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Published online: 27 Jul 2015.

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Changing the Face of Advocacy? Explaining Interest Organizations' Use of Social Media Strategies

ADAM WILLIAM CHALMERS and PAUL ALEXANDER SHOTTON

Social media have increasingly been recognized as an important and effective tool for advocacy. A growing body of research examines the use of social media in grassroots and social movements as well as issues related to civic engagement, social capital, and voter turnout. The extent to which organized interest groups have adopted social media as an advocacy tool, however, has been relatively ignored. This article examines the determinants of the use of social media tools by a broad range of interest organizations. We argue that social media use needs to be understood as part of an interest organization's larger set of news media lobbying strategies. We explain social media use as a function of two factors: first, the importance organizations place on trying to shape lobbying debates through the news media; second, the importance they place on shaping their public image via the news media. We test this argument using a unique data set of interest group advocacy in the European Union. Controlling for a host of competing explanations, regression results provide evidence supporting our central argument.

Keywords advocacy, interest organizations, lobbying, news media, social media

Has social media changed the face of advocacy? Facebook and Twitter played an important role in facilitating recent large-scale anti-government protests in Turkey, Brazil, Indonesia, and Bulgaria. "Twitter revolutionaries" incited powerful social movements and protest activities spreading across North Africa and the Middle East during the Arab Spring. In Western democracies, the Occupy Wall Street movement demonstrated the power of these new social media tools in organizing and mobilizing protest activities on a global scale. For nearly a decade, WikiLeaks has provided an online platform for Internet activists to highlight issues related to privacy and the democratization of information posed by the Internet. Given these recent events, it is little wonder scholars have increasingly turned their attention to examining the effects of social media on advocacy and campaigning activities. This growing research has variously examined the effectiveness of social media in fostering civic engagement (Boulianne, 2009; Delli Carpini, 2000; Howard & Hussain, 2011; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003), social capital (Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Kobayashi, Ikeda, & Miyata, 2006; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001), collective action (Lupia & Sin, 2003), and social movements (Ayres, 1999; Carty, 2010; Petray, 2011) as well as the extent to which they mobilize and inform voters (Bimber, 2001; Dulio, Goff, & Thurber, 1999; Haynes & Pitts, 2009; Polat, 2005). While cyber-skeptics and cyber-enthusiasts are divided

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over the extent to which "Advocacy 2.0" has leveled the playing field for activists and advocates of all stripes, there is little question that social media are now commonplace in many advocacy activities.

Largely absent from this growing literature, however, is a consideration of the place of social media in the advocacy toolkit of organized interest groups (see, for exceptions, Karpf, 2010; Obar, Zube, & Lampe, 2012; van der Graaf, Otjes, & Rasmussen, 2013).[1] To what extent have social media been adopted by interest organizations as a tool for lobbying? Much of the research on lobbying strategies still tends to focus on a largely outmoded set of pressure strategies ranging from letter-writing campaigns to phone calls (Baumgartner, Berry, Hojnacki, Kimball, & Leech, 2009; Mahoney, 2008). The scant work that has acknowledged social media in lobbying activities provides only cursory evidence that interest organizations are increasingly turning to these new tools in their advocacy work (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012) or explains the adoption of social media tools in terms of a patchwork of assumptions regarding an organization's background characteristics (e.g., van der Graaf et al., 2013). As a result, we still know very little about the role of social media in the repertoire of advocacy strategies used by interest organizations. Have interest organizations embraced these new strategies and, if so, to what extent? Furthermore, what factors explain when and why interest groups use social media as a lobbying strategy?

The purpose of this article is to shed light on these fundamental questions. We examine when, why, and to what extent interest organizations use social media in the context of lobbying in the European Union (EU). The EU presents an important case for an analysis of social media use. The absence of a transnational public sphere or EU-wide media would seem to reduce the potential impact of social media as a tool for advocacy. Furthermore, the highly institutionalized nature of lobbying in the EU (comprised of a host of formal and informal points of access for interest groups) should also suggest a diminished role for social media tactics (Binderkrantz, 2012). As such, findings related to social media use in such an unreceptive lobbying climate should suggest even stronger effects in other settings.

Using a unique database of more than 1,200 interest organizations lobbying at the EU level, our analysis advances a new theoretical framework for understanding when and why these organizations use social media tools. The scant existing work addressing our question primarily explains social media use as a function of resources. While this explanation tells us about the capacity of organizations to use social media tools, it says little about their motivation to do so. We argue that a motivational argument combined with a consideration of resources provides a more compelling explanation for social media use. As such, drawing on an emerging literature about the important role of the news media in the politics of interest representation, we argue that social media use is best understood as part of an organization's larger set of news media lobbying strategies. In particular, media-savvy organizations maintain two objectives when using social media: to shape lobbying debates as they are played out in the news media and to shape their own public image. Controlling for alternative explanations put forward in the existing literature, like group resources, group type, existing advocacy strategies, and the governmental level at which groups lobby, empirical analyses largely confirm this argument. Interest organizations working to control a lobbying debate and seeking to shape their public image via the news media also tend to use social media to a greater extent. Importantly, we also find that resources only play a marginal role in explaining an organization's use of social media.

