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**The elements of advocacy:  
Finnish PR consultants' media strategies in lobbying**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

In Finland the use of Public Relations (PR) agencies and consultants in political decision making has increased in the last two decades. The development of the Finnish political realm has been similar to that of other Nordic countries where the PR industry has built a strong linkage to the political sphere. The present study analyses how Finnish PR consultants with a political background use and attempt to influence the news media as part of lobbying processes to advance their clients' causes. The chapter is based on 11 interviews with PR consultants that were conducted during November 2018. The main findings indicate that Finnish PR consultants consider the news media and journalists as an important part of lobbying. The media and journalists are considered supportive or alternative forums for advocacy and political debate. PR consultants use the media strategically to establish relationships and networks with journalists, and to advocate long-term political decision making and agendas. Overall, the study indicates that Finnish PR consultants want to be active political interpreters, who together with their clients engage in shaping the political agenda and discourses. This is done by taking advantage of previous political experience and networks, constructing the political agenda for media communication, organising a network of media representatives to influence and finally by framing political messages to the media.

### **KEYWORDS:**

1. Lobbying
2. PR consultants
3. News media
4. Political decision making
5. Political communication

### Introduction

In recent decades, the PR industry has built a strong linkage to the political sphere and has specialised in public affairs and lobbying in the Nordic countries. For instance, in Sweden PR consultants have taken on an influential role in the political system (Svallfors, 2016; Helgesson and Falasca, 2017), which has increased the demand of political analysis and advice from PR agencies. Around 20 per cent of Swedish PR consultants have been active in political parties or political youth organisations, elected representatives or engaged as political advisors (Allern, 2011). In Norway, advisors with a political background have been actively recruited as PR consultants to focus on public affairs (Allern, 2011; see also Ihlen and Gullberg, 2015). The development shows the importance of PR in unpredictable times and in the management of political communication. It also emphasizes the importance of the human element in strategic communication. In the last decade, the same development has been seen in Finland. Previous Finnish studies on PR consultants have focused on the public image (e.g., Kantola, 2014; Kantola and Seeck, 2011) or on storytelling and promotion perspectives (Kantola and Lounasmeri, 2014; Kantola, 2016; Lounasmeri, 2018). A clear gap exists in the research when it comes to how consultants attempt to use the news media in lobbying. Therefore, this chapter attempts to fill the research gap of how PR consultants influence the news media. Overall, the role and significance of PR consultancy in lobbying in Finland needs more systematic research. In the Nordic context, research of the news media strategies of PR consultants has also been scarce. Overall, studies on outside lobbying have traditionally concentrated on finding out how much media attention an organisation or an interest group gets by using the non-direct lobbying methods (Tresch and Fischer, 2015). Earlier Nordic research has shown that the PR industry and lobbyists are systematically influencing the work of journalists and media organisations (e.g., Larsson, 2009; Mykkänen and Ikonen, 2019). This so called 'media lobbyism' has become a distinguished part of lobbying for example in Denmark (see Blach-Ørsten *et al.*, 2017; Johansson and Larsson, 2015).

This chapter explores Finnish PR consultants' strategies of using media in lobbying processes. In Finland the debate of PR consultants' significance to political decision making has become popular in the last few years. At the same time, the demand for regulations of lobbying has increased. Finland, like the other Nordic countries, has a long tradition of integrating interest groups into political decision making (Vesa *et al.*, 2018). In the Nordic countries the development of an increased use of PR consultancies in politics results from the mediatisation of politics (Allern, 2011). Political power in Finland is influenced by the role and presence of the media (Kunelius and Reunanen, 2012). In the recent decade, the PR industry has built a stronger linkage to political decision making as several former politicians have founded a PR agency or moved to work in PR agencies. Finnish PR agencies

have actively recruited political advisors. In addition, the number of consultants who simultaneously actively work in PR agencies and participate in politics has slightly increased. This chapter also contributes to the growing literature on the mediatisation of politics in Finland. It shows that by using media relations to influence political decision making the PR consultants aim to make their role more meaningful in the political field. This chapter also sheds light on some PR consultants' hidden and non-transparent lobbying practices.

