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How to cite this publication

Please cite the final published version:

Trapp, L., & Laursen, B. (2017). Inside out: interest groups' 'outside' media work as a means to manage 'inside' lobbying efforts and relationships with politicians. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 6(2), 143-160.

Publication metadata

Title:	Inside out: interest groups' 'outside' media work as a means to manage 'inside' lobbying efforts and relationships with politicians
Author(s):	Leila Trapp & Bo Laursen
Journal:	Interest Groups & Advocacy
DOI/Link:	https://doi.org/10.1057/s41309-017-0016-y
Document version:	Accepted manuscript (post-print)

This is a post-peer-review, pre-copyedit version of an article published in Interest Groups & Advocacy. The definitive publisher-authenticated version Trapp, N. L., & Laursen, B. (2017). Inside out: interest groups' 'outside' media work as a means to manage 'inside' lobbying efforts and relationships with politicians. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 6(2), 143-160. *is available online at:* <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057%2Fs41309-017-0016-y>

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Title:

**Inside-out: Interest groups' "outside" media work as a means to manage
"inside" lobbying efforts and relationships with politicians**

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Abstract

Recognizing the important role that media work can play for interest groups in securing their members' interests, the purpose of this study is to more precisely explore the reasons why "insider" interest groups that participate in valuable face-to-face lobbying with policy makers might supplement their lobbying efforts with media work despite the inherent risk of doing so. Through interviews with press contact staff at 52 Danish insider interest groups, we find that media work is conducted in order to (1) motivate policy makers to address particular issues in ways that are favorable to the organization, (2) manage the ongoing face-to-face lobbying process, and (3) strengthen relationships to policy makers. While the first reason neatly reflects the well-known agenda-setting strategy in which raising public awareness on political issues is central, the remaining more surprising and underexplored reasons indicate a need to revise our assumptions about media work in politically motivated organizations. Our proposal is three-fold: Because interest groups view political actors as key consumers of news stories, *media work should no longer be conceptualized as an exclusively outside strategy; we should sharpen our appreciation of the importance of political finesse, in addition to media savvy, amongst press staff in politically driven organizations;* and finally, as part of the ever-growing mediatization of politics, *we should recognize that political processes that traditionally have taken place in face-to-face lobbying, such as relationship building, are now also taking place in the news media.*

Key words

Mediatization, lobbying, media work, news media, insider interest groups

1 Introduction

It is well known that political organizations such as interest groups often target the news media in their communication efforts. The reasons for doing so can be many-fold, but a key reason is to influence public policy. In this way, media work can be contextualized, as we do here, as a form of lobbying. Evidently, the widespread practice of targeting the media by political organizations is not likely to change soon as the news media continues to strengthen its standing as a prominent forum for political communication (e.g. Strömbäck and Esser 2014).

Much of what we know today about interest groups' media strategies stems from studies which categorize media work as a form of outside strategy, as opposed to inside strategy, where outside strategies aim at influencing public opinion, and inside strategies aim at directly influencing political decision makers (e.g. Kollman 1998, Grant 2004, Binderkrantz 2005, Kriesi, Tresch et al. 2007). Much research on interests groups' media work has focused on the key question of media access; that is, which interest groups get into the news media, and what it takes for groups to be successful in their efforts (e.g. Beyers 2004, Trevor Thrall 2006, Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012, Binderkrantz and Christiansen 2013, Dür and Mateo 2013). Another key concern with respect to media strategy is whether the interest organization has enough political clout to lobby directly with politicians or not; that is, whether it is an "insider" organization (e.g. Grant 2001, Binderkrantz 2005, Kriesi, Tresch et al. 2007). As we will see, insider groups may run the risk of damaging their inside lobbying efforts, if they simultaneously pursue media work (e.g. Jordan and Richardson 1987, Page 1999, Beyers 2004, Grant 2004). On the basis of this tension, and the observation that insider groups

do at times choose to pursue media work despite the risks, this article focuses on the much less studied question of what specific goals insider interest groups want to accomplish when they seek media access. Despite a scarcity of empirical knowledge about this ‘why’ behind interest groups’ media work, there seems to be a widespread assumption that when interest groups seek media access, they do so in order to bring ‘their’ issues on to the news media’s agenda as a way to influence public policy (e.g. Jacobs and Glass 2002, Binderkrantz and Christiansen 2013, Dür and Mateo 2013). This makes sense because agenda setting research provides solid support for the idea that the general public is indeed influenced by the issues and frames that are prominent in the news media, and that democratically elected politicians tend to keep a close eye on public opinion (e.g. Baumgartner, Jones et al. 1997, McCombs 2005). However, based on indications that interest groups may not only focus on creating public awareness of, and shaping public opinion on, issues when they seek access to the news media (e.g. Miller and Williams 1998, Manning 2001), we question whether this well-established agenda-setting logic is the only logic that guides insider interest groups’ media work.

