Making news: Interest groups' social media activities as a channel to the public discourse? A case study of the 2019 EU copyright directive

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Previous research has shown that social media posts are often covered by the legacy media. This study applies this finding to the social media activities of interest groups and asks whether they generate coverage by the traditional media. Analysing German newspaper articles on the 2019 EU copyright directive, I argue that interest groups' social media activities trigger legacy media coverage, but that it is important to differentiate between individual and trending posts. While individual posts that do not go viral are rarely covered by the legacy media, trending posts often appear in the news media. The results also show, however, that interest groups generate more legacy media coverage through other activities than social media posts.

1. Introduction

Since the rise of social media platforms, the academic media literature has been interested in the influence of social media posts on the legacy media. It has detected that journalists increasingly report on social media activities. They often refer to posts that were shared extensively by individuals on social media platforms – so-called viral or trending posts (Mills, 2012, p. 165). In addition, they frequently mention standalone posts that do not go viral, which I refer to as individual posts hereafter (Broersma, Graham, 2013, p. 460).

This trend has important consequences for the political sphere. Political actors are often interested in strategically shaping the public debate to achieve their policy goals. The most important mean for doing this is still influencing the legacy media. It exerts a unique impact on the public discourse, acting as an agenda-setter who tells the public "what to think about" (McCombs, Shaw, 1972, p. 180f.; Cohen, 1963, p. 13). The notion that social media could be a new tool to make news is thus highly relevant for political actors. Previous research has shown that particularly the posts of politicians often trigger legacy media coverage (Broersma, Graham, 2016). For instance, an individual post of Ursula von der Leyen announcing a €15bn coronavirus support package was covered by many traditional journalists (see, for example, Chini, 2020). A viral post of

Barack Obama showing him hugging Michelle Obama after his election victory in 2012 triggered much legacy media coverage likewise (see, for example, Harding, 2012).

However, the literature has not yet examined the newsmaking potential of interest groups' social media activities effectively even though interest groups often aim at influencing the traditional media. Legacy media coverage helps them, for instance, to be seen by politicians and direct their attention towards an issue (Powers, 2016, p. 491). Thus, this study aims at addressing this gap in the lobbying literature by asking: Do interest groups' social media posts generate coverage by the traditional media in Germany? The answer to this question also adds to the media literature on the journalistic usage of social media posts. It shows whether the finding that social media posts trigger legacy media coverage also applies to a greater variety of actors, namely interest groups. For interest groups seeking traditional media coverage, the findings indicate whether social media could be a new tool to achieve this goal.

I argue that the social media activities of interest groups trigger legacy media coverage, but that it is important to differentiate between individual and trending posts in an interest group context. Analysing the German media coverage of the 2019 EU copyright directive, I find that interest groups' individual posts that do not go viral are rarely covered by the legacy media, while their trending posts receive a high level of attention from the traditional media. Drawing on the journalistic gatekeeping theory, I suggest that this finding can be explained by differences in the newsworthiness of both types of posts (Tresch, Fischer, 2015, p. 359f.). Individual posts are usually not newsworthy for journalists, which could be caused by the tendency of interest groups to use social media to inform and interact with supporters (Lovejoy, Saxton, 2012, p. 348). Trending posts on social media, by contrast, indicate that the post reflects not only the interest group's but also the public's opinion, since virality can emerge only through involving a high number of social media users (Kollman, 1998, p. 8f.; Mills, 2012, p. 163). This raises the societal relevance and newsworthiness of the trending posts significantly, which ultimately results in more legacy media coverage. However, my findings also show that interest groups' social media posts are generally less covered than other activities of interest groups. Given the rising importance of social media for reporting, I argue that social media posts could become more relevant for

interest groups to shape the debate in the traditional media in the future (Broersma, Graham, 2016).

I proceed as follows. In the literature review, I illustrate the media scholars' findings and demonstrate that they have not yet been applied effectively to interest groups. Subsequently, I derive the hypothesis that interest groups' social media activities get covered by the legacy media from the journalistic gatekeeping theory. I continue by introducing the 2019 EU copyright directive and showing that it is an ideal case to study the newsmaking potential of interest groups' social media activities. Thereafter, I explain the design and limitations of my methodology, a content analysis of news items. Finally, I reveal my findings and discuss their potential, underlying reasons. I conclude by pointing to the implications of my research for the academic literature and interest groups.

2. Literature review

Over the past years, media scholars have found that social media activities can trigger legacy media coverage (Broersma and Graham, 2013, p. 460; Sayre et al., 2010, p. 23f.). Despite the importance of media coverage for interest groups, these findings have not yet been integrated effectively into the lobbying literature. Addressing this gap, this study applies the media scholars' findings to interest groups and examines whether and in which way their social media activities generate traditional media coverage (Eckstein, 1973, p. 147f.).

The rise of social media has changed not only the media landscape but also the working routines of journalists profoundly (Klinger, Svensson, 2015, p. 1245; Weaver and Willnat, 2016, p. 851). It has become common for journalists to incorporate social media into their daily work (Broersma, Graham, 2016). For instance, Weaver and Willnat (2016, p. 851) find that the majority of journalists use social media to monitor other news outlets and do additional research on their stories. Interestingly, many scholars also note that journalists often report on social media activities, implying that social media posts are able to influence the legacy media agenda (Weaver, Willnat, 2016; Metag, Rauchfleisch, 2017; Parmelee, 2014). Generally, two ways in which social media activities trigger legacy media coverage have been identified. Firstly,

Broersma and Graham (2013, p. 460) find that journalists report on individual posts, which often applies to posts of politicians. Secondly, many scholars observe that journalists report on issues that are trending on social media platforms. For instance, Sayre et al. (2010, p. 10, 18f., 23f.), who study the debate on banning same-sex marriage in California in 2008, demonstrate that the opponents increased the attention for the issue on social media using hundreds of YouTube videos, which caught the attention of professional journalists who started to cover the topic.

Despite the relevance of legacy media coverage for interest groups, the lobbying literature has not yet applied the media scholars' findings effectively to interest groups. Even though scholars in this field are naturally concerned with media coverage of interest groups, they tend to investigate whether and which interest groups appear in the news rather than how interest groups generate legacy media coverage. While they agree in principle that interest groups are used as sources by journalists, most of the debate focuses on which groups have a privileged access to the legacy media (Cooper et al., 2007, p. 46). For instance, while Thrall (2006, p. 412) states that media coverage depends on a group's resources, Binderkrantz (2012, p. 130) suggests that the group type as well as the policy area play a major role. De Bruycker and Beyers (2015, p. 465) disagree with both findings and argue that interest groups gain more media coverage if they oppose a policy proposal.

What all these studies have in common is that they do not examine how the interest groups actually generated the legacy media coverage. Studies investigating the channels through which interest groups make news are rare (Tresch, Fischer, 2015, p. 356). A few studies find that instruments like position papers or press releases containing relevant information on legislative proposals are the most promising tools for interest groups to generate media coverage (Kim, McCluskey, 2015, p. 794, 800; Tresch, Fischer, 2015, p. 357, 365f.). Crucially, most of these studies do not consider the possibility that the interest groups' social media activities could also trigger media coverage (Chalmers, Shotton, 2016, p. 377). This is due to the fact that the lobbying literature attributes a different strategic value to social media usage: It comprehends social media primarily as a tool used for informing, interacting and mobilising supporters (Lovejoy, Saxton, 2012, p. 348; Guo, Saxton, 2014, p. 70; Figenschou, Fredheim, 2020, p. 4f.). The newsmaking potential of social media activities, as

indicated by the media literature, is not recognised in the lobbying literature, resulting in a limited number of studies looking at the relationship between interest groups' social media activities and their legacy media coverage (Eyal, 2016, p. 120).