### **Lobbying, the news media, and political communication**

Lobbying can be considered as one of the important aspects of PR that seeks to cultivate the relationship with decision makers (Cutlip *et al.*, 2003). On the other hand, lobbying has its own specific goals, purposes, and strategies that overlap with PR (Jugo *et al.*, 2015). Klemens (2016) sees lobbying as a strategic communication process. In his view, the terms PR, public affairs, lobbying and governmental relations all fall into the field of corporate communications, as lobbying usually intends to advance the interests of organisations. Public affairs is considered a broader term and practice than lobbying as it contains all communicative activities and relationship building efforts in the political arena (Solvoll and Bang, 2017; Klemens, 2016). Lobbying can also be considered a completely separate political communication process aimed at influencing decision making through specific communication tools (Bentele and Nothaft, 2015).

Media is a social institution that influences politics - and is influenced as part of politics (Cook, 1998, 2006). Practising media relations as part of lobbying processes aims to build relationships with and influence journalists in order to reach the general public through the media (Trapp and Laursen, 2017), to present an issue or a public interest and to pressure decision makers (Ihlen *et al.*, 2018), and also to communicate facts, arguments and power (Milbrath, 1963). Lobbyists work for journalists and politicians as information subsidies which provide alternative information, proposals and formulations to use in policy processes (Allern, 2011). The interests of lobbyists and the news media may sometimes coincide, allowing the news media to use news emphases to convey the perspective of decision making desired by lobbyists (Sobbrio, 2011).

Media is often treated as a resource that can be used to influence politics and gain political power (Kunelius and Reunanen, 2012). The position in political decision making can be improved by attaining media access (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2016). Van Aelst and Walgrave (2016) argue that the media is a formidable information resource for politicians. Politicians' relationship with the media is unique because they need the media for information and as an arena at the same time (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2016). Contrary to politicians' belief, the media is important agenda setters –

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even compared with political parties and interest groups (Walgrave, 2008; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2011). Political decision makers actively use media resources and mold their actions to the demands of the media (Kunelius and Reunanen, 2012). Lobbyists seek to influence the information that the news media collects about political decision making (Sobbrio, 2011).

Politicians' stance towards the media is both active and passive (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2016). In passive stance the media is considered only as a source of information, whereas in the active stance the media is considered as an arena for political communication. Various actors promote different stories to advance issues and policies in their favour, which leads to a 'framing competition' between political actors (Chong and Druckman, 2013). In political systems, media attention is considered an important element because it signals the priorities of decision makers to the public and the priorities of the public to decision makers (Atkinson *et al.*, 2014). Media attention strengthens positions in decision-making processes (Kunelius and Reunanen, 2012; Cook, 2006). Various political outsiders, for instance activists and lobbyists, employ the information and arena functions of the media (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2016). In the media arena political issues and interpretations of these issues are promoted. Lobbyists seek to change prevailing politics through the media system. In this system, the news media has a role to play in gathering information about the goals and aspirations of alternative policies and communicating them to the general public (Sobbrio, 2011). Organisational resources play a crucial role in who gets their voice heard in the media (Thrall, 2006). Actors with insufficient resources to influence the media are often delegitimised by the media and they have to seek media attention by non-political means, like protests or demonstrations. This might question their political credibility and communication (Thrall, 2006).