To address the question *why insider interest groups may include media work in their lobbying efforts*, we have conducted an exploratory study based on qualitative interviews with press contact staff in 52 Danish insider interest groups. Before describing the study in more detail and presenting the results and discussion, we first establish a framework for understanding media work as a form of lobbying amongst interest groups and other politically motivated groups below.

2 Literature review: Media work as lobbying amongst interest groups and other politically motivated groups

As noted, we find three key concerns in this literature: the means by which politically motivated groups seek coverage in the news media, the circumstances that assist interest groups in securing media coverage, and the relevance of the insider-outsider group distinction for choosing media work as a political strategy. Because we challenge the assumption that political agenda-setting provides a complete answer as to why interest groups may seek media coverage, the final section of this literature review presents a small set of studies which do take a more nuanced approach to explaining media work in interest groups, thereby setting the stage for our empirical study.

2.1. Getting into the news: The media logic

It is conventional knowledge that the news media is the most important source of information about politics and society in Western democracies. One of the implications of this high degree of mediation of politics is that ‘messages, organizations and leaders who do not have a presence in the media do not exist in the public mind’ (Castells 2013:194). While the term *mediation* may suggest that the news media is nothing more than a neutral channel through which political messages flow freely, a key claim in the mediatization literature is that this is not the case. Instead, the news media’s professional, gatekeeper routines and values have major consequences for how political actors, such as interest groups, interact with the news media to gain coverage.

Mediatization is defined as an ongoing social change process in which the news media's 'logic' increasingly influences various spheres of society, including political processes, institutions, organizations and actors (Cook 1998, Strömbäck 2008, Hjarvard 2013, Strömbäck and Esser 2014). The news media logic is understood as institutionalized and often internalized professional routines and values that guide editors' and journalists' selection and presentation of news content (*ibid.*). It is well established that political organizations are increasingly professionalizing their communications efforts to cater to the news media logic in order to maximize their organization's exposure (Davis 2000a, Davis 2000b, Manning 2001, Negrine and Lilleker 2002). Examples of professionalization include creating news stories that fit the well-known news criteria (e.g. current relevance, target group identification, conflict) and, in a broader context, priming news institutions with opinion polls, background analyses, and other types of reports (Manning 2001, Larsen 2006).

Empirical studies on the professionalization of interest groups' media activities in particular are scarce, but Berry (1999) and Rosenbaum (2003) suggest that interest groups, like other politically motivated groups, are also keen on adapting to the media logic by, for example, offering reliable and authoritative information in formats which mirror journalists' news stories. This practice reflects what many scholars characterize as a 'responsible' approach to the media, and also includes practices such as building relationships with reporters, writing opinion pieces to newspapers, organizing press briefings, and producing and publicizing analyses. Alternatively, interest groups might take on a 'confrontational' approach to gain media attention by arranging public meetings,

organizing petitions, staging demonstrations or carrying out other spectacular events. This distinction between 'responsible' and 'confrontational' tactics is widespread in the literature, albeit with various labels (e.g. Beyers 2004, Andrews and Caren 2010, Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012).

This exploration of the ways interest groups are seen to seek media coverage should not mask the fact that certain interest groups, in certain circumstances, may instead prefer to avoid media coverage; for example, groups that use confrontational strategies to influence policy may fear that their actions could give rise to media coverage which is negative (Trevor Thrall 2006). We also noted this preference of avoiding media coverage in an interview with the leader of an immigrant interest group. He explained that the interest group avoids media coverage because news articles having to do with immigration tend to adopt negative, anti-immigration angles.

2.2 Getting into the news: circumstances that lead to media coverage

We have now seen examples of how interest groups may actively seek media coverage through adaptation to the media logic. The literature also seeks to identify some of the significant circumstances that lead to successful media penetration. For example, with regard to the 'responsible' and 'confrontational' distinction, Andrews and Caren suggest that 'responsible' strategies yield more coverage (2010). Also, it is no surprise that interest groups that have more resources to use on media work tend to get more coverage than groups with fewer resources (e.g. Trevor Thrall 2006, De Bruycker and Beyers 2015).

Successful media coverage has also been seen to depend on the extent to which

interest groups are in favor of, or against, particular policy proposals; those which oppose a proposed policy gain significantly higher levels of media attention (De Bruycker and Beyers 2015). This final point can quite possibly be related to the idea of media logic adaptation, as conflict tends to be newsworthy.