Explaining Social Media Use

The effectiveness of social media as an advocacy tool is a contested topic. While some scholars see social media as a panacea for collective action problems and an effective tool for grassroots mobilization, others suggest that the benefits of these new technologies are overplayed, characterizing social media strategies as failing to truly mobilize supporters and resulting in a type of apathetic "clicktivism" or "slacktivism" (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009). At the root of this disagreement are contrasting normative claims, casting social media either as a "great leveler" between the rich and the poor or as a new instrument for the continued dominance of those already with considerable influence and power. Importantly, both arguments explain the adoption and use of social media tools primarily as a function of resources.

Scholars stressing the inherent democratizing and empowering function of the Internet and social media also stress its openness, transparency, and ease of access. This is a particularly prevalent argument for those highlighting the advocacy potential of these new technologies for social movements and grassroots mobilization. The same arguments have been extended to research on interest organizations. Bergan (2009, p. 328), for instance, points out that "the Internet has made it cheaper for groups to form lists and easier for activists to join groups and contact legislators through email." For Edwards and Hoefer (2010, p. 226), organizations can use social media "for effective advocacy efforts that require little staff time to maintain." Social media not only reduce the costs of advocacy (Boulianne, 2009), but also have "low entry costs" (Van Laer, 2010, p. 406). For interest group scholars the tendency is to therefore label social media as a "weapon of the weak." Along with demonstrations and protests, social media are typically categorized as an "outside strategy," providing so-called diffuse interest groups (like nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] and citizen groups) with a form of indirect contact to decision makers (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Thrall, 2006).

Skepticism about the democratizing and empowering potential of social media not only dismisses the leveling ability of these new technologies, but also suggests that they play into the hands of those already in power. Again, resources explain social media use. However, while social media technologies may be inexpensive, their effective use requires considerable time, staff, and resources. Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) as well as Obar and colleagues (2012) find that resources, and especially staff know-how, are crucial factors determining social media use. van der Graaf and colleagues (2013), controlling for groups' membership structure and level of mobilization, find that groups with more staff also tend to use a larger number of social media tools. Similar observations have been made with regard to earlier research on interest groups' news media strategies, where only large, well-funded private interests were found to have the ability to effectively play a role in public debates (Danielian & Page, 1994; Thrall, 2006). Indeed, for Iosifidis (2011, p. 619), rather than serving NGOs and citizen groups, "the Internet has become a major instrument for corporate activity" supplementing other so-called inside lobbying strategies like the provision of expert information via policy reports and analyses. Social media do not balance the playing field between rich and poor, but rather bias a game where all players already speak with an "upper-class accent" (Schattschneider, 1975).

News Media, Interest Organizations, and Social Media Use

Our aim in this analysis is to identify the factors explaining when and why interest organizations use social media tools. Presently there is no consensus amongst scholars

on this question. In particular, the dominant resource-based explanation presents contradictory results. These new technologies are presented as both weapons of the weak benefiting resource-poor groups like NGOs and citizen groups, as well as yet another tool for those who already wield considerable power, like corporations and business associations. We argue that these contradictory findings are largely an artifact of the limits of the resource-based approach. In particular, resources can only tell us about the potential capacity of interest organizations to use social media, but nothing about why they might do so and to what end. What is more, this potential varies depending on how we conceptualize use: either resources play a minor role because use entails low start-up costs or resources play a larger role because use entails functions that require more staff resources and time. Our approach captures a broader understanding of social media use by focusing on the factors motivating certain interest groups to adopt these new technologies. Thinking about these motivating factors first requires us to specify how social media get deployed in advocacy practices. The current tendency to categorize social media as either a traditional inside or outside lobbying strategy, in addition to leading to contradictory assumptions about resources, does little to answer this question. Our central point is that social media are not easily categorized as either type of traditional strategy. It is not well suited to transmitting expert and policy-relevant information like traditional inside strategies and, at the same time, is considerably different from the type of protest politics that typify outside strategies. Following Beyers (2004) and Binderkrantz (2005), we consider social media as an "alternative" strategy that needs to be distinguished from traditional inside and outside strategies and which is more closely related to news media lobbying campaigns. In what follows we will advance a new theory that begins by understanding social media as part of an interest organization's larger repertoire of news media lobbying strategies.

A growing literature suggests that the news media are a key platform for interest organization activity. Studies have examined how organizations seek out media coverage and attention, attempt to influence decision makers and policy outcomes by making headlines, and work to shape policy options through their interactions with reporters and news outlets (Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz, 2012; Kollman, 1998; Mahoney, 2008; Thrall, 2006). Binderkrantz (2012, p. 121) links these new trends to an increasing "mediatization" of politics, "leading all political actors to focus more on making a presence in the media." For Manin (1995) and Kriesi, Tresch, and Jochum (2007), the increasing importance of media-related lobbying activities is part of the broader trend of so-called audience democracy, where politics are no longer confined to smoke-filled back rooms but rather play out under the constant gaze of the media. News media coverage and shaping the news-making process, according to Thrall, is "critical to success or failure of social movements and interest group efforts" alike (Thrall, 2006, p. 408).