There are a few studies that consider the newsmaking potential of interest groups' social media posts. Chalmers and Shotton (2016, p. 378, 385f.) conduct a survey of interest groups in the EU and find that they employ social media to influence the discourse in the legacy media. However, since they do not analyse newspaper articles, their findings reveal only that interest groups *intend* to use social media to make news but they do not show whether interest groups actually *achieve* this goal (ibid, p. 375). Eyal (2016, p. 126), by contrast, investigates the actual media coverage of interest groups. She explains it using an aggregated variable of an interest group's social media usage and other factors indicating digital skills (ibid, p. 123). Even though she finds a positive correlation between both variables, the aggregate nature of the independent variable inhibits isolating the effect that only social media had on the legacy media coverage (ibid, p. 129). Vesa et al. (2020, p. 8f.), on the other hand, provide a study that allows to isolate the impact of social media. They link an interest group's social media usage to its appearances in the news using a regression (ibid). Yet, the general design of the dependent variable does not allow the authors to test the media scholars' findings effectively, as it does not distinguish between the two ways in which social media activities may trigger legacy media coverage. The same applies to the study of Thrall et al. (2014, p. 142), who compare the topics interest groups tweeted about with the groups' appearances in news items covering these issues.

There are two studies that investigate both ways separately. Broersma and Graham (2013, p. 450) generally examine only the inclusion of *individual* social media posts in news items. Their analysis of the referenced posts' origins reveals that single posts of interest groups are rarely included in news items (ibid, p. 458). However, it is reasonable to assume that their findings may underestimate the newsmaking potential of interest groups' social media posts. They gathered their sample of newspaper articles by focusing on a certain time period (ibid, p. 450). However, since most of the legislative dossiers are not salient in the news media, it is likely that there was no extensive discussion of a legislative proposal in this time period (De Bruycker, Beyers,

2015, p. 461). This could lead to an underrepresentation of interest groups in their sample, because interest groups tend to seek media coverage and get covered mostly when legislative dossiers are prominently discussed in the media (Junk, 2016, p. 247). As a result, the generally low number of interest groups in the news biases any investigation of the newsmaking potential of interest groups' social media activities.

Bal et al. (2013) show that the social media activities of interest groups can become trending topics on social networks that are covered by journalists. They illustrate the case of "Kony 2012" – a video published by the humanitarian non-governmental organisation (NGO) "Invisible Children" that addressed the war crimes of the Ugandan rebel group leader Joseph Kony (ibid, p. 202, 204). This video spread rapidly across social media platforms, reaching 112 million views in just one week (ibid, p. 202). Due to the high attention for the topic on social media, journalists started to cover the issue (ibid, p. 205). However, these findings were arguably retrieved in exceptional circumstances and it is not clear whether they are generalisable to the usual work of all interest groups.

Clearly, the media scholars' findings have not yet been integrated effectively into the lobbying literature. It has not been established whether and in which way interest groups' social media activities actually influence the legacy media agenda. This study aims at addressing this gap in the lobbying literature by asking: Do interest groups' social media posts generate coverage by the traditional media in Germany? The study answers this question employing the German newspaper coverage of the highly salient 2019 EU copyright directive as a case study. Using this methodology allows to differentiate between the two ways in which social media activities potentially trigger legacy media coverage. Thus, the study is able to examine whether the media scholars' findings apply to an interest group context (Eckstein, 1973, p. 147f.). While it is also interesting to study the subsequent impact of media coverage on policy outcomes, this study's focus is only on the legacy media coverage.

3. Theoretical framework

Investigating legacy media coverage is always associated with understanding the decisions of journalists. They act as gatekeepers to the mass media agenda, gathering

information, selecting sources and producing as well as distributing news items (Shoemaker, Riccio, 2016, p. 1). Journalists have the ability to determine which actors and information become news in the mass media, giving them a unique influence over the public discourse (Singer, 2014, p. 56).

With the rise of Web 2.0 technologies like social media, this power monopoly has come under attack (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008, p. 1506). Web 2.0 technologies allow users to participate in the content creation on the Internet (Mills, 2012, p. 163). For example, social media platforms enable users to create and share content and interact with each other (Obar, Wildman, 2015). This empowerment allows users to establish an alternative media agenda promoting issues independently from the mass media (Neuman et al., 2014, p. 210). Through endorsing or sharing content, every individual can promote the popularity of another post (Bruns, 2003, p. 34). These individual decisions are aggregated by algorithms highlighting trending posts among users, which reinforces the reach of popular posts (Figenschou, Fredheim, 2020, p. 6). Thus, social media platforms offer users the opportunity to create attention for an issue among many people, setting an alternative agenda to the legacy media agenda (Meraz, Papacharissi, 2013, p. 159f.; Neuman et al., 2014, p. 210).

This study is aimed at the intersection of these two media agendas – it investigates how social media content produced by interest groups possibly passes the legacy media gatekeepers and makes news (Klinger, Svensson, 2015, p. 1251). Traditional journalists tend to apply two principles to decide whether they cover a piece of information (Tresch, Fischer, 2015, p. 359f.). Firstly, they prefer information that fits with their news routine (ibid). The high economic pressure for many newspapers forces journalists to produce an increasing number of news items (Lewis et al., 2008, p. 36). This incentivises them to favour convenient information that can be easily integrated into a news item (Shoemaker, Reese, 1996, p. 125). For instance, they tend to include easily accessible and reliable information from official sources, as this type of information does not require much additional research (ibid). Secondly, journalists prefer information that provides a news value (Tresch, Fischer, 2015, p. 359f.). This means that the information has to be newsworthy (ibid). When choosing information, journalists apply certain criteria to measure the content's newsworthiness (Shoemaker et al., 2001, p. 240). Over the past decades, a vast literature has developed that

focuses on identifying these criteria, which include, for instance, the exclusivity or the controversial nature of a piece of information (see, for example, Galtung, Ruge, 1965; Harcup, O'Neill, 2017).

The social media activities of interest groups – the written, visual, auditory or audiovisual statements on social media platforms – have to fulfil these two principles to generate legacy media coverage. Such activities are generally able to meet the journalists' news routines. Social media posts are a cost-efficient and always available tool to gather information (Moon, Hadley, 2014, p. 291-293). For journalists, particularly the posts of interest groups represent a convenient way to obtain reliable information from official sources (Moon, Hadley, 2014, p. 299f., 302; Thrall, 2006, p. 409).

In addition to meeting the journalists' news routines, social media activities can also provide news value (Vesa et al., 2020, p. 5). It is possible that individual posts contain newsworthy information, for instance an actor's immediate reaction to an event, insider knowledge or breaking news (Broersma, Graham, 2013, p. 460; Parmelee, 2014, p. 441, 445). This makes a single post inherently newsworthy (Broersma, Graham, 2013, p. 460). It is likely that this applies to the posts of interest groups, as interest groups have always possessed the status of an elite source whose statements on events, for example legislative proceedings, represent newsworthy information for journalists (Thrall, 2006, p. 409). As for politicians, social media posts just represent a new channel for interest groups to spread these statements and reach journalists. Thus, based on this theory, I hypothesise that individual posts of interest groups are covered by the legacy media.