Influencing policy-making processes via the media is considered *outside lobbying* (Kollman, 1998; Beyers, 2004). In outside lobbying, lobbyists can disseminate information via paid media articles or organise events that are covered by the news media (Jugo *et al.*, 2015). According to Kollman (1998), outside lobbying accomplishes two tasks simultaneously: First, it communicates aspects of public opinion to policy makers and second, it intends to change how policy makers consider and respond to policy issues. Journalistic media is considered to be politically influential (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014). They possess some form of political power (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2016), which can be considered agenda-setting and so-called career controlling power (Lengauer *et al.*, 2014), and they can shape the public agenda by influencing public opinion, authorities, and elites (Andrews and Caren, 2010). Media favour professional and formalised groups that employ routine advocacy tactics and work on issues that overlap with the newspaper's focus, such as economic and social issues (Andrews and Caren, 2010). Media activate audiences and increase public support for the causes of interest organisations and social movements (Berkhout, 2013). By engaging in media relations,

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interest organisations seek organisational validation and a position to be taken seriously by policy makers (Berkhout, 2013). The ability to influence the news-making process and to use various mass media channels successfully has importance in influencing the public opinion, electoral outcomes, and political decision making (e.g., Thrall, 2006; Linsky, 1986; Cook, 1998).

Nordic media systems have created liberal media models due to diminished influences from governments and political parties (Nord, 2008). In the Nordic countries, especially newspapers have lost their party press character, and overall the media can be described as independent without any clear political party affiliation. At the same time, the ownership of media has concentrated into fewer hands and governmental press subsidies in media markets no longer play as important a role as earlier (Nord, 2008). Nordic media systems have high newspaper circulation, press subsidiaries for printed media and the distinguished role of public service broadcast media (Holtz-Bacha, 2004). In Finland and Sweden, as Pfetsch *et al.* (2014) analysed, the political communication culture is media driven. In Finland, the news media usually emphasise news related to politics, public administration, economics, science and technology (Curran *et al.*, 2009). The media is considered to have independence on determining the public agenda and politicians “are on the mercy of the media to make their issues count in public discussion, which is reflected in the strong reliance on back-stage agenda setting strategies” (Pfetsch *et al.*, 2014, p. 95). In Nordic political systems a liberal, pluralistic model has increased the role of lobbying in political decision making (Möller, 2009). The less institutionalised forms of lobbyism have increased, and the lobbying efforts of corporations and advocacy groups, as well as the demand for public affairs consultancy, have also risen (Tyllström, 2009). By influencing the media content, lobbyists and interest groups often try to influence legislation, public opinion and general behaviour (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Lobbying firms have been identified to be relevant intermediaries between organised interests and legislators (Furnas *et al.*, 2019). For instance, the Swedish and Norwegian PR agencies offer analysis and advice from consultants with different political backgrounds and ideological leanings. These consultants are networked with both government and opposition parties (Allern, 2011).

### **Methodology**

This exploratory study aims to contribute to understanding how Finnish PR consultants, who have a political background, practise media relations in lobbying in order to advance their clients’ causes. It poses the following research question: *How do Finnish PR consultants use and attempt to influence the news media as part of lobbying processes?*

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The empirical research discussed in this chapter uses a qualitative approach. The qualitative method – conducting semi-structured interviews – was chosen because a rich description of actors' strategies was sought. Purposive sampling of PR consultants was applied as the participation was based on availability and willingness. All Finnish PR agencies providing political lobbying consultancy were mapped for the study in November 2018. Overall 15 different agencies were found to fit into this category. Consultants with a political background or still working in politics were then identified from the agencies. All 15 agencies were contacted and one consultant per agency was asked to participate in the interviews. Finally, 11 consultants expressed their willingness to participate. The consultants represented both small PR agencies and large international PR agencies. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to all interviewees.

The semi-structured interviews with a free discussion lasted from 30 to 70 minutes. Interviewees were asked to describe their role as a consultant, the importance of media influence in their work, the practical implementation of media influence and the reasons for using media relations in the lobbying process. The interviewees were also asked to evaluate the success of media use, and to describe problem situations that arose with the media. In addition, consultants were also asked to describe the advantages or disadvantages of their political background in using media relations in lobbying.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The level of transcription was basic, i.e. the tone of voice, pauses and fillers were omitted. This resulted in 110 pages of transcript material. After this, the transcripts were content analysed in several phases. In the first phase of analysis, the interviews were coded based on the responses given to each of the questions within the themes. This allowed to compare the answers and identify key differences and similarities between the responses. After this, in the second phase, all responses were coded for each theme and answers were compared, broader views were sought from the data. Finally, the coded material was re-read numerous times and thematised into broader, abstract themes. Based on the analysis, seven distinct themes emerged, which are presented next.