2.3 Media work as a political strategy: the insider-outsider distinction

The literature is also concerned with circumstances surrounding an interest group's decision to carry out media work as a political strategy or not.

Traditionally, the extent to which an organization relies on the media in their political communication has been seen to depend on whether the group has privileged inside access to policy makers in decision-making arenas or not. This insider/outsider distinction was developed by Wyn Grant in 1977 to categorize the types of influence strategies that groups pursue; insider groups were seen to pursue direct contact with bureaucrats and parliamentarians, and outsider groups were seen to pursue indirect means of influence such as media campaigns and mobilization of members (Grant 2000, Grant 2004, Binderkrantz 2005). However, contrary to the model, a great deal of evidence has since been gathered which reveals that insider groups often use not only the predicted insider strategies, but also so-called outsider media strategies as well (Beyers 2004, Binderkrantz 2005, Kriesi, Tresch et al. 2007, Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012). Seeking media access is usually not, however, the most important strategy for them; instead, insider interest groups are generally seen to prioritize inside lobbying strategies (Kriesi, Tresch et al. 2007). In this way, media work is considered a supplement to directly accessing policy makers (*ibid.*), with groups

turning to outside strategies only in special instances, such as when political actors are not responsive to their wishes (Beyers 2004).

These findings which point to the combined use of various influence strategies weaken Grant's proposal that when a group has the opportunity to simultaneously combine insider and outsider strategies, in the long run they should choose either an inside or an outside strategy in order to avoid the 'serious tensions' that can otherwise arise (Grant 2004: 410). In particular for insider groups, Grant proposes that because insider groups are expected to behave responsibly, the simultaneous use of inside and outside strategies will weaken the group's relations with political decision makers (Grant 2000, Grant 2001).

Grant's proposal has also been questioned in British studies which find that government officials do not necessarily get provoked by interest groups' simultaneous use of inside and outside strategies; instead, government officials are found to understand the game rules for gaining influence, and to invite these groups anyway to join privileged participatory fora, such as working groups (Jordan and Richardson 1987, Page 1999).

Despite these contradictory findings, Grant's suggestion that insider groups run a serious risk when pursuing outside strategies has not, however, been completely dismissed. For example, Beyer's study that explores the possible incompatibility of 'public' (outside) political strategies, such as media campaigns, with inside lobbying activities, notes that public strategies might indeed harm the interest groups' reputations as trustworthy interlocutors (2004).

In summary, the choice of influence strategy amongst insider groups is complex, and the literature points to potential risks associated with media work.

2.4 Politically motivated reasons *why* groups target the media in lobbying efforts

We have now seen that the literature on media work amongst political actors has had considerable theoretical and empirical focus on how political actors attempt to penetrate the news media, the circumstances surrounding successful media access, and the circumstances that influence the feasibility, and risk, of choosing a media strategy in lobbying efforts. In comparison to these subjects, considerably less attention has been given to exploring the reasons *why* political actors seek exposure in the news media in lobbying efforts. The following sections address this question.

2.4.1 Agenda-setting: Influencing politicians through public attention-getting

A well-established explanation for politically motivated groups to target the media is evident in the ‘agenda-setting approach’ which is based on the idea that the issues discussed in the news media also get discussed by political decision makers. In this line of thinking, social actors who seek to influence political debates and political outcomes therefore have a keen interest in getting ‘their’ issues into the news media.

This fundamental idea is corroborated by studies in communication and political science. Communication scholars have documented that those issues which are prominent in the news media (the media agenda) are also prominent in the minds of the news media's audiences (the public agenda), and, additionally, the way the news media frames issues influences how audiences think about them (for an overview see McCombs 2004). In other words, 'The media can not only be successful in telling us *what to think about*, they can also be successful in telling us *how to think about it*' (McCombs 2005: 546). Moreover, findings from the political science discipline suggest that politicians' political priorities (the political agenda) are influenced by the media agenda; politicians tend to adopt issues raised by the media in their political work (e.g. Baumgartner, Jones et al. 1997, Soroka 2002, Walgrave and De Swert 2004). In their analysis of studies focused on the correlation between the media agenda and the political agenda, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) argue that the main reason for politicians' adoption of media issues is that politicians and other political actors assume that the public agenda is strongly influenced by the media agenda. Therefore they see the media agenda as a strong indicator of what the public needs, wishes and thinks. Since politicians in democracies depend on the public for their (re-)election, they often react to and adopt prominent media issues in order to show commitment and display responsiveness to what they believe to be the public's concerns (*ibid.*). Therefore, by raising and framing their preferred issues in the media, politically motivated organizations, such as interest groups, may hope to either influence the public agenda in line with their interests, or to create enough media focus on 'their' issue to send the signal to politicians that the issue is high

on the public agenda. If their efforts are successful, these organizations may be able to motivate politicians to address 'their' issue.