Additionally, journalists also monitor the user-generated social media agenda to identify emerging stories and capture the public's interests as well as opinion (Tandoc Jr., Vos, 2016, p. 956f., Singer, 2010, p. 136; Kreiss, 2016, p. 1485). This information is newsworthy for them, as it fits with their readers' interests and gives a voice to the people. For interest groups, this means that their social media activities can get covered by the legacy media if they become a trending topic on the social media agenda (Vesa et al., 2020, p. 5). In other words, their posts have to go viral – meaning that the posts have to trigger a "self-propelled" and "exponential" spread of the information through the network through extensive sharing by the users (Mills, 2012,

p. 163). The notion of virality has been investigated thoroughly by the marketing literature, resulting in many factors potentially influencing the emergence of a viral process (Bal et al., 2013, p. 203). Mills (2012) conceptualised these findings in a framework highlighting four dimensions that are crucial to create a viral process. First, the content has to motivate the recipients to become senders and share it with others (ibid, p. 166). Second, the motivated users have to be able to share the content easily and quickly to a large audience (ibid, p. 167). Third, the content has to be promoted on all relevant social media platforms simultaneously, adjusted for the needs of every platform (ibid, p. 167f.). Fourth, the content has to be supplemented with follow-up information (ibid, p. 168). This framework illustrates the strategic effort an actor has to make to create a viral process and increase the attention for a topic. Given the resources and time needed for this endeavour, it is not surprising that most posts on social media do not go viral (ibid, p. 163). However, this could be an advantage for interest groups. Interest groups are organised institutions that represent a community of members who share the same opinion, for instance on policies (Lelieveldt, Princen, 2015, p. 129). These groups often possess an elite status and have significant resources at their disposal, which allow them to provide the strategic effort needed for a viral campaign (Thrall et al., 2014, p. 139f.). Indeed, previous research shows that organised actors are responsible for most of the viral content on social media platforms (Edgerly et al., 2016, p. 117, 119). Thus, based on this theory, I hypothesise that trending social media posts of interest groups are covered by the legacy media.

4. The 2019 EU copyright directive

I intend to test these hypotheses using the 2019 EU copyright directive as a case study. This legislative proposal was intended to adapt the copyright rules of the time to the digital age (Wenzel, 2016). The previous rules were established in 2001, at a time in which social media networks had not yet been invented (European Commission, 2019b). However, the rise of these platforms has dramatically changed the requirements for copyright laws. The platforms provide an infrastructure that allows users to share copyright-protected content at a large scale (ibid). According to the previous rules, the platforms were not liable for copyright violations, they just had to remove the content if the right holders demanded them to do so (Lill, 2019). In addition, many platforms and other Internet services themselves distributed copyright-protected

content. A good example is Google News, a news aggregator that compiles news items produced by others (Wenzel, 2016). While Google and other platforms were highly successful at selling advertisements on their platforms, they refused to pay for the copyright-protected content (ibid). This led to a significant discrepancy between the right holders' and the platforms' earnings – the so-called "value gap" – which often posed an existential threat to the right holders (European Commission, 2019b). The goal that the European Commission (EC) had in mind when it proposed the copyright directive in 2016 was to address this problem and ensure that right holders are able to survive in the digital age (Kirchner, 2018). It should allow them to participate in the platforms' earnings (European Commission, 2019a).

At the beginning, it seemed like most actors agreed with protecting right holders and the EC published a number of measures to support them (Heuzeroth, 2018; Kirchner, 2018). Two of those measures mentioned in Article 11 (later 15) and 13 (later 17), however, triggered a massive controversy as the proposal proceeded through the European Parliament (EP) and the Council of the European Union (Council) (Heuzeroth, 2018).

The former forced tech platforms to negotiate licenses for journalistic content that they present on news aggregators (ibid). This led to significant opposition by companies like Google, Facebook or Wikipedia that use copyright-protected content on their platforms. They pointed to similar regulations in the past, which were unsuccessful and harmed both the platforms and the media companies (Wenzel, 2016; Beuth, 2017). A licensing obligation would, in their view, just result in a lower news diversity on the Internet, as platforms would license content only from high-circulating newspapers attracting many readers (Fischer, 2018). The publishers, on the other side, argued that a European directive would provide them with the necessary bargaining power to negotiate a fair compensation for their content with the tech giants (Grabitz, 2018).

However, the much larger controversy was caused by Article 13. This passage was aimed at regulating the usage of copyright-protected content on social media platforms. It required social media platforms to negotiate licenses with right holders for any copyright-protected content that their users may upload to the platform (European

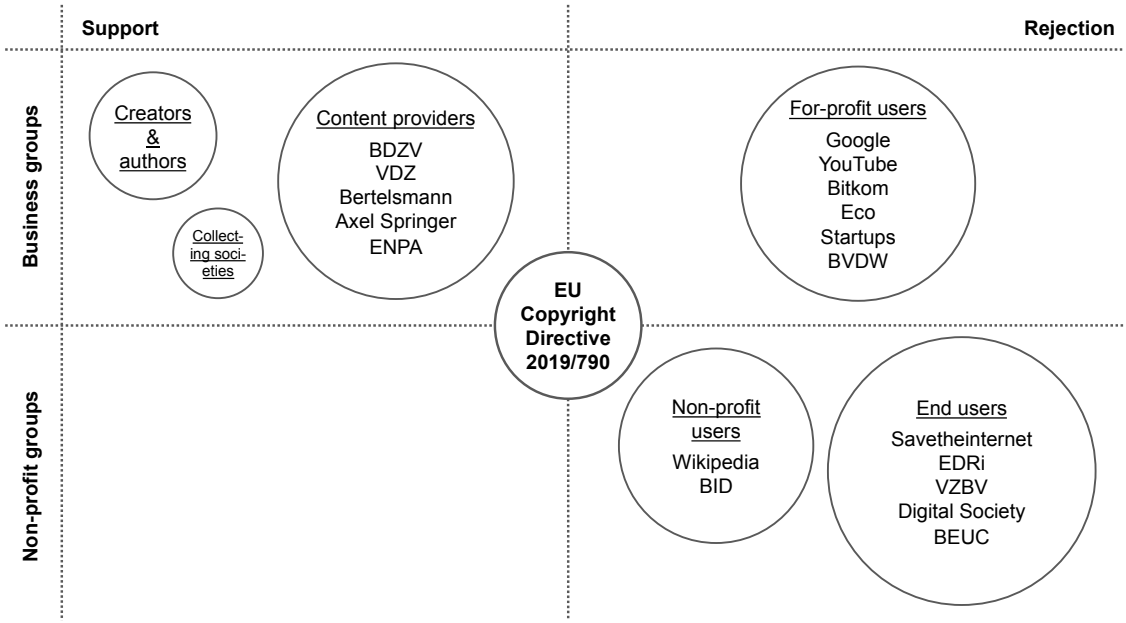

Figure 1: Categorisation of selected interest groups *(Günnewig, 2003)*

Commission, 2019b). In addition, the platforms have to make their best effort to avoid that any non-licensed content is published on the network (ibid). This demand triggered massive opposition by the consumers of social media as they got organised into groups like Savetheinternet.info. Their fear was that the platforms are not able to agree on licenses with every right holder around the world, which could force the platforms to apply filtering software to avoid any liability for copyright violations (Hurtz, 2019). Such software automatically checks every upload for copyright infringements (Schwartmann, 2019). Based on the experience with an already existing filtering system on YouTube, the social media users argued that these filters often delete legitimate content like parodies (Hurtz, 2019; Knipper, 2018). Combined with the notion that the social media platforms would probably filter extensively to avoid copyright violations, the opponents concluded that the copyright directive was as a “censorship machine” introducing “upload filters” that restrict the freedom of speech and expression on the Internet (Beisel, 2019). The supporters of the reform argued that these fears were clearly exaggerated, as the proposal does not even mention the usage of filtering software (European Commission, 2019b). They emphasised that the directive was aimed at commercial users of copyright-protected content and that the consumers even benefit from the reform, as the responsibility for copyright violations is moved to the platforms (ibid).