### **Results**

#### ***The role of lobbying consultants in Finland***

Many interviewed PR consultants considered themselves as “wannabe politicians”. Consultants want to be active players in decision making by acting in the background of the political decision making. They want to influence and be close to the decision-making process in order to bring in new ideas and solutions. The PR consultants think that the Finnish political media landscape has divided into



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numerous actors and has made political communication more complex. Also, the law-making cycle has become shorter than before, but the legislation and regulations still play a very big role. The PR consultants described their work primarily to be strategic consulting and advising in lobbying, as well as planning media strategies together with the clients.

*In this work I simply try to influence political decision making. If I describe my work, I mainly advise my clients on how political decision making goes. For example, who are the key decision makers and what is the right time to influence the decision? [18]*

Secondary work for consultants is to participate in the operationalisation of media lobbying activities. Consultants consider their role also essential in building a relationship between decision makers and the news media who provide political forecasts and “product developments”. Many PR agencies have established long-term clientship with interest groups and large companies, which gives them advantages as the law making usually lasts a very long time. Consultants also see that offering lobbying services is not just operating with acute issues and there is no “normal state” of political decision making.

*Together with the client, we plan various media activities, which focus on journalists, contacting the news media and background information. If the ultimate goal is to change some law, then the indirect lobbying or media work is often something much broader than that. [12]*

Consultants think that the earlier the lobbying is started the bigger the chances are to affect the decision making. In the Finnish political system, the agreements are considered so binding that, once a political decision has been made, the argument in the media is no longer relevant. The Finnish PR consultants consider themselves also political and social decision-making experts and advisors. They participate in a broad social debate. Their clients are large business organisations that are affected heavily by legislation, which has a direct impact on their business environment.

In addition, they consult other organisations that want opinions and sparring. They help to communicate the social significance of things and teach organisations to emphasise various messages to politicians and decision makers. In principle, consultants are not doing lobbying by themselves, they are helping their clients to connect with the Finnish political realm. Consultants coach their clients to work with decision makers as the clients themselves are more credible in the conversation with decision makers than PR consultants.

*In practice, my job is to create strategies with the client and provide them guidance for lobbying. [14]*

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*The starting point is to design the influencing process, which then has several different stages, for example, background research, independent work or work with other consultants, working with the client, and so on. [11]*

Consultants emphasise that they must be able to understand the customers' business environment. Consultants, for their part, monitor the social debate and political preparation, look for tensions in decision making and find out if it requires further actions. The consultants work with companies in a number of different industries and seek to consolidate and increase their collaboration. Whenever industries create new business, it is usually necessary to create regulatory legislation. Consultants meet their clients a lot to discuss social issues. This is similar to media communication consulting, which looks at what the goals, main target groups, main messages and schedules are. Consultants give advice because they are able to analyse the decision-making process better than their clients. Politicians rely heavily on civil servants. In Finnish political decision making, not all power is political and not all power is elected. The consultants will endeavour to establish a good dialogue with the legislative drafters as this might be useful later in future lobbying processes.

### ***The significance of media in lobbying***

To Finnish PR consultants, using media relations in lobbying is a supportive method but still important and a crucial part of the process. Consultants pointed out that media relations cannot be considered a subtle lobbying method. Consultants emphasised that the media's role is even bigger when the political agenda is brought to public discussion.