Scholars with a specific research focus on interest groups generally follow these lines of thought. For example, Jacobs and Glass write, 'Most political scientists and sociologists today agree that successful advocacy requires getting an issue onto the media agenda' (2002: 249); Binderkrantz and Christiansen write, '(...) a prominent media presence provides an opportunity to affect or even shape the political agenda and influence the content of ongoing debates as well as political decisions' (2013: 2); and Dür & Mateo write about '(..) activities that aim at mobilizing and/or changing public opinion' (2013: 662). Although these firmly established insights on agenda setting make very good sense, we question the extent to which agenda setting provides us with a comprehensive understanding of why interest groups conduct media work. In the following and final sections of our literature review, we explore studies that provide the starting point for a more nuanced understanding of the aims of interest groups' media work.

2.4.2 Beyond agenda-setting: nuanced understandings of why politically-motivated groups target the media in lobbying efforts

A number of scholars have suggested that not all media efforts carried out by interest groups are guided by traditional agenda setting logic. In some cases, the difference is with regard to the intended target audience, which is no longer considered the general public; for example, Miller and Williams note that there is a 'myriad of (...) audiences which the strategists may try to influence' (1998: 123). Similarly, Manning notes that politically motivated groups use the news

media to send messages targeted at individuals, groups or organizations outside or inside the decision-making arena (2001).

Outside the decision-making arena interest groups may target '...a particular social group or segment of the public, (...), or a very particular group of two or three 'key' individual opinion leaders' (*ibid.*:138), while targets inside or close to the political decision-making arena may include the government or a specific minister. De Bruycker has added particular policy institutions such as the European Commission or European Parliament to this list of potential inside targets (2014).

We see that players inside the decision-making arena may be especially important targets for interest groups' media work (Kollman 1998) because 'being noticed by those in power is crucial for organized interests' (De Bruycker and Beyers 2015: 453). Besides being noticed, the purpose of targeting decision-makers may be to present policy positions to other actors involved in policy processes (Davis 2007, Kumar 2007, Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013), to 'show policymakers that the people the group claims to represent really do care about some relevant policy issue' (Kollman 1998: 8), to 'undermine the position of a rival organization' (Manning 2001: 138), or 'to draw policy makers' attention and put pressure on them' (Kollman 1998, Beyers 2004, Mahoney 2007, in De Bruycker and Beyers 2015:453). In more recent work, we see that the messages included in this insider-directed media work are more likely to focus on political information (how much support there is for a policy) than technical, expert knowledge aspects of an issue (De Bruycker 2014).

In summary, we see in the literature that media work in politically motivated organizations is traditionally viewed as targeting the general public in order to agenda-set. In a more nuanced sense, however, we also see that media work may be intended to target particular, politically influential audiences in order to disperse strategic, politically motivated messages. These two key forms of media work motivate our empirical study, described below, in which we seek to contribute an even more nuanced understanding of *why insider interest groups may include media work in their lobbying efforts*. While we expect to confirm the central role of agenda-setting as a motivating factor, the study's purpose is to address and unfold the nuances surrounding less explored reasons for media work. As described below, to do so, we take an explorative research approach, and seek answers from practitioners' portrayals of their own media work.

3 The Empirical Study: Method

The empirical study is a semi-structured, qualitative interview study, which was preceded by a newspaper analysis to identify relevant interviewees.

3.1 The Newspaper Analysis: selection of interviewees

To ensure that our chosen interviewees do indeed interact with the news media, we conducted a newspaper analysis to identify interest groups that gained press coverage in Denmark's three largest national papers (Berlingske, Politiken and Jyllands-Posten) during a random eight-day period (28th October – 4th November 2013). We chose to examine news stories in hard copy newspapers based on our awareness that it is common for these stories to simultaneously appear in other, parallel, forms of mediated news sources such as online news editions, radio, and

television news programs. The analysis involved an examination of all articles printed in the newspapers' main section and business section, if any.

The final list included 64 interest groups. We were granted telephone interviews with a key press contact staff member at 55 of the organizations¹. By key press contact staff member we mean the individual who leads the organization's media work. In some cases this was the organization's top managing director, but most often the interviewee was a manager with direct ties to the public affairs department, for example, Head of Media Relations or the PR department. The interviewees' backgrounds were typically within journalism and/or political science.