Clearly, the positions of the different interest groups were conflicting. Figure 1 illustrates the different categories of interest groups lobbying on the reform (Günnewig, 2003, p. 533). It classifies them using two binary variables – the interest groups' attitude towards the reform and their group type. In addition, the circles are drawn to scale using the number of mentions of each interest group category in the German media coverage of the reform to indicate the relevance of each interest group category in the public debate.[1] The figure shows that the initial fight between the politically powerful content providers and the resource-rich commercial users of copyright-protected content turned into a broader societal debate, as the end users were highly present in the news.

The controversy also attracted the Germany legacy media: It reported extensively on the copyright directive, with media coverage culminating towards the adoption of the reform by the EP in March 2019 (see figures 2 and 3). As indicated by the Google search queries in figure 3, this peak in attention was mirrored in the online sphere, resulting in a high offline as well as online salience of the copyright directive.[2] Interest groups were active in both spheres: They made their voices heard using traditional techniques like large-scale protests but also more modern approaches like social media tools (Grabitz, 2019). Of the 79 different interest groups covered by the German legacy media, 37 used official Twitter accounts to discuss the copyright directive publicly.[3] More importantly, among the top ten interest groups accounting for more than 60% of all interest group appearances in the news media, eight used Twitter to lobby on the copyright directive.

The high salience of the EU copyright directive in Germany and the wide-spread usage of social media among interest groups make the German news coverage of the reform an ideal opportunity to investigate the newsmaking potential of interest groups' social media posts. The extensive discussion of the reform in the German news media probably incentivised not only interest groups to seek media coverage but also journalists to cover them (Junk, 2016, p. 247). As interest groups expressed their

[1] The data on the legacy media coverage was retrieved from this dissertation's content analysis. For further exploration see chapters five and six.
[2] Google accounts for more than 90% of all online search queries in Germany, making it a good estimator of the general activities on the Internet (StatCounter, 2019).
[3] The data on the Twitter usage was gathered by searching for Twitter posts from interest groups that mentioned a keyword relating to the copyright directive. For further exploration see appendix 2.

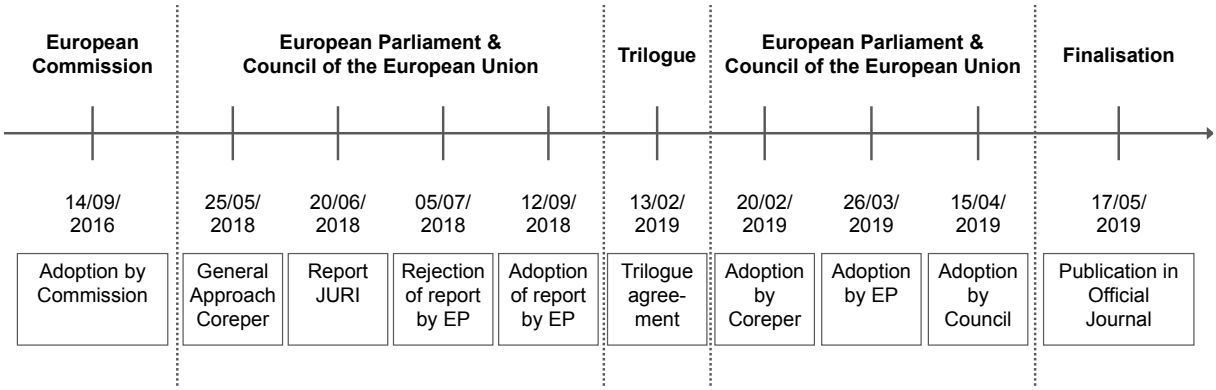

Figure 2: Overview of the legislative process 2016/0280 (COD) *(EUR-lex, no date; Legislative Observatory, no date)*

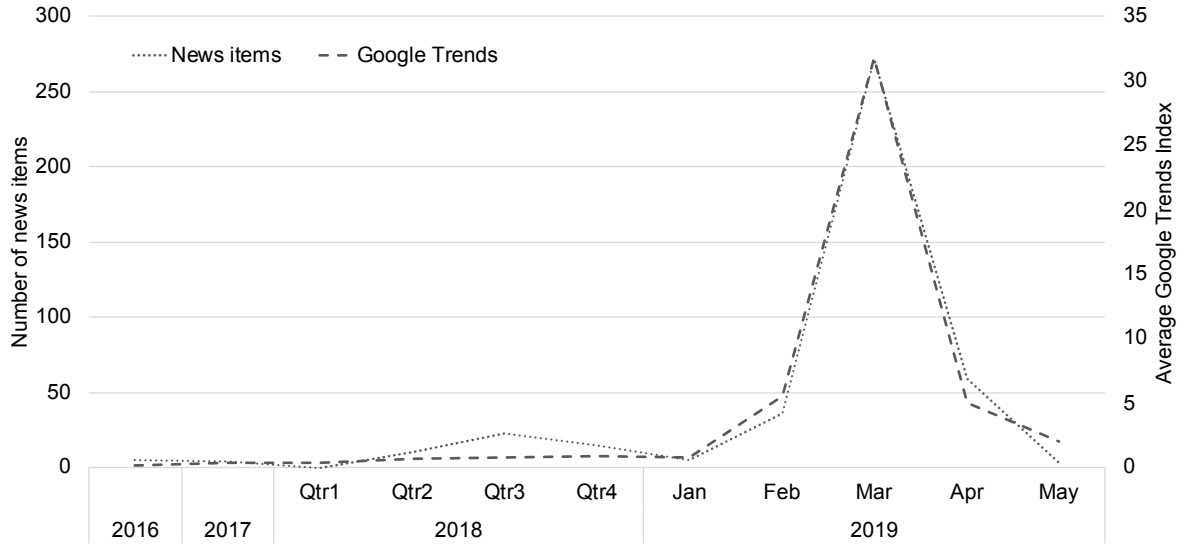

Figure 3: Number of news items and average Google Trends index
(own research, key word "Urheberrechtsreform", area "Germany", date range "14/09/2016 - 17/05/2019")

opinion and commented on legislative proceedings on social media, it is likely that journalists viewed their individual posts as newsworthy and included them in news items. Interestingly, 62% of the interest groups using social media opposed the copyright directive. Combined with the fact that the sentiment on social media platforms was also against the reform, this makes it likely that particularly opposing groups were able to generate viral processes that were covered by the legacy media (Hunke, 2019). Thus, the copyright directive represents a case study for which it is likely to observe both of my hypotheses (Levy, 2008, p. 12). Additionally, the media coverage of the reform has not yet been investigated, making this the first study to do so.