What role do social media tools play in lobbying via the news media? Importantly, social media are rarely examined in terms of their news-making potential. Instead, they are conceptualized as either existing apart from the news media or working in parallel to it. We argue that this is not the case. Instead, social media are not only well suited to news media-related lobbying strategies but are crucial new tools for attracting media attention, shaping the news-making process, and exercising lobbying influence through the news media. In what follows we provide a theoretical framework for explaining social media use in terms of its application in lobbying through the news media. In particular, we argue that two factors are essential to explaining social media use: first, the importance groups place on shaping policy debates, and, second, the importance groups place on shaping and controlling their public image. In what follows we describe both factors in detail and present corresponding hypotheses.

Since Schattschneider (1975), interest groups scholars have recognized the importance of "spinning" or "framing" advocacy debates (see Baumgartner et al., 2009; Mahoney, 2008). Policy issues are almost always multidimensional and lobbying battles take place over controlling which dimension gets highlighted and which gets ignored. Organizations that can successfully "frame" or "spin" policy alternatives in a way that gets others to debate issues "on their terms" tend to have more influence in shaping policy outcomes. Controlling and shaping a debate is, therefore, key to lobbying success. For Riker (1986, p. 9) this amounts to nothing less than "structuring the world so you can win" (see also Baumgartner et al., 2009). Importantly, framing has a distinct news media dimension. Interest organizations frequently turn to the news media to shape messages, spin debates, and "raise awareness for an issue" (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010, p. 230). Daily newspapers and television news in particular offer the reach and speed necessary for successfully spinning strategies. Our central point is that social media present one further opportunity to communicate with the news media in an effort to shape and spin lobbying debates. This leads to our first hypothesis.

H1: The greater the importance an interest organization places on shaping a lobbying debate in the news media, the more that organization will use social media.

Just as interest organizations use social media to shape lobbying debates, they also use these new technologies to shape their public image (Curtis et al., 2010). Interest group scholars acknowledge a trend toward a growing professionalization of lobbying. Advocacy increasingly "requires less membership muscle and more policy expertise and professionalism" (Maloney, 2009, p. 283). In addition to employing in-house experts and engaging in a type of "evidence-based policymaking" process (Chalmers, 2013, p. 49), professionalization has also led interest organizations to place greater importance on developing, shaping, and maintaining their public image. Advocacy and lobbying strategies are no longer only about pressure and purchase tactics. Indeed, lobbying is also described as a type of "public affairs management" (van Schendelen, 2005). Interest organizations have been shown to routinely seek attention in the news media in order to "generate favorable media attention for themselves" (Thrall, 2006, p. 407) or, as Obar and colleagues (2012, p. 14) demonstrate, to use technologies like Twitter to "raise their online presence" and "contribute to the branding process." These trends have perhaps been explored in greatest detail in the corporate reputation- and image-building literature (Gray & Balmer, 1998; Schultz, Castelló, & Morsing, 2013, Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011). Here scholars have pointed out the new challenges and opportunities related to image maintenance in an era of new social media where shareholders are more intimately in tune with a company's online presence (Patriotta, Gond, & Schultz, 2011; Schultz et al., 2011). We contend that social media technologies provide an important tool for implementing public relations, image, and reputation strategies in the news media. This leads to our second hypothesis.

H2: The greater importance an interest organization places on shaping their public image in the news media, the more that organization will use social media.

Research Design

Data for this analysis were collected primarily via a large-scale online survey of interest organizations lobbying in the EU. Our survey population of 5,484 individual interest

organizations was drawn from the European Union Transparency Register.[2] From this population, we drew a random sample of 1,300 organizations for the survey. After eliminating certain organizations based on missing contact information, we ended up contacting 1,219 organizations. A total of 358 responses were collected, putting the response rate at about 30%. To ensure reliability of responses, we made every effort to contact organization presidents, directors, or upper-level management. To the same end, the survey was made available to respondents in the EU's three working languages: English, German, and French. Table 1 organizes responses by interest organization type following the Transparency Register's classification scheme (due to missing data we were not able to code 17 organizations, reducing our *N* to 341). The distribution of responses corresponds roughly to existing empirical research mapping the EU interest group population (Greenwood, 2011; Wonka, Baumgartner, Mahoney, & Berkhout, 2010). So-called specific interest groups (especially corporations and business and professional associations) as well as diffuse groups, like NGOs, appear to be the most prevalent types of groups in the EU. By contrast, public authorities, trade unions, religious organizations, academic organizations and law firms, all with low response rates, are typically less prevalent. On balance, the representativeness of the sample of interest groups used in this analysis does not seem to differ greatly from existing research.

The purpose of this analysis is to explain when and why interest organizations use social media tools. We argue that the use of social media is related to two central factors: (a) shaping lobbying debates and (b) shaping an interest organization's public image. In what follows we explain how these two factors were operationalized and provide details about data collection. We will also discuss the operationalization and data collection procedures used for our dependent variable and control variables.