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewees were asked how their organization seeks support for its political interests other than through media work. We considered those groups that reported on direct dialogue with political actors or public officials to be insider groups. Press contact staff from 52 of the 55 interest groups reported on inside activities. We excluded the three groups which did not report on inside activities from the data set so that we could focus exclusively on insider groups. Roughly one third of the insider groups were industry and trade groups (18), and one third were labor groups (14). Because categorizing interest groups can be complicated (Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012), we describe the last one-third of the groups (20) as a collection of heterogeneous "other" groups. This final category includes, for example, local

¹ The authors are in possession of the sound files and written transcripts of the interviews that form the basis of this study's findings.

authority, consumer, parent and hobby groups. In general, because this is an explorative, qualitative study, we have primarily been concerned with collecting insights from a wide range of insider interest groups that conduct media work and achieve press coverage in widely distributed news channels. We have not been concerned with collecting data from a representative sample of interest groups in terms of variables such as ideology or degree of media access. For the same reason, the dates chosen for data collection were random rather than intentional.

3.2 The Interview Study: data collection

The study reported on here is part of a broader interview study of media strategies and tactics in Danish interest groups. In the current study, results stem from responses to one broad, open question, which was designed to encourage respondents to reflect freely on key aspects of their work as press contact staff members in an insider interest group:

How do you view the relationship between media work, public affairs/lobbying, and other means of gaining support for your interests?

We aimed at a rather informal interview style that allowed for responses and comments that were not necessarily strictly related to the question posed. The interviews were recorded, ranged between 8 and 37 minutes (mean: 18 minutes), and were conducted between March and June 2014. Each author conducted half of the interviews, guided by a pre-established, written interview guide. To encourage unhampered dialogue, the interviews were conducted in the

interviewees' first language, Danish. All direct references to the interviews in this article are therefore translations from Danish.

3.3 The Interview Study: data analysis

Rather than transcribing the recorded interviews in their full, only those utterances that were judged relevant to the current study were transcribed and coded. This was the first step of a two-step qualitative data analysis process, as described by Coffey and Atkinson, which includes coding and interpreting data (1996).

During the first step, the data was coded according to data-driven themes and patterns. In other words, the code categories did not reflect tight or theory-driven categories; as noted, the interview question was designed with the goal of *exploring* the nature of, and reasons for, media work in interest groups *vis-à-vis* other means of gaining political support.

In the subsequent analysis phase, the move from coding to interpreting the data involved "playing with and exploring the codes and categories that were created" in order to extract meaning (*ibid.*: 46). This exploration involved, for example, thinking about how the data relates to contemporary theoretical ideas, and to findings and gaps in the existing academic literature. In this way, three general reasons for media work were identified:

1. Interest groups use the media simply to make themselves known to the general public; familiarity with the organization's name and goals increases its power and influence.

2. Interest groups seek media visibility to gain and strengthen their legitimacy amongst current and potential members. By taking part in mediated debates and publicly taking firm stands, organizations demonstrate that they are active and influential social actors who defend the interests of their members.
3. Interest groups understand the media *as a forum for lobbying*.

The interviewee data that relates to this third motivation provides us with answers to the current study's particular research question, **why insider interest groups may include media work in their lobbying efforts**. The results are presented below.

4 Results

Overall, our interviewees confirm our knowledge regarding certain aspects of why interest groups may seek media coverage in lobbying efforts, but they also provide nuanced, and surprising, insights. First, confirming what we would expect, our respondents underscored the importance of mediated agenda-setting to create public awareness of political issues and thereby *to motivate policy-makers to address certain issues in ways that are favorable to the interest group* (See section 2.4.1). Secondly, respondents made it evident that mediated agenda-setting in a more nuanced sense can also be a means for interest groups *to manage their inside, face-to-face lobbying efforts*. This confirms the more tentative notion presented in the literature review that interest groups conduct media work to target (particular) political players inside the decision-making arena (See section 2.4.2). The third and last reason is arguably the most

surprising: interest groups may use media work to enhance the general public's impression of particular policy-makers, and, by doing so, indirectly seek to *establish, maintain and nurture their relationships with these policy makers*. As this final strategy has not yet been described in the literature, we have dubbed it 'boosting'.

Our results deviated from the literature in three noteworthy ways. First, when the press contact staff in our study described using the media to report on political information (See De Bruycker 2014), or to signal that their organization really does care about a particular issue (See Kollman 1998), they explained the rationale of these tactics in terms of shaping public opinion rather than in terms of specifically targeting policy makers as the literature suggests. Second, the press contact staff in our study did not mention using the media to undermine opposing groups (See Manning 2001, Mahoney 2007). Finally, there was only one respondent who mentioned media work as a means of being noticed by policy-makers (See De Bruycker and Beyers 2015).