Case studies are often associated with a limited external validity (Halperin, Heath, 2017, p. 154). With regard to this study, however, a differentiated approach to this

concern is required. Since the copyright directive makes it very likely to observe positive findings for both of my hypotheses, a negative finding can arguably be generalised (Levy, 2008, p. 12). If I do not find references to interest groups' social media activities in this case, it is unlikely that this will happen in other cases (ibid). However, if I find evidence confirming my hypotheses, it is disputable whether these findings also apply to other legislative proposals that are, for instance, less salient in the news media (ibid). The focus on Germany certainly reduces the external validity of my findings in any scenario, as national differences in the coverage of social media activities across countries inhibits drawing conclusions for other areas (Broersma, Graham, 2013, p. 460). However, the lacking European sphere prevented studying the research question on a European level (Chalmers, Shotton, 2016, p. 375).

5. Methodology

As I am primarily concerned with legacy media coverage, I ground this study on a quantitative content analysis of newspaper articles (Halperin, Heath, 2017, p. 336). This allows me to identify references to individual and trending social media posts in the news media unambiguously. However, a content analysis investigates only the final result of the journalistic gatekeeping process – the newspaper article (Metag, Rauchfleisch, 2017, p. 1158). It is not able to examine any influence of social media on the legacy media beyond the direct mentioning of social media activities in a news item (ibid). For instance, if journalists see a post that links further resources like press releases or position papers, they probably cite only the supplementary material instead of the post itself (Parmelee, 2014, p. 444). A content analysis could not reveal this influence of the social media post on the legacy media. The scope of this study, however, prevents conducting further research like interviews that could address this problem.

Additionally, a quantitative content analysis does not capture the highly qualitative process by which interest groups create a viral post that is covered by the legacy media (Lieberman, 2005, p. 440). Investigating this process is, however, relevant to derive implications for interest groups employing social media to generate legacy media coverage. It also allows to identify factors that may have contributed to the interest group's ability to create a viral process, which is crucial for determining the

generalisability of the results. Thus, I complement the content analysis with a case study of a viral post that was covered by the legacy media (ibid). The case is selected based on the results of the content analysis and investigated using Mills' (2012) framework that allows to identify a chain of mechanisms explaining the emergence and news coverage of a viral post (Lieberman, 2005, p. 436; Halperin, Heath, 2017, p. 247f.). Accounting for the fact that virality is a dynamic process that is influenced by many factors, I also apply findings from other studies investigating viral processes (Mills, 2012, p. 165f.).

5.1 Data collection

I gathered the news items for the content analysis using the database *Factiva*. I searched for all newspaper articles published in Germany that contained the German translation of "copyright directive" ("Urheberrechtsreform"). The search term was relatively broad to capture all news items on the topic. However, this made it necessary to manually exclude news items that primarily dealt with different issues. I selected the full legislative process shown in figure 2 as the relevant time frame. Even though I excluded identical texts in the search query, I removed any further duplicates manually when reading the news items. Additionally, I eliminated newspaper articles published in a German-speaking country other than Germany. This approach yielded 431 relevant news items.

5.2 Data analysis

Many content analyses investigate only a representative sample of the total population of newspaper articles (Halperin, Heath, 2017, p. 347). However, I examined all 431 news items, as this approach accounts for the possibility that the references to interest groups' social media activities may be limited. It ensures that the mentions are not missed in this case.

The first question when coding these 431 news items manually was whether they mentioned an interest group (ibid, p. 350). I considered every interest group that matches with the respective definition provided in the theoretical section. Importantly, this does not include references to whole industries. I also considered only references that referred to an interest group's statement or attitude towards the copyright directive.

The reform naturally concerned social media platforms and many journalists mentioned these groups only to illustrate the content of the directive. This type of references, however, is not relevant for my study, as I am interested in mentions that are caused by a specific activity of an interest group.

If a newspaper article referred to an interest group, I analysed the channel through which it was cited. I did not determine any potential categories for this variable in advance, but gathered them when reading the news items (Guo, Saxton, 2014, p. 62). Regarding social media activities as a potential channel, I recognised all social media platforms and posts that coincide with the respective definitions provided in the theoretical part. This includes literally quoted but also paraphrased posts. It is crucial, however, that a social media platform was clearly stated as the source in the news item, since this avoids any potential ambiguity.

In order to provide an effective answer to my research question, I differentiated between references to individual and trending posts of interest groups. Additionally, I determined whether the interest groups' social media activities triggered a news item or whether they were just used for illustrative purposes, for instance to provide a different perspective on an issue (Broersma, Graham, 2013, p. 450f.). Both information helped to examine which social media activities of interest groups actually triggered legacy media coverage. I collected the same data for politicians for comparative purposes.

As this study represents another case of interest groups in the news, I also reported on two other variables that add to the general literature on this topic. Firstly, I identified the type of interest groups mentioned in the news using the categories provided by the EU Transparency Register (Chalmers, Shotton, 2016, p. 379). Secondly, I documented whether the interest groups supported or rejected the copyright directive.[4]

6. Results & Analysis

The analysis of the news items revealed that interest groups were highly present in the legacy media coverage of the copyright reform. More than half of all news items

[4] Appendix 1 contains the Excel spreadsheet used to conduct the content analysis.

mentioned at least one interest group, resulting in a total number 348 references to 79 different interest groups in the whole coverage. As suggested by previous research, groups opposing the reform received significantly more coverage than groups supporting it (De Bruycker, Beyer, 2015, p. 465). This reflects that the negative public opinion towards the reform probably attracted more opposing interest groups to seek media coverage (ibid, p. 458f.). Interestingly, the news items were still equally distributed between business and non-profit groups, as the high number of references to opposing NGOs offset the references to the business-dominated supporting side. The media coverage, however, concentrated on a few, highly visible interest groups. As indicated by figure 4, the five most covered interest groups, which include opposing NGOs as well as business groups from both sides, accounted for almost half of all coverage. The ten most covered interest groups generated almost two thirds of all references to interest groups. These findings are in line with previous research that also found a heavily skewed concentration of media coverage on a few actors (Thrall, 2006, p. 417f.).

Turning to my research question, I found 15 mentions of interest groups' social media activities in the legacy media coverage. This generally confirms the idea that the social media posts of interest groups are used as a source by journalists (Parmelee, 2014, p. 441). However, it is important to differentiate between the coverage of individual and trending posts. Of the 15 references, 40% were caused by individual posts, while 60% were provoked by trending posts.