*Political lobbying is not worth doing without somehow taking into account and using the news media. But what its weight is depends on the case. [16]*

*When it comes to wider political influence and the client's desire to be involved in the societal debate, then this kind of indirect influence through the news media is important. [19]*

The use of media is dependent on the current issue or on the political decision. Media relations is often utilised in cases where public discussion is needed to add pressure on political decision making. In these cases, consultants execute media analyses, produce materials for the media, contact journalists, organise meetings with journalists and in some cases even meet journalists by themselves. In addition to this, consultants also do background research about topics to use in lobbying. PR consultants consider that media is best used when public pressure is needed to speed up the political process. They also point out that the prerequisite for the use of media in lobbying is either the human-interest point of view or wide range impact for the society.

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*In things that a wide range of people can identify with and perceive as their own, the publicity will help and we will be able to mobilise that pressure through the news media. There are also issues for which it is important to create a public opposition. This makes it easier to participate in decision making through public debate than in the background. [11]*

### **Connecting with the news media**

To consultants, the most effective method to gain influence on the media in lobbying is to connect with journalists personally or meet them in background sessions. This way the journalists have a possibility to get familiar with the consultants and the lobbying organisation that wants to influence the media.

*Directly via email or call. It is my expertise to find as relevant media representatives as possible, for example, which news outlet and who the right journalist is. It is also our job to make that client's message clearer and sharper, so we have a clear message that we want to convey to the news media. [110]*

In a background session, the organisation shares their views and expresses their expertise in the matter. This way they communicate why their opinion should be considered in the decision-making process and what they bring to public discussion.

*I try to be as interesting as possible. I try to give clear facts for and against. It tells the journalist that we are on the right track. [17]*

PR consultants help the client organisation to formulate the communication to be as newsworthy as possible. The background session also provides various themes that support the core message of the client organisation. At the same time, more information about the decision-making process is actively shared and more political contacts to use in news making are provided.

PR consultants may take care of contacting the media on behalf of their clients. Before this, the consultants investigate which media and journalists could be the most suitable to report on the topic at hand.

*Some journalists want written material. It's actually kind of tacit knowledge that comes from just getting to know the journalists and learning how journalistic practices work. And the same goes for the messages that work for journalists. Some often want statistics to support the message, while others want a ready-made text and a story. It depends on the person and the news media they represent. [12]*

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Consultants also try to emphasise what themes are valuable for their customers. The respondents stated that mostly they are contacting the most well-known journalists who have a good reputation and have previously reported or written articles about the topic. In the consultants' opinion, this is the way in which the journalist is most beneficial for the public discussion and for helping the client's cause.

### ***Influencing the news media and journalists in lobbying***

Respondents emphasised that it is important to include media and journalists in the lobbying process. The consultants argued that they want to influence the media and journalists because they are a very effective channel to deliver political messages forward. Some Finnish journalists are well-known and followed by politicians, which is important for the consultants. The consultants felt that media, in some level, defines the political agenda and is the key player in public discussion even though the role of social media has increased.

*I think the chances of successful political influence increase when influencing the news media is involved. If the issue comes up in the news media, the chances of successful political influence increase. If the issue becomes the main news in the media, the topic usually arises for discussion among politicians as well. Then the general public becomes aware of this and will help to make it even more relevant. [13]*

The Finnish media is considered to be influential as they make the political decision-making public. If a topic becomes the media's main headline, it often becomes important for politicians and decision makers as well. Media and journalists are contacted in lobbying processes when consultants think that the topic would be interesting for the media. One main reason to why media influencing is part of lobbying is raising awareness and discussion among the general public and voters. The information obtained from news sources is considered to be more convincing than advertising or purchased content.

PR consultants also felt that the significance of decision-making content is very often related to the public discussion or media reporting. The more the lobbied topic is discussed in the media by journalists or on social media by the general public, the higher the possibilities for political influence. But still, consultants think affecting the media is often problematic and using media relations in lobbying could be seen as a desperate strategy.