Insert Table 1 here

In the following sections we unfold each of the three most salient reasons for media work as a form of lobbying, including how and under which circumstances press contact staff attempt to reach their aims.

4.1 Agenda-setting to motivate policy-makers to address particular issues

In line with the well-known agenda-setting phenomenon, our respondents described media coverage as an important means for interest groups to influence public opinion, and thereby, hopefully, influence the political agenda. Indeed, the respondents explained that most politicians keep close track of public opinion, and cannot allow themselves to ignore major mediated debates.

‘The media agenda can help establish a willingness amongst politicians to listen to [our] proposed solution. It can help bust the door in’.

Some interviewees noted that for their organization, influencing public opinion through the media is essential because without pressure from public opinion, their issues would never make it to the political agenda. This is especially the case when the issues in question either do not fit the existing political agenda, or do not seem promising to politicians; indeed, politicians primarily tend to engage themselves with issues that could strengthen their profile and voter appeal.

4.2 Agenda-setting to manage inside, face-to-face lobbying processes

The interviews also revealed that mediated agenda-setting is also considered a means to manage face-to-face, inside lobbying processes. When discussing this reason, interviewees revealed an awareness that ‘outside’ media strategies may indeed be potentially risky in terms of their relationships with policy-makers. They note that in many cases, it is not a good idea to simultaneously use media a media strategy together with traditional, face-to-face lobbying. Therefore, to address this risk and expedite ongoing, inside lobbying efforts, interest groups either avoid the media altogether, or else time it carefully. The general tendency

is that interest groups start a lobbying process by seeking to engage in direct dialogue with selected policy-makers, while avoiding the media.

'If we get through to the state administration, if there is an active political dialogue, we will refrain [from approaching the media] because we don't want to risk short circuiting anything'.

Only if the dialogue is not yielding satisfactory results will media work then be used to (re-)set the political agenda and thereby put pressure on the policy makers to adopt the interest group's perspective on the issue. In this way, media work to manage the lobbying process tends to be at later stages of lobbying efforts.

'Other times the PA [public affairs] staff can't convince the politicians to have "the right" opinion, so then we can decide to go to the press with the case to introduce it to the public and thereby put popular pressure on the politicians'.

Overall, inside lobbying seems to be preferred to media work because it is perceived as discrete, flexible, and efficient. Media work is harder to control. As several respondents mentioned, if an issue appears in the media, it tends to get politicized and thus less controllable. One respondent furthermore explained that interest groups are not always able to choose their arena of influence because other political actors may already have taken an interest in politicizing

an issue by raising it in the media. In such cases, interest groups have no other choice than to become involved in the media debate.

4.3 Media work to gain goodwill and strengthen relationships to policy-makers

As noted earlier, the third reason to conduct media work as a form of lobbying is arguably the most surprising: instead of focusing on issue-based agenda-setting or the potential *risks* that media work can pose to relationships with political actors, our interviewees often discussed the *opportunities* media work presents for establishing, maintaining and nurturing relationships with political actors. It was evident that this media-facilitated relationship building is not simple; it depends to a great extent on the press contact staff's understanding of the needs of the involved political actors. For example, in several cases, respondents describe their awareness of the fact that a politician's potential for success and (re-)election is greatly dependent on positive media visibility. This leads press staff to create positive media content on politicians in order to enhance the politician's public image, and thereby gain their goodwill. In a practical sense, this is done in a variety of ways. One is to flatter and praise political actors.

'Media work can also be used to go out and praise a ministry or politician if we believe this can strengthen our cause. One can send lots of signals through the media. That is obvious.'

Another practice is to intentionally introduce and frame issues in a way that would strengthen not only their own, but also politicians' political profiles, amongst a broad audience.

'Media work helps to establish a debate that politicians also want to participate in and profit from. Both [our organization] and politicians use media debates to profile themselves. Both parties have a shared interest in the media debate'.

The question of who loses or wins a political battle is crucial in mediated politics. Therefore, putting pressure on politicians behind the scenes in direct lobbying encounters is very different from doing it publicly in the media, because politicians certainly do not want to lose face publicly by giving in to interest groups' demands. Therefore, to help save politicians' face, and still "win" a political battle, care is taken by interest groups to only use media work at times, and in ways, that can either mitigate the risk of making politicians look weak, or that actually make the politicians look good. In the latter case, press contact staff frame news stories in a manner that selflessly provides politicians with the credit and honor of positive negotiation outcomes.