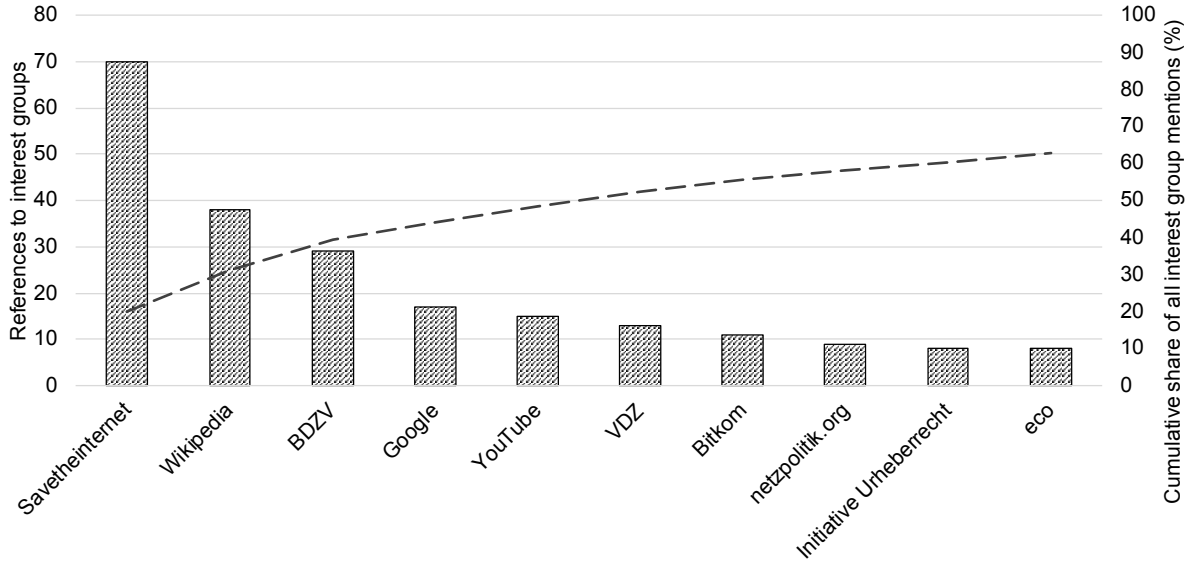

Figure 4: Ten most mentioned interest groups *(own research)*

6.1 Individual social media posts

The individual posts that triggered news media coverage always contained breaking news. For instance, two news items reported on a post of a German Wikipedia administrator that first announced the temporary shutdown of Wikipedia as a protest against the copyright directive. In another example, a newspaper article referred to a post of the group Savetheinternet.info that informed about spontaneous protests against the reform after it had passed the EP in March 2019. Both posts were newsworthy, as they provided novel information about significant opposition to a controversial topic that involved the politically powerful elite (Harcup, O'Neill, 2017, p. 1482; Weaver, Willnat, 2016, p. 850f.).

In addition to the posts triggering a news item, some individual posts were used to illustrate a story. For example, when the Council of the EU seemed to agree on a compromise in February 2019, the German Startups Association tweeted a response criticising the agreement. This tweet was the group's only immediate response to the ongoing events at the time, and thus, it was featured in a newspaper article reporting on the compromise and presenting reactions of different interest groups (Fischer, 2019). In line with previous research, this shows that journalists use social media posts to get a different perspective on an issue (Parmelee, 2014, p. 441).

However, a total number of six references to individual social media posts of interest groups, of which only four triggered a news item, seems to be relatively low given the extensive social media usage of interest groups in this case. By contrast, the tweets of politicians were cited 37 times, making them the second most important channel into the news for politicians.[5] This indicates that the individual posts of interest groups rarely trigger legacy media coverage – a surprising finding. The generally high coverage of interest groups in this case demonstrates that traditional journalists were interested in what interest groups had to say. In addition, while channels offering more in-depth information like press releases or position papers were among the least important means for interest groups to generate legacy media coverage, short statements to newspapers were among the most popular ones. This contradicts previous research which explained the media coverage of interest groups by pointing to their ability to

[5] Excluding unspecific references.

produce informative and detailed material (Kim, McCluskey, 2015, p. 794, 800; Tresch, Fischer, 2015, p. 357, 365f.). My findings demonstrate the opposite: journalists are indeed interested in short statements of interest groups – something that a social media post can definitely deliver. Thus, it is surprising that they were not covered.

A possible explanation relates to the content of the interest groups' social media posts. The gatekeeping theory states that a piece of information has to be newsworthy to be covered by journalists (Tresch, Fischer, 2015, p. 359f.). If an individual post does not contain information that journalists perceive as newsworthy, it is usually not covered. So far, I have assumed that the posts of interest groups are primarily aimed at influencing the legacy media debate (Chalmers, Shotton, 2016, p. 385f.). My findings could indicate that the alternative view – that interest groups use social media for mobilising supporters – may be true (Lovejoy, Saxton, 2012, p. 348). This view states that interest groups employ social media to inform and interact with potential supporters (ibid). However, discussions of interest groups with other users, for instance, are usually not newsworthy for journalists, which means that the legacy media does not cover the majority of the interest groups' social media activities. They would only cover individual posts in exceptional cases in which the posts are newsworthy, for instance if they announce a protest. However, even though the literature on interest groups' social media usage allows to draw this conclusion, further research investigating social media posts is required to underscore the statement's validity in the context of the copyright directive.

6.2 Trending social media posts

The majority of interest groups' posts triggering legacy media coverage were posts that went viral. There were nine references to such posts in total, of which five triggered a news item. Interestingly, all references can be attributed to the same viral post, which is investigated in detail in the following section.

On October 22, 2018, the YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki published a post addressed at all content creators on YouTube (Wojcicki, 2018a). This post was intended to inform the YouTube community about the consequences of Article 13 of the copyright reform. She argues that the goal of Article 13 – making social media platforms liable for

copyright violations – may destroy YouTube and change the Internet drastically (ibid). In her view, the reform would force YouTube to delete existing content and prevent uploads from individuals in the future to avoid that copyright-protected content is circulating on the website (ibid). YouTube, she claims, would only allow uploads from large media corporations that license their content appropriately in the future (ibid). This reasoning goes even further than the danger of censorship on the Internet through filtering software and argues that the reform would turn YouTube into a unidirectional media platform like the legacy media. Emphasising that this would particularly threaten content creators who earn their living on the platform, she directly addresses them and asks them to take action against the reform (ibid). They should use their reach to inform as many people as possible about the consequences of the copyright directive (ibid).

The content creators followed Wojcicki's recommendation, spread the information to their followers and created a remarkable aggregation of videos addressing the topic. Several content creators with millions of followers published videos with titles like "Why YouTube will no longer exist next year", "My channel will be deleted" or "YouTube will die" (LeFloid, 2018; LUCA, 2018; Jarow, 2018). Within days, these videos received millions or hundreds of thousands of views and dominated the trending topics on YouTube (Wissenswert, 2018; MrWissen2go, 2018).[6]

As in the Kony 2012 example, the virality in the YouTube case was a strategic effort of the interest group rather than a coincidental event (Bal et al., 2013, p. 207). This can be revealed by applying Mills' (2012) virality framework to the case. Mills (2012, p. 166f.) first mentions the need to turn the post's recipients into senders, which requires that the recipients pay attention to the information and are motivated to share it. YouTube truly excelled in this dimension. Wojcicki's framing of the reform was a convincing narrative for the YouTube community. It clearly revealed the direct negative impact of the reform on YouTube users and avoided the technical discussion on licensing and filtering software (Dür, Mateo, 2014, p. 1206f.). This made a relatively complex, European legislative issue accessible to the broad public (ibid). More importantly, the threat that YouTube may be destroyed evoked strong anxiety in the YouTube community, as demonstrated by the headlines stated above. Previous

[6] The followers and views at the time of the publication of the videos were retrieved using the web archive https://web.archive.org.

research indicates that if a post triggers an emotion like anxiety, it motivates recipients not only to pay attention to the content but also to take action against the imminent danger (Berger, Milkman, 2010, p. 15f.; Berger, Milkman, 2012, p. 201). In this case, the initial audience, the content creators, were captured by the anxiety evoked through the post and took action by spreading the information. The impression that eliminating the danger seemed like a realistic goal – it could be achieved by a simple vote in the EP – further motivated them to fight against the proposal (Dür, Mateo, 2014, p. 1206f.).