Table 1
Survey responses

Interest Organization Type	Frequency	%
Nongovernmental organizations, platforms, networks & similar organizations	124	36.36
Trade, business, & professional associations	96	28.15
Professional consultancies	29	8.5
Think tanks & research institutions	29	8.5
Companies & groups	19	5.57
Trade unions	10	2.93
Other similar organizations	8	2.35
Local, regional, & municipal authorities	7	2.05
Self-employed consultants	6	1.76
Academic institutions	5	1.47
Organizations representing churches and religious communities	4	1.17
Other public or mixed entities, etc.	3	0.88
Law firms	0	0
Total	341	100.00

Dependent Variable: Social Media Use

Social media can be distinguished from "traditional" (pre-information and communication technology [ICT] or pre-1990s) or Web 1.0 (electronic versions of "traditional" tools) technologies and are defined primarily in terms of user interactivity—the ability of users to create and share content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). Social media therefore include a broad range of so-called Web 2.0 technologies, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, Google+, and XING, for instance. Our survey results suggested that while organizations use a broad range of social media tools, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn were clearly the most frequently used platforms.[3] As such, our analysis is limited to a consideration of these three social media platforms.

The purpose of this analysis is to explain interest organizations' use of social media. This entails both the extent to which social media is used as well as when or in which lobbying venues it is used. Combing insights in Nah and Saxton (2013) and van der Graaf et al. (2013), we conceptualize "use" in three different ways: first, as a categorical measure of whether or not interest organizations use social media at all; second, as a count of the number of the social media platforms used by interest organizations; and third, as a measure of interest organizations' reported use of social media in different lobbying venues. Data for social media use were gathered via Web-based coding of interest organizations' individual websites, a search using the internal search engines of social media platforms, and survey data.

Coding for these variables followed several steps. First, social media use was coded as the presence or absence of organizations having an account with the three social media platforms considered here—Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. A binary measure of social media use (=1) was coded when an organization used any or all of these platforms. A count measure (ranging from 0, no platforms used, to 3, all three platforms used) was coded as the number of platforms used by organizations (a similar approach is used in Nah & Saxton, 2013). The use of social media in different lobbying venues was measured with the following survey question: "How important is it for your organization to use social media tools when interacting with (a) European Union decision makers (European Commission, European Parliament, Council), (b) the general public, and (c) the news media?" Importance was measured on a 1 to 5 Likert scale, where 1 = very unimportant and 5 = very important. An implicit expectation related to both our theory and hypotheses is that social media use will be greater with news media and general public venues than with European institution venues. The task of spinning a lobbying debate and shaping a group's public image are simply better suited to public and media-related venues. These tasks are also more directly targeted at these venues. While groups might hope to influence EU decision makers via these strategies, the effect would be circuitous and would rely first on success in these other venues. As such, examining social media use in different lobbying venues not only provides insight into when groups use social media tools but also acts as a robustness check for some of our core theoretical assumptions. Importantly, concerns regarding overreporting of behavior in survey data suggest that actual use and reported use rarely match up (see Prior, 2009).[4] Nevertheless, survey data remain the only means for assessing social media use in specific lobbying venues. Also, by combining measures of actual and self-reported use, we get a more comprehensive picture of the place of social media in interest organizations' lobbying strategies.

Shaping the Lobbying Debate

Media strategies have become a common part of interest organizations' lobbying toolkits. To a large degree, interest organizations use these outlets to "spin" or "frame" policy debates in a way that is favorable to their preferences and desired policy outcomes. Groups that are successful in framing policy debates are also successful in shaping policy itself. We posit that social media tools provide new opportunities to carry out these framing strategies with the news media. Moreover, groups that place a greater emphasis on bringing attention to specific issues in a debate will also tend to use social media tools to a greater extent. In this analysis we measure the importance placed on framing policy debates using the following survey question: "How important is it for your organization to use social media in order to generate media awareness for an issue/story?" Importance was measured on a scale ranging from 1 = very unimportant to 5 = very important.

Shaping Public Image

The increasing professionalization of interest group activities as well as a shift away from pressure and purchase tactics and toward public relations strategies speaks to a central strength of social media tools. Interest organizations, in their efforts to influence policy and attract members, are image conscious, building and maintaining a specific public image in an effort to bring them greater influence and attract (and retain) members. Interest organizations that place more emphasis on shaping their public image will also tend to use social media tools to a greater extent. We measure this factor by asking survey respondents the following question: "How important was the following factor in making the decision to use social media tools for your organization: shaping the public image of your organization?" Again, importance was measured on the same 1 to 5 scale described earlier.

It is important to consider the extent to which systematic differences between interest organizations might play a role in how individuals responded to our survey questions, especially as they pertain to our two key explanatory variables (shaping the debate and shaping public image). To this end, we conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) model disaggregating the variance in the two explanatory variables between interest organization types (a full discussion of the organization types considered in this analysis follows). Results suggest that little variation in the explanatory variables is owing to the differences in interest organization types. Specifically, for shaping the debate and shaping public image there are no statistically significant differences between the mean responses of all interest organization types considered in this analysis.[5]

Control Variables

In order to isolate the effects of our two main independent variables, we also control for several competing explanations in our empirical analysis. This includes interest organization resources, interest organization type, alternative advocacy strategies, and the level at which an interest organization lobbies. We explain each in turn.