'There will be [cases] where it would be inappropriate for the case to be in the press. If we approach the press and say that we think the case should result in a specific way, it would become difficult for a politician to actually suggest that result because that would make the politician look weak in the public eye. In other words, it is also about who gets the honor for a

particular result. The politicians may take the honor for initiatives that originally are taken by us, as long as they fight thoroughly for the case. We don't care as long as our suggested result wins. (...) If they were inspired by us, and they take the honor, then our work has paid off.

As these utterances illustrate, respondents believe it is not always possible to strengthen relationships with politicians through media work; instead, the aim is to avoid harming the relationships.

'It is a balancing act between expressing sharp [political] opinions on the one hand, and at the same time remaining conscious of the fact that we also have to be able to cooperate with politicians on the other hand. In other words, we mustn't ruin our relationships with politicians by communicating inappropriately.'

Overall, we see that the respondents expressed keen awareness of the risks as well as opportunities inherent to media work. They also displayed clear insights into the mechanisms of political life in general, explaining that by understanding and accommodating politicians' needs and interests, they hoped to increase their own chances of gaining influence on political outcomes.

5 Discussion

This explorative, qualitative study has aimed at gaining up-to-date, salient and nuanced insights into the reasons why press contact staff in insider interest groups may use media work as a form of lobbying. In the following discussion

section, we situate the results within the theoretical framework and propose three ways in which media work in political organizations seems to be shifting alongside the increasing mediatization of political processes. Reflections on the study's limitations and ideas for future research conclude the article.

5.1 Media work to agenda-set and thereby motivate policy makers to address issues

As noted, the finding that interest groups conduct media work in order to agenda-set and thereby motivate policy makers to address certain issues in ways that are favorable to them clearly confirms the widespread assumption found in many earlier studies of interest groups' media work (see literature review). We refer to, and understand this first motivation as reflecting a traditional agenda-setting strategy.

5.2 Media work to agenda-set and thereby manage the inside lobbying process

The second reason described for media work, to manage the inside lobbying process, reflects a more contingent form of agenda-setting. Here, we still see media work as an attempt to (indirectly) influence policy makers on particular political issues, but the media work is situated within a framework of simultaneous, inside lobbying efforts. In this way, our study enhances our understanding of motivations for conducting mediated agenda-setting in several ways.

First, in line with the literature that examines insider interest groups' choice of lobbying strategies and questions the compatibility of inside and outside strategies, our study provides clear evidence that insider interest groups do not necessarily limit themselves to face-to-face lobbying strategies, but also find it useful to simultaneously rely on so-called outside media strategies as well (Beyers 2004, Binderkrantz 2005, Kriesi, Tresch et al. 2007, Binderkrantz and Krøyer 2012). More specifically, and in line with the findings from Kriesi, Tresch et al. (2007), our study adds support to the suggestion that insider interest groups commonly prioritize inside strategies, and delegate public-oriented strategies such as media work an important, albeit subordinate, role in lobbying efforts.

In addition, our results reveal particular circumstances surrounding the decision to either launch, or not launch, media activities in conjunction with inside lobbying; as noted, in cases where face-to-face lobbying has stalled or is not progressing satisfactorily, carefully timed media work is considered a viable option, and in cases where face-to-face lobbying is progressing well, media work tends to be avoided. Regarding the first circumstance, our findings provide further nuances to the suggestion by Kriesi, Tresch et al. that the choice between inside or outside lobbying strategies 'varies according to the *phase of policy making in a given policy domain*' (*ibid*: 55-56), and in particular that actors are more likely to conduct media work in critical phases of rapid policy change as opposed to 'equilibrium phases of routine policy making' (*ibid.*). Regarding circumstances in which media work is avoided, the respondents' clear awareness

of the risks associated with media work in terms of hurting relationships with policy makers supports Grant's core proposal (2000, 2001, 2004)(see section 2.3). Their reports of avoiding media work when face-to-face lobbying is progressing satisfactorily also complement DeBruycker and Beyers' work (2015) that notes that groups tend to keep silent when they are in favor of a tabled proposal.