It is reasonable to assume that the involvement of influential content creators was the key for the emergence of the viral process and the following legacy media coverage (Van Dijck, Poell, 2013, p. 7). They increased what Mills (2012, p. 167) calls propagativity – the ease with which content is disseminated through a social network (Bal et al., 2013, p. 206f.). Even though some studies have questioned the importance of influential users in spreading a piece of information on a platform, this case is a remarkable example of the success of such a strategy (Watts, Peretti, 2007). YouTube leveraged its elite position and used an established medium, the quarterly letter to content creators, to reach as many influential actors as possible who subsequently distributed the information to a high number of people. This approach accounted even for the possibility that some content creators do not share the information, as it is still spread by many other influential personalities (Bakshy et al., 2011, p. 5). In addition, the usage of content creators as intermediaries between the interest group and the public increased the likelihood that the potentially non-political followers pay attention to the political topic, as they were familiar with the sender (Phelps et al., 2004, p. 345; Nahon et al., 2011, p. 19). Since the message evoked the fear that the followers may not be able to view YouTube videos anymore, they were also highly incentivised to deal with and share the content (Berger, Milkman, 2010, p. 15f.; Berger, Milkman, 2012, p. 201). As a result, YouTube's message was spread widely through the network, reaching millions of views within a few days (see, for example, Wissenswert, 2018).

YouTube promoted this popularity even further by setting up a website and a playlist aggregating the videos of content creators against the reform (YouTube, 2019a; YouTube, 2019b). In addition, in line with Mills' (2012, p. 167f.) integration phase, the company spread Wojcicki's post and interacted with followers using various accounts

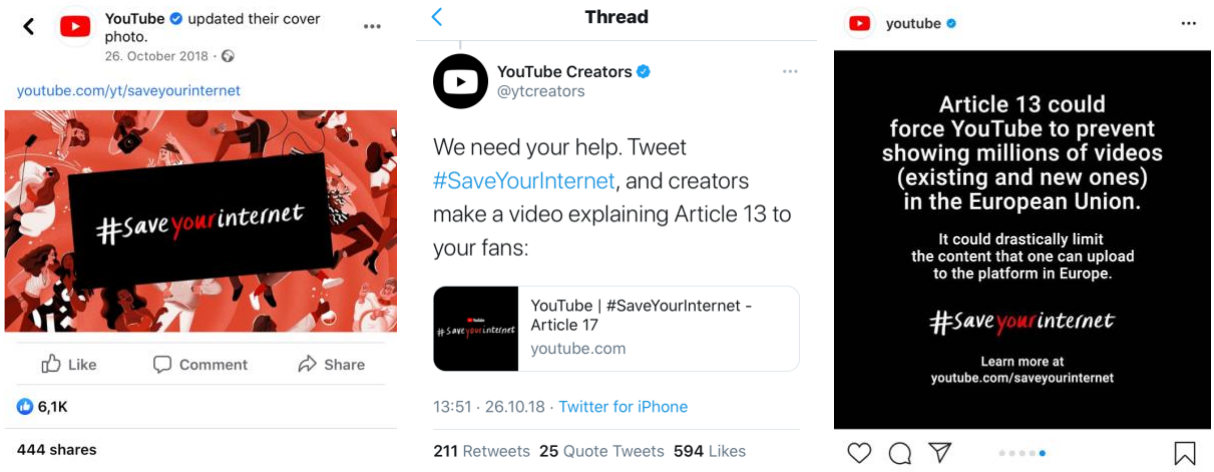

Figure 5: Dissemination of the message on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram *(own research, retrieved from the respective social media platforms)*

on all social media platforms, as shown in figure 5. In order to substantiate its claims, YouTube also published follow-up content that provided more detailed information on the consequences of the reform (Wojcicki, 2018b). Thus, the company fulfilled all stages of Mills' (2012, p. 168) virality framework.

As a result of these highly strategic efforts, Wojcicki's message was prominently featured on the social media agenda. It was dominating not only the trending videos on YouTube, but also other social media platforms. Figure 6 measures the online salience of the reform using Google searches of two keywords relating to the directive and shows that the online attention peaked around the time when most YouTube content providers published trending videos on the reform.

Wojcicki's post was covered nine times by the legacy media. Interestingly, while only one news item reported on the post immediately after it had been published, eight news items covered it only after it had become viral. This clearly demonstrates that the virality was the primary reason why the legacy media covered the post. Headlines like "Doomsday mood among YouTube fans" or "YouTube stars fear for their career" reveal that journalists interpreted the virality as information on the public opinion on the platform, which is highly newsworthy for them (Schwarz, 2018; Hartwig, 2018).

However, if information on public opinion itself was sufficiently newsworthy to generate media attention, traditional journalists would report on every viral movement, as all of them reveal information on public opinion. The legacy media does not do that, which

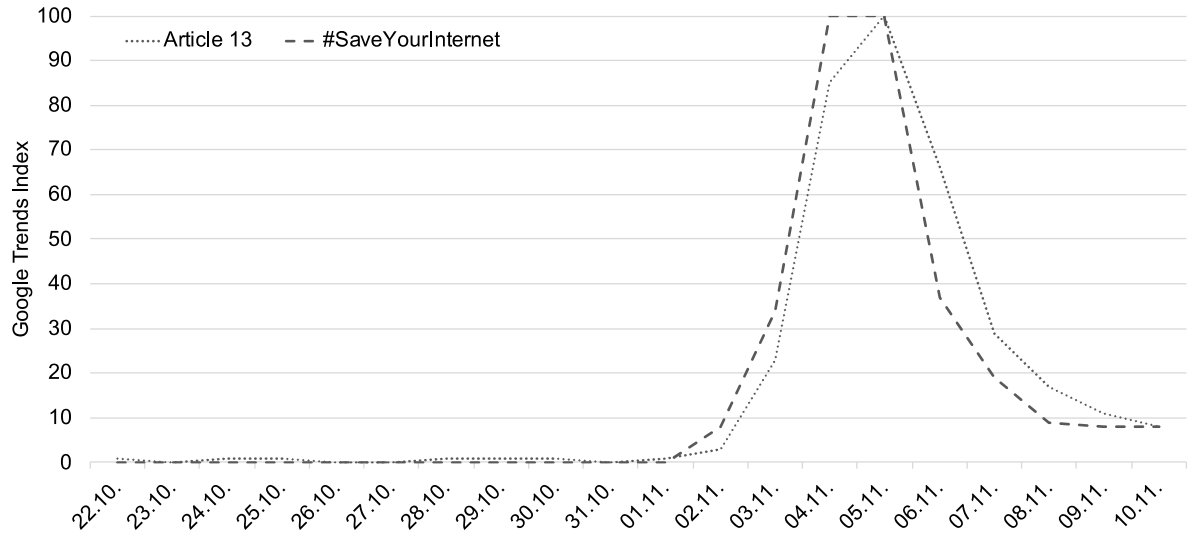

Figure 6: Salience of the copyright directive on the Internet in Germany
(own research, key words see legend, area "Germany", date range "22/10/2018 - 10/11/2018")

indicates that the viral content also needs to be newsworthy on other dimensions. The specific feature of Wojcicki's post was that it happened in a political context – it naturally concerned the politically powerful elite and suggested a high level of conflict and drama (Harcup, O'Neill, 2017, p. 1482). In such settings, it is common that journalists pay attention to the public opinion and report on any potential opposition such as protests (Tresch, Fischer, 2015, p. 357). This tendency is confirmed by my research, as 31% of all mentions to interest groups referred to groups organising a protest. Any journalist, who scanned social media for information on public opinion, was suddenly exposed to a massive opposition to a political topic that was already inherently newsworthy (Tandoc Jr., Vos, 2016, p. 956f.). Thus, just as the journalist would have covered a normal protest signaling opposition to a legislative proposal, she covered the online opposition to the directive as well.