Resources

While scholars have identified resources as a key factor explaining social media use, there is no consensus on the nature of their effect. On the one hand, the low start-up and maintenance costs seem to suggest that social media tools would attract resource-poor groups

that have fewer lobbying options. On the other hand, scholars suggest that the efficient use of social media tools requires considerable staff and financial resources. We control for the importance of resources in social media use in a number of different ways: first, following van der Graaf, Otjes, and Rasmussen (in press), in terms of staff resources and financial resources; and second, using a survey question asking respondents directly about the effects of resources on their reasoning for using social media tools.

Group resources measured as finances and staff were coded using data from the European Union's Transparency Register. Finances are measured as an organization's estimated yearly costs of "representing [their] interests to the EU institutions" and are indicated on a scale from 1 to 52, with 1 = less than 50,000 euro per year and 52 = more than 10,000,000 euro per year (increasing in 50,000 euro increments). Staff is measured as the number of persons in a given organization engaged specifically in lobbying activities.[6] Initial analyses of finances and staff indicated that both variables were highly skewed and were therefore logged to normalize distribution.

In order to better understand the effects of resources on the use of social media, we also gathered data through survey questions. In particular, we asked survey respondents about the importance of "reducing the costs of lobbying" in making the decision to use social media tools. "Importance" was measured on the same 1 to 5 scale detailed earlier. Assessing the effects of resources in this way provides insight into an interest organization's motivation for using social media tools.

Interest Organization Type

Much of the existing literature explains an interest organization's choice of advocacy strategy as a function of interest organization type (Beyers, 2004; Chalmers, 2013; Gerber, 1999; Kollman, 1998; van der Graaf et al., 2013). A central distinction is made between specific interest groups and diffuse interest groups. Specific interest groups (i.e., socioeconomic and producer interests such as business associations and corporations) have well-circumscribed and concentrated constituencies, considerable financial, organizational, and informational resources, as well as privileged access to key decision makers. Diffuse interest groups, such as NGOs and citizen groups, lack a well-delineated and concentrated constituency, defend the interests of broad and general segments of society, have limited resources, and are routinely denied direct access to decision makers. As such, specific interest groups tend to have greater lobbying advantages over diffuse interest groups. In terms of strategy choice, specific interests are assumed to be better positioned to use inside lobbying tactics, such as face-to-face meetings and phone calls, while diffuse groups, lacking direct contact with decision makers, turn to outside strategies, such as demonstration and protests.

Central to our argument is that social media tools cannot accurately be classified as either an outside strategy or an inside strategy. Instead, we argue that they form part of an interest organization's larger set of news media lobbying strategies. As such, it is difficult to make an assumption about the effect of interest group type of social media use. Given the prevalence of these arguments in the extant literature it is nevertheless prudent to control this variable. We do so by introducing a dummy variable for "specific interests" and for "diffuse interests" into our empirical analysis. We coded specific and diffuse interests using the group type classification scheme used in the Transparency Register. Specific interests include corporations, business and professional associations, trade unions, as well as consultancies and law firms. Diffuse interests include non-governmental organizations and religious organizations.

Alternative Advocacy Strategies

Social media present interest organizations with relatively new and perhaps largely unproven advocacy tactics. At the same time, most organizations already have a well-established repertoire of advocacy tools that may have presented considerable adoption costs, whether in terms of investing time, energy, or financial resources. As such, and given the budgetary constraints faced by all interest organizations, the decision to use social media strategies would necessary involve diverting energy and resources away from an organization's existing and proven set of lobbying tactics. This type of trade-off could be risky and act as a deterrent for adopting new social media tactics. We examine this trade-off by controlling for the importance that individual interest organizations place on a set of traditional lobbying tactics. This includes (a) inside lobbying tactics (defined as face-to-face meeting, phone calls, e-mails, position papers, etc.) and (b) outside lobbying tactics (defined as public events, demonstrations, petition, etc.). Data were gathered from our survey and importance is measured on a 1 5 scale, with 1 being very unimportant and 5 being very important. In both cases, our expectation is that placing greater importance on these traditional strategies will decrease an organization's likelihood of using social media strategies.

Level of Lobbying

The EU represents an important case for an analysis of the use of social media as a lobbying tool. In the absence of a transnational public sphere and/or EU-wide media, social media become less effective tools for lobbying on EU policies. National-level lobbying, however, should not suffer from this same problem (see Kriesi et al., 2007, p. 54). Given the diminished effectiveness of social media tools in EU-level lobbying, we would expect organizations with distinctly EU-level interests to eschew these new technologies. Organizations with national-level interests, by contrast, should be more likely to use social media tools to a greater extent (on this point, see also van der Graaf et al., 2013). Using data from the Transparency Register, we measure this variable in terms of an organization's stated field of lobbying interest: national or European. Both are coded as dummy variables.[7]

Data Analysis

We examine the use of social media in three ways and in five different models: first, in Model 1, as a binary variable measuring whether or not interest organizations use social media; second, in Model 2, as a count variable measuring the number of social media platforms used (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn); third, in Models 3, 4, and 5, as self-reported use based on survey data. Estimating the five models also acts as an additional robustness check for our findings.[8] Importantly, the models use different dependent variables and therefore required different regression specifications. Model 1, explaining social media use using a binary measure, employs logistic regression analysis. Model 2, insofar as the dependent variables are based on count data, uses negative binomial regression analysis. The remaining models, measuring social media on an ordinal scale, use ordered logistic regression. The results for are presented in Table 2.

