staff over 9		3.5			
Public interest group		11.3			
Union or business group		31.4			

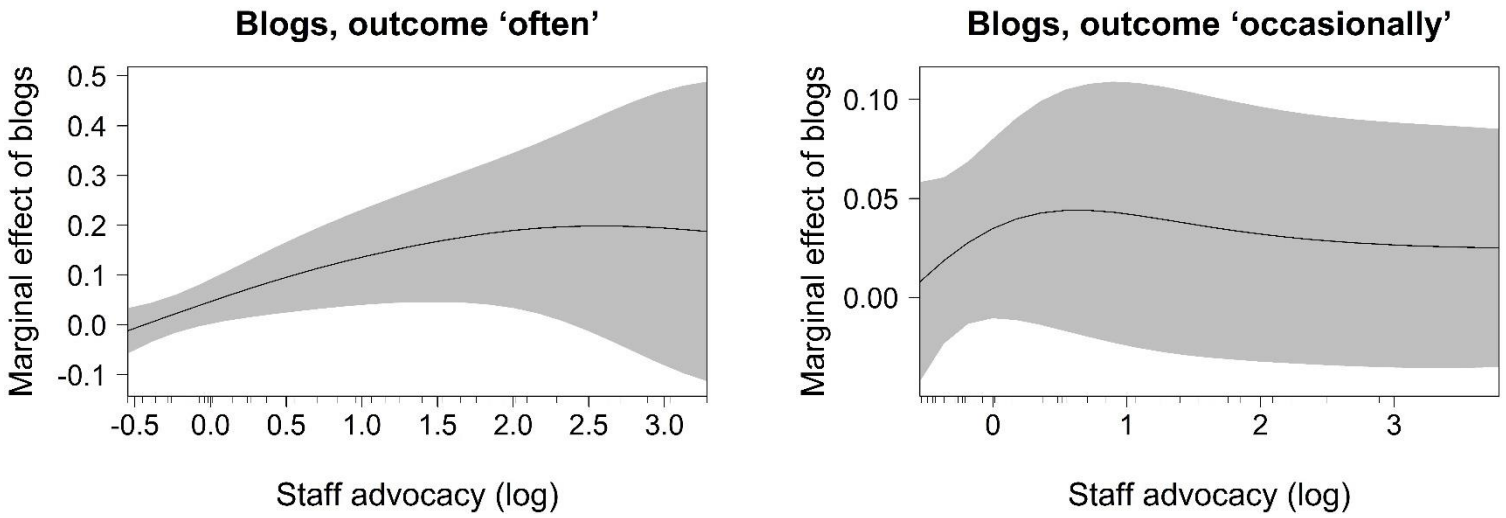
Note. The means for the digital media use variables, *news media strategy*, *staff advocacy*, and *media influence aim* are zero because these variables have been centered to facilitate the interpretation of interaction models.

Appendix 2. *Marginal effects of digital media utilization on agenda-building success conditional on advocacy staff (reference category = 'never'; 95% confidence intervals).*




Text and pictures, outcome ‘often’
Marginal effect of text/pictures
0.10
0.05
0.00
-0.05
-0.10
-0.15
-0.5
0.0
0.5
1.0
1.5
2.0
2.5
3.0
Staff advocacy (log)


Text and pictures, outcome ‘occasionally’
Marginal effect of text/pictures
0.05
0.00
-0.05
0
1
2
3
Staff advocacy (log)



Notes. The figures are based on two separate binary logistics regressions. As we log-transformed and centered the variable staff advocacy, in figures the value –0.55 indicates the groups that have no staff involved in advocacy, and 0.15 stands for one person.

Appendix 3. *Wordings of survey questions*

All survey questions (except Digital media use) are adopted from the questionnaire of the INTERARENA project (see interarena.dk/).

Agenda-building success
We would like you to indicate how often within the last year your organization's work has led to various outcomes. Please indicate how often your organization's work was significant in the following ways. (Very often, Fairly often, Occasionally, Never)

- The media have taken up an issue

Digital media use
Internet and social media have enabled new activities that groups can perform to gain political influence. Please indicate how often your organization has performed each activity [and how important these activities are to your organization]. (Very often, Fairly often, Occasionally, Never)

- Publishing blog texts
- Publishing other writings or pictures on social media (e.g. on Facebook or Twitter)
- Publishing videos on social media

News media strategy
Below is listed activities that groups can perform to gain political influence. Please indicate how often your organization has performed each activity [and how important these activities are to your organization]. (Very often, Fairly often, Occasionally, Never)

- Issue press releases and hold press conferences
- Contact journalists

Staff advocacy
How many staff does the group employ at the central/headquarters level? (Please convert to full-time equivalent positions)
How many of these are involved in political work? This includes contact with civil servants, politicians or journalists; generating analyses or research for policy advocacy; or monitoring the political process. (Please convert to full-time equivalent positions)

Media influence as goal

Does your organization seek to affect the following areas? (To a large degree, To some degree, A little, Not at all)

- The media agenda

Media-attracting policy areas

How active is your organization in the following policy areas? (Very, Somewhat, A little; Not at all)

- Labour market policy
- Urban and housing policy
- Research, technology and communications policy
- Defence and security policy
- Industrial and consumer policy
- EU policy
- Refugee and immigrant policy
- Religious policy
- Local government and regional policy
- Culture and sports policy
- Agriculture, fishery and food policy
- Environment and energy policy
- Monetary, fiscal and tax policy
- Law and order/justice policy
- Social affairs and families policy
- Health policy
- Traffic and infrastructure policy
- Education policy
- Foreign affairs (excluding EU)

The composite variable measuring *Media-attracting policy areas* was constructed by, first, recoding the answers as follows: 3 (points) = *very active*, 2 = somewhat active, 1 = *a little active*, and 0 = *not at all active* or no answer. Next, we summed the four policy areas and divided this by the sum of the remaining 15 policy areas.