In this sense, virality strengthens the position of an interest group. It signals that not only the interest group but also the public opposes the political endeavour, giving the opposition a high societal relevance (Kollman, 1998, p. 8f.). The individual posts of interest groups that do not go viral, by contrast, represent only the opinion of the interest group itself, which is often less newsworthy than the opinion of the public. This idea fits with my finding that only those individual posts triggered legacy media coverage that announced protests – another way to signal public support for a position (ibid). Thus, the ability of a viral post to indicate public support for an interest group's policy position increases its newsworthiness significantly. The viral posts of interest

groups possess a very high newsmaking potential, which is demonstrated by the fact that YouTube's viral post triggered more legacy media coverage than all individual posts of the various interest groups.

A limitation of this conclusion is that I cannot rule out that there may have been other viral posts of interest groups that the legacy media did not cover, since my content analysis would not reveal such cases. This would put doubt on the argument that interest groups' viral posts have a high newsmaking potential. However, I assume that this is highly unlikely given the fact that virality is very rare (Mills, 2012, p. 163). Even if there was another viral post of an interest group, it would be highly likely that the legacy media covered it. Both factors combined make it reasonable to assume that my study revealed all viral posts of interest groups in this case.

6.3 Comparison with other channels

Even though these findings clearly show that particularly trending social media activities of interest groups trigger legacy media coverage, the relevance of social media compared to other channels into the news is relatively low. Interest groups were usually cited when they organised a protest (31% of all mentions) or had direct contact with newspapers (13%), for instance through statements, interviews, spokespersons, guest commentaries or advertisements. Individual and trending social media posts, by contrast, accounted for only 4% of all references to interest groups.

Beyond the explanations that individual posts of interest groups are usually not newsworthy and trending posts do not occur frequently, the low relative importance of social media could also be caused by a path dependency between interest groups and journalists (Powers, 2016, p. 503). Interest groups often hire former journalists who have good contacts with newspapers and inform them directly about the group's statements (ibid). This idea fits with the finding that direct contacts with newspapers are a common way for interest groups to create legacy media coverage. However, the current journalists who interest groups will hire in the future will have more experience with social media as a tool for reporting. They will be more aware of the newsmaking potential of social media posts and probably try to use it to generate legacy media

coverage of the interest group. Thus, social media could become an emerging way for interest groups to make news.

7. Conclusion

This study addressed the question whether and which type of interest groups' social media activities generate legacy media coverage in Germany. It started with the findings of the media literature that individual as well as trending social media posts are covered by the legacy media (Broersma, Graham, 2013, p. 460; Sayre et al., 2010, p. 23f.). As the existing lobbying literature has not yet captured this trend effectively, this study aimed at applying the media scholars' findings to interest groups. It used the German media coverage of the 2019 EU copyright directive as a salient case study.

I argued that interest groups' social media activities are generally able to trigger legacy media coverage, but that there are important differences between individual and trending posts. The findings revealed that individual posts that do not go viral are rarely covered by the legacy media, while trending posts often generated news media coverage. Drawing on the journalistic gatekeeping theory, I suggested that these findings can be attributed to differences in the newsworthiness of both types of posts. The individual posts of interest groups are usually not newsworthy, which could be explained by the interest groups' tendency to use social media to inform and interact with supporters (Lovejoy, Saxton, 2012, p. 348). A viral post, by contrast, which can emerge only through the involvement of many social media users, suggests that the post reflects not only the interest group's but also the public's opinion on a political topic (Mills, 2012, p. 163; Kollman, 1998, p. 8f.). This increases the societal relevance and the newsworthiness of the post significantly, which ultimately results in more legacy media coverage. However, my findings also showed that interest groups' social media posts are generally less covered than other activities of interest groups. Given the rising importance of social media for journalistic reporting, I argued that social media posts could become more important for interest groups to generate legacy media coverage in the future (Broersma, Graham, 2016).

These results imply that the media scholars' findings apply only partially to interest groups. The idea that individual posts trigger legacy media coverage is not valid in a

lobbying context. Interest groups, however, are predestined to provide the effort that is required to create a viral post that is covered by the legacy media. Contributing to the literature on which interest groups have a higher access to the legacy media, this finding suggests that particularly resource-rich groups are able to influence the news media using social media (Thrall, 2006, p. 418). However, the result also implies that groups opposing a policy dossier may be very successful in leveraging social media to gain traditional media coverage (De Bruycker and Beyers, 2015, p. 465). Negative and rejecting emotions are more likely to spread easily through networks and more newsworthy for journalists due to their conflict potential than positive, supporting emotions. Thus, these groups are more likely to create a viral post that is covered by the legacy media. Which final impact social media has on the representation of different groups in terms of resources, group type and policy position in the news media can be revealed by additional studies in the future. Such research could also show whether social media is indeed an emerging channel into the news for interest groups.

Additionally, my findings indicate that the best strategy for interest groups aiming at generating legacy media coverage using social media is to try to create a viral process. However, this strategy makes sense only in certain circumstances. It is vital that the public sentiment on the platform corresponds with the interest group's policy position. In an ideal case, both oppose a proposed policy and the interest group is able to frame its position emotionally and address a large number of influential social media users. Even if these conditions are given, an interest group has to weigh the costs and benefits of the strategy. Creating a viral post requires many resources that could be utilised to employ other channels like direct contacts with journalists, which are currently more relevant than social media for creating legacy media coverage. This argument is particularly compelling given that fact that even high efforts can never guarantee virality (Mills, 2012, p. 163).

Finally, this study has some limitations. First, the scope of the study did not allow to conduct further in-depth research on the interest groups' social media posts, which may, as mentioned in the results section, influence the internal validity of my findings (Halperin, Heath, 2017, p. 149). Even though I derived my argument from the existing literature and theories, further research could conduct a similar analysis including an investigation of social media posts. This approach could strengthen the ideas that

individual posts are usually not newsworthy due to the fact that they are used for mobilisation purposes and that all viral posts of interest groups are covered by the legacy media, which underscores their high newsworthiness.

Second, the fact that I focused on the EU copyright directive as a case study may affect the external validity of my findings regarding the trending posts (ibid). As indicated above, the most-likely character of this case study makes it difficult to generalise the positive findings regarding viral posts (Levy, 2008, p. 12). The copyright directive provided YouTube with the perfect opportunity to create a viral process. These factors do not apply to every legislative proposal, casting doubt on the ability of interest groups to create viral posts in different settings. In addition, YouTube possessed some unique capabilities like a central position on the platform, which does not apply to every interest group. If the interest groups, however, are not able to create viral posts, they cannot be referenced by the legacy media through this medium. Considering also the focus on Germany, more research is required to investigate the validity of my findings in other circumstances. In this sense, my findings should not be interpreted as a final answer to a question, but rather as a guide for future studies that investigate the phenomenon which social media activities of interest groups trigger legacy media coverage in more depth (ibid, p. 6).

8. Appendix

Appendix 1

The following link contains the Excel spreadsheet that I used to conduct the content analysis of the newspaper articles.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1MKECMVhT1w43cTdLYAuAMtgw2Quav1hNoTIeY8Scrrw/edit?usp=sharing

Appendix 2

The following key words were used to search for tweets from interest groups on the copyright reform between 14/09/2016 and 17/05/2019.

Urheberrecht, Urheberrechtsreform, EU-Urheberrechtsreform, Copyright, copyright directive, EU-copyright directive, Artikel, Artikel11, Artikel12, Artikel13, article, article11, article12, article13, art, art11, art12, art13, art., art.11, art.12, art.13, upload filter, uploadfilter, save the internet, savetheinternet, LSR

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