The results presented in all five models provide little evidence supporting a resource-based explanation of social media use. Indeed, all five models show no significant differences with regard to group finances, staff, or use of social media to reduce lobbying costs. Social media use is neither associated with having superior resources nor with

Table 2
The determinants of social media use

	(1) Binary	(2) Count	(3) EU Institutions	(4) General Public	(5) News Media
Shape debate	1.719***	1.416***	1.857***	2.827***	3.560***
	(3.79)	(4.63)	(5.02)	(8.06)	(9.20)
Shape image	1.335*	1.136*	1.020	1.280**	1.311**
	(2.57)	(2.09)	(0.20)	(2.79)	(2.90)
Financial	1.291	1.126	1.416+	1.226	1.360
resources (ln)	(1.00)	(1.09)	(1.85)	(1.12)	(1.64)
Staff (ln)	1.187	1.093+	1.000	0.870	0.847
	(1.07)	(1.66)	(−0.00)	(−1.27)	(−1.48)
Reduce costs	0.783+	0.938	1.132	1.078	0.993
	(−1.94)	(−1.36)	(1.39)	(0.83)	(−0.08)
Specific interest	0.469	0.678+	0.776	0.641	0.852
	(−1.64)	(−1.86)	(−0.68)	(−1.22)	(−0.43)
Diffuse interest	1.102	0.985	0.585	1.503	0.934
	(0.19)	(−0.08)	(−1.45)	(1.11)	(−0.18)
Direct lobbying	1.129	1.048	1.007	0.992	0.834
	(0.50)	(0.37)	(0.03)	(−0.04)	(−0.91)
Indirect lobbying	0.698+	0.831*	1.424*	1.079	1.244
	(−1.95)	(−2.23)	(2.24)	(0.53)	(1.54)
National level	0.857	0.969	1.278	0.991	1.055
	(−0.49)	(−0.22)	(0.98)	(−0.04)	(0.22)
European level	0.887	1.026	0.627	0.503*	0.615
	(−0.30)	(0.15)	(−1.54)	(−2.18)	(−1.57)
Constant	−.080	−1.207			
	(1.195)	(.644)			
Log likelihood	−129.73	−299.003	−293.556	−304.916	−297.910
LR chi2 (11)	45.97		72.43	156.27	179.44
Pseudo R-squared	0.151		0.109	0.204	0.232
McFadden's R-squared		0.084			
AIC		2.496			
BIC		−710.580			
N	250	250	248	248	248

Note. Exponentiated coefficients; t statistics in parentheses. AIC = Akaike's Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion.
$+ p < 0.10$. $^* p < 0.05$. $^{**} p < 0.01$. $^{***} p < 0.001$.

a lack of resources. The decision to use these new technologies, in other words, has little to do with their assumed low start-up costs nor with the higher costs of using these tools effectively. Indeed, the findings presented here pose an important challenge to the dominant resource-based explanations of social media use in the literature and suggest that some other factors play a significant role in an organization's decision to adopt these

new advocacy tools. Similarly, the regression results suggest that specific interest groups (like companies, trade and business associations, and trade unions) have no advantage over diffuse groups (like NGOs) in terms of social media use.

Regression results cast similar doubt on differences related to an interest organization's existing advocacy strategies and level of lobbying interests. First, most models suggest that there is little consideration of a trade-off between using social media strategies and traditional inside or outside strategies. In fact, Models 2 and 3 suggest that groups already using traditional outside strategies are more likely to use social media strategies. However, this result is not consistent across the other models and should be interpreted with some caution. Second, while EU-level lobbying may not present an ideal context for the use of social media lobbying strategies due to the highly institutionalized nature of lobbying in the EU and the lack of an EU-wide public sphere, the results do not suggest that lobbying at the national level is any more conducive to using social media tools. Specifically, national-level lobbying shows no significant differences in any of the models. In contrast to Binderkrantz (2012), for instance, as well as Kriesi and colleagues (2007), we cannot expect media-related lobbying strategies to be best suited to national-level lobbying venues or those without an institutionalized form of interest intermediation. At the same time, however, the results do support the notion that social media are not well suited to EU-level interests or lobbying that target EU institutions. In particular, Model 4 suggests a statistically significant negative correlation between use of social media and European-level interests.

One explanation for our findings is that, while the level of lobbying is a consideration for news media-related strategies, social media are simply not used to lobby decision makers in the EU institutions. Social media are not well suited to direct forms of lobbying. As one survey respondent providing additional details in an open field question noted, "Twitter is very powerful—we have 2,000 members and 12,000 followers. But it does not appear that Twitter helps us to communicate with EU or national government institutions."[9] This finding provides support for Edwards and Hoefer (2010, p. 229), who found that while groups might use social media to "facilitate communication" with decision makers, they rarely (2% of their total sample) use social media to directly interact with decision makers.