Importantly, these insights on media work as a means to manage the inside lobbying process indicate that insider interest groups may on occasion deploy a mediated agenda-setting strategy in order to influence particular decision makers or political entities. In this way, we find clear support for the studies reviewed earlier (see section 2.4.2) that point to media work as a means of influencing specific audiences, such as individuals within the political decision-making arena, through messages directed at the public in general (e.g. Kollman 1998, Miller and Williams 1998, Manning 2001, De Bruycker 2014, De Bruycker and Beyers 2015). Indeed, the way the respondents so clearly understand their media work as a means of influencing particular decision makers and the ongoing negotiation process – albeit indirectly - has important consequences for the way we traditionally have viewed media work as a form of “outside” strategy. As noted earlier, outside strategies such as media work are typically defined as a means to influence public opinion, while inside strategies are defined as a means to directly influence decision makers (e.g. Kollman 1998, Grant 2004, Binderkrantz 2005, Kriesi, Tresch et al. 2007). Our study provides evidence that this distinction is disappearing. Because of this, and based on our other findings, we see a need to revise our assumptions about media work in politically

motivated organizations in several ways. Our proposal is three-fold. First, we propose that *media work should no longer be conceptualized exclusively as an outside strategy*, especially since there is a growing tendency for interest groups to capitalize on democratically elected politicians' sensitivity to public opinion and thereby to consider political actors as key consumers of their news stories. Second, we propose that that in addition to the well-known, keen awareness and adaptation to the media logic, *we should sharpen our appreciation of the importance of political finesse, in addition to media savvy, amongst press staff in politically driven organizations*. Third, we propose that, as part of the ongoing mediatization of politics, *we should recognize that political processes that traditionally took place exclusively in face-to-face lobbying, such as relationship building, now take place in the news media*. All of these proposals are perhaps most strongly supported by our finding that interest groups view media work as a means of strengthening their relationships to policy makers.

5.3 Media work to strengthen relationships to policy makers

It is well-known that good relationships are a key element of successful face-to-face lobbying, and in this context, relationship building is typically understood as a result of personal interaction: 'the more skillful the lobbyists are in forging personal contact with governmental officials, the more successful the group is likely to be' (Duignan 2013). What we see in this study, however, is *mediated* relationship building. As an under-explored phenomenon, this leaves us to wonder how to understand and explain it. In our proposals above, we consider it another aspect of mediatized politics. In this way, the finding lends support to, and broadens the scope of, Strömback and Van Aelst's work which indicates

'policy-making processes are no longer exclusively played out behind closed doors' (2013: 349). Another reasonable way to understand mediated relationship-building strategies such as flattering, praising, profiling and giving honor, could be as reflecting a new sort of "asset" or "information supply" which interest groups possess and can provide political actors in return for political influence. This type of asset could complement the interest group information supply categories referred to by De Bruycker: technical, legal and economic expertise and political information (2016). This would be fully in line with De Brucker's general suggestion that lobbying messages regularly contain information that is *useful* to policy makers (*ibid.*). Certainly a strengthened public image and profile would be considered useful for politicians who depend on the public for (re-)election.

6 Limitations and future research

As discussed in the method section, exploratory, qualitative studies have inherent strengths and weaknesses. In the present study, one strength is that our method allowed us to gain nuanced, unexpected insights into motivations for media work amongst press staff that we would not have been able to gain using a strongly deductive, quantitative method. Our method also allowed us to achieve theoretical saturation in the analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1998, Guest, Bunce et al. 2006), as the final interviews did not provide us with new information or insights. However, in conducting interview studies, one needs to remain aware of the fact that the results are in essence reports on interviewees' perceptions and perspectives. For this reason, to get a more complete understanding of media

work as a form of lobbying, it would be valuable in future studies to also examine policy makers' perspectives on this topic. In addition, the results of the current study point to a need for subsequent quantitative studies that would allow for more rigorous hypothesis testing. For example, quantitative studies could provide insights into the relative importance of various media strategies, the typical circumstances under which these strategies are followed, and how particular interest group characteristics, such as type and size, correlate with particular media strategies. Finally, we find that the practice of avoiding media coverage amongst interest groups deserves more attention in future studies.

Strategy	Reasons	Practices	Circumstances
Agenda-setting: Creating public awareness of, and shaping public opinion on, political issues	To motivate policy-makers to address particular issues (as framed)	Monitoring current agendas Promoting select issues, etc.	When interest groups' preferred issues are not on the current political agenda, for example, when politicians downplay or ignore an issue that does not hold much profile-strengthening potential or voter appeal.
	To manage the face-to-face lobbying process	Avoiding the media	In the early phases of inside lobbying processes, and when inside lobbying processes are progressing well.
		Carefully timing media work	When inside lobbying processes are not progressing well. Often at later stages of lobbying processes.
Boosting: Enhancing public's impression of policy-makers	To gain goodwill and strengthen relationships with policy-makers	Flattering and praising Profiling Giving honor and credit to save face	When interest groups need the immediate or future support of a particular politician or politicians. Often <i>after</i> political decisions have been made.

Table 1: Media work as lobbying effort amongst interest groups: strategies, reasons, practices and circumstances.

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