The results presented in Table 2 provide considerable support for our two hypotheses. Model 1, using a binary measure of social media use, shows significant differences (at the .05 level or better) for our two main independent variables: organizations shaping the lobbying debate and shaping their public image. Odds ratios describe the magnitude of these correlations. First, the results suggest that with a one-unit increase in the level of importance interest organizations accord to shaping the lobbying debate, the odds of using social media are 1.72 greater. Similarly, with a one-unit increase in the importance accorded to shaping their public image, the odds of using social media are 1.33 greater. In both cases, social media use is associated with concerns for news media lobbying strategies.

The findings in Model 2 also present clear results supporting both hypotheses, suggesting the news media lobbying strategies are strongly correlated with social media use. As with Model 1, both shaping the lobbying debate and shaping a group's public image are positively correlated with social media use at a significance level of 0.05 or better. The incidence rate ratios (IRR) provide for a clearer interpretation of the magnitude of these correlations. First, with each single unit increase in the level of importance accorded to shaping the lobbying debate, the number of social media platforms used by an interest organization is expected to increase by a factor of 1.42. Second, and similarly, as the level of importance accorded to shaping an interest group's public image increases, so too is the number of social media platforms used expected to increase by a factor of 1.13. Figures 1 and 2 plot the marginal effects of our main independent variables on the predicted values
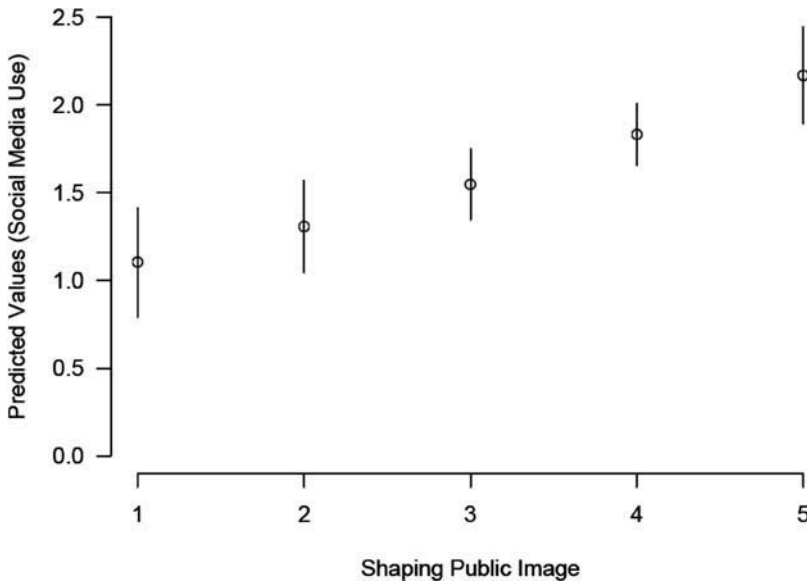
Figure 1. Predicted social media use and shaping a group's public image.

of the dependent variable measured as a count of the social media platforms used by interest groups. Both figures show a clear increase in the use of social media as both shaping the lobbying debate and groups shaping their public image also increase (while holding all other variables constant at their mean and binary variables constant at their mode). Figure 1 shows a significant increase from a predicted social media use value of about 1.1 to a value of 2.16 as shaping a group's public image moves from being "very unimportant" (=1) to being "very important" (=5). Similarly, in Figure 2, we see an increase from a predicted social media use value of about 1.16 to a value of 2.2 as shaping the lobbying debate moves from being "very unimportant" to being "very important."

Finally, self-reported social media use in different lobbying venues also appears to be associated with shaping the lobbying debate and (although to a somewhat lesser extent) groups shaping their public image. With a one-unit increase in the importance accorded to shaping the lobbying debate, the odds of using social media are between 2% and almost 4% higher in EU institutions, the general public, and news media venues. Groups stressing the importance of shaping their public image also seem to place more importance on the use of social media with the news media and the general public, but not with EU institutions. Importantly, this finding gives purchase to the idea that many organizations are media-savvy users of social media tools. Shaping a public image, after all, is well suited to news media and general public audiences, but less so to EU institutions where more direct forms of lobbying (like face-to-face meetings or lobbying reports) are more effective strategies. This finding levels an important challenge to a growing body of empirical research suggesting that the potential of social media remains largely unrealized (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Fine, 2007; Kenix, 2007). Indeed, comparing results across all models suggests that both adopting social media tools as well as their use in specific venues is part of groups' larger set of news media lobbying strategies.
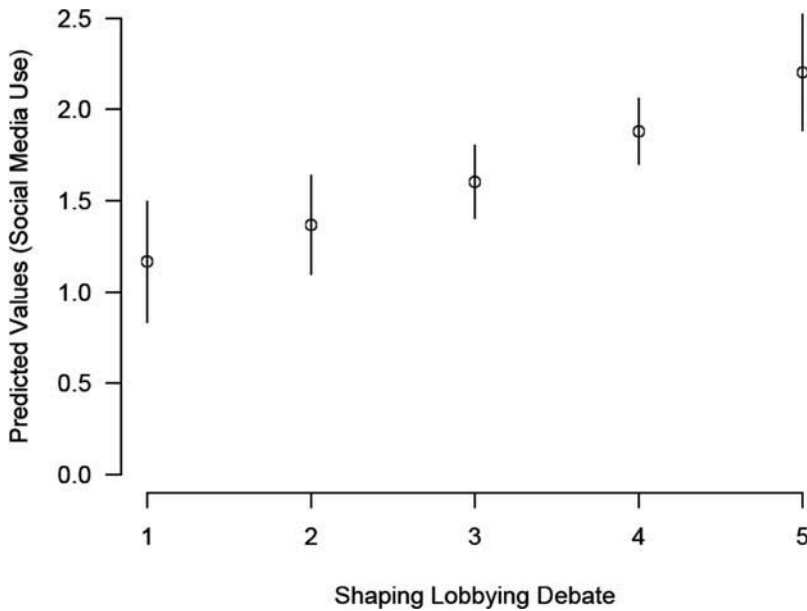
Figure 2. Predicted social media use and shaping the lobbying debate.

Conclusions

This analysis has shed light on the factors that explain the extent to which interest organizations use social media tools. While a growing literature suggests that social media are important advocacy tools for grassroots and social movements, interest organizations have only rarely been examined. The scant work that does exist presents contradictory findings about the effects of interest organization resources on social media use. Our analysis argues that such a resource-based approach can only tell us about an interest organization's potential capacity to use social media but says nothing about their motivation to do so. Understanding social media tools as part of an organization's larger repertoire of news media lobbying strategies, we argue that social media use is related to two factors: the importance organizations give to shaping the lobbying debate as well as to shaping their own public image.

Our empirical analysis, controlling for a series of alternative explanations, found considerable support for our central argument. In particular, regression results suggest that as organizations place more stress on shaping a lobbying debate and shaping their own public image and reputation they also tend to use a greater number of social media platforms. Importantly, this trend was found using different measures of social media use across different lobbying venues. On balance, these findings suggest that media-savvy groups have not only adopted these new technologies, but have also integrated them into their larger set of lobbying strategies. Importantly, our analysis found little support for the dominant resource-based explanation of social media use. Organizations' finances as well as resource-related considerations like saving costs showed no significant difference in our models. We also found that interest organization type (specific or diffuse), existing advocacy strategies, and the level at which interest groups tend to lobby have little bearing on the use of social media tools.

The support given to our theory in this analysis suggests a high likelihood for the generalizability of our results. In fact, the effects presented here can be expected to be stronger in other contexts, especially those with a well-defined and robust public sphere. Future research would necessarily need to bear out these expectations and would be well served by comparisons across different contexts, perhaps adding variation on the level of interest group intermediation. Our results for the level at which groups lobby already suggest a first finding with regard to intermediation. Unfortunately, these findings say little about variation with regard to forms of corporatism and pluralism in governmental interactions with interest organizations. Future research comparing different lobbying contexts could include these considerations.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed on the publisher's website at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2015.1043477.

Notes

1. We use a functionalist definition of interest organizations as any formally organized group that seeks to influence policy outcomes but which is not a policymaker (those who seek office or governmental bureaucrats). Importantly, this excludes broad social movements and waves of public opinion (see Beyers, Eising, & Maloney, 2008). For an in-depth examination of the question of defining and classifying interest organizations, see Baroni and colleagues (2014).

2. http://europa.eu/transparency-register/

3. Approximately 36% of survey respondents indicated using Facebook, 37% using Twitter, and 13% using LinkedIn. Other social media platforms are used only very infrequently: 4% for Blogger, 5% for WordPress, and 1.5% for Google+. Reddit, Tumbler, MySpace, Foursquare, and Wikia are all used by less than 1% of survey respondents.

4. We further tested the validity of self-reported social media use by creating a correlation matrix of our survey data with data collected on an individual group's use of Twitter (number of tweets and number of Twitter followers), Facebook (number of "likes"), and LinkedIn (number of followers). The results, presented in the supplemental material (Table A1), suggest only a very weak association between self-reported use and these other indicators. This weak association is a reflection of the fact that, for interest organizations using social media for advocacy purposes, social media use implies more than these few indicators can tell. For example, a single tweet might be part of a larger Twitter campaign involving considerable time and resources. Furthermore, using "tweets," Facebook "likes," and LinkedIn "followers" as a measure of social media use is confounded by the "interactive" nature of social media—the ability of all uses to create and share content. It is difficult to assess an individual interest group's use from these indicators. Survey data on self-reported use is, therefore, a useful tool in assessing social media use at the level of the individual interest group.

5. Specifically, ANOVA results for "shaping the debate" can be summarized as $F(11,315) = 0.66$, $p < 0.77$; the ANOVA results for "shaping public image" can be summarized as $F(11, 335) = 1.03$, $p < 0.42$.

6. While our data on staff do specify staff involved explicitly in lobbying activities, we do not have data on the number of staff dedicated to using social media for advocacy purposes. Future research could consider such staff as well as staff "specialized" in using social media.

7. A complete table of descriptive statistics for each indicator used in this analysis is available in the supplemental material (Table A2).

8. We also performed additional robustness checks to assess the structural validity of our models. This involved assessing how the core regression coefficient estimates behave when regression specifications are modified and by adding and removing regressors. It also involved including various interaction effects in our models. On balance, the results demonstrate considerable stability in

our main models. The results of these analyses are presented in the supplemental material (Tables A3–A8).

   9. Anonymous statement from survey respondent submitted in an open field question at the end of the survey.

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