*It would be foolish just to use the news media because it is unpredictable. The effect can also be the opposite of the one that was intended. In the worst case, it could lead to a media*

*crisis. Decision makers also notice influencing through the news media and generally do not like it. [15]*

***The efficiency of using the news media in lobbying processes***

The estimations of how efficient media as a lobbying method is were contradictory. Consultants evaluate the use of media to be an efficient method but at the same time a very limited one. The media use in lobbying should always be part of a bigger advocacy campaign used by a small core group consisting of consultant and client's representatives with versatile knowledge of lobbying and the media. Using just PR personnel to get media publicity is not considered efficient. Using media relations as a supportive tool in lobbying is most efficient in order to introduce new initiatives and openings.

*I often recommend [using the news media] because it has a great influence and it has an ability to do things that may not play a particularly important role but are still very useful in lobbying. The news media is effective in matters that you want to be discussed. In particular, in the longer-term influencing, the role of the news media has a big impact. [12]*

Finnish politicians and parties follow changes in society and in the public discussion. Suitable topics and agenda supporting the set of values are often integrated into the political program. The consultants believe that using media relations gives new ideas and topics which support the set of values for political players to play with. Introducing openings and ideas via media, PR consultants are capable of raising awareness of various problems in the society. News reporting and public discussion fuelled by the media help politicians and parties to recognise these problems. In some cases, media reporting might be a valuable channel to raise awareness and even more suitable than direct contacting or other lobbying methods.

*Media attention raises awareness of societal issues and politicians follow the news media closely. In that way, the information reached them even better than it would have through direct influence, as politicians are contacted directly by different companies and organisations tremendously. [13]*

In the current communication climate, politicians are bombarded with messages by citizens, corporations and associations. Important email messages might remain unnoticed, but this hardly happens to the topics that are actively discussed in the media.

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Consultants emphasised that advocating for a certain cause might often be a very long process. This process can be used to build awareness and relationships among journalists. If relationship building is done well, the client organisation might become a legitimised part of political decision making.

*Influencing through the news media is important. It strengthens the reputation and brand of the lobbying organisation. It enhances the legitimacy of an organisation if things are done right. [17]*

Using the news media in lobbying contains several risks. First of all, the media publicity might create tensions between decision makers and lobbyists. This might reduce the value of the arguments and create a negative attitude towards lobbyists. Too much media attention might arouse political tensions and even lock the attitudes of decision makers. In the worst case, media attention in lobbying can turn against the lobbyist and the cause. Uncontrolled media communication could also harm or break the harmony of mutually trusted decision-making.

Measuring the effectiveness of the use of the news media in lobbying is problematic and challenging. Consultants propose various methods to clients on how to measure the effectiveness. The number of contacted journalists and media, and acting according to agreed plans were the measurement methods mentioned most often. The consultants also emphasised that, eventually, how the set goals are achieved can be measured only over a very long time. In these cases, it is needed to see what the final decision is and how it affects the client organisation.

*Success is reflected in whether the end result has been achieved or not. It can be said that the case is often known to be very difficult in advance. The aim is to achieve the goal that has been set. [18]*

One challenging aspect of using media relations in lobbying is the timespan of a decision. According to consultants, sometimes politicians feel that the topic that the media report is on is so important that politicians start to use it as their own agenda. Nevertheless, in these cases the topic still needs to be supported by lobbying efforts to ensure that the intended content is included in policy preparation and hopefully in the final decision.

### **Conflicts with the news media**

Conflicts with the media in lobbying were considered uncommon. Consultants think that using media relations in lobbying should always be ethically sustainable and openness with the media is always recommended. If conflicts occur, they are most often related to the background discussions. Sometimes the journalists are eager to use confidential background discussions in news making and

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reveal the source in their story. Overall, consultants felt that an appropriate and honest relationship with journalists is beneficial in lobbying to prevent conflicts. Conflicts are also avoided if the client and the consultant work together with the journalists. The consultants said they advise their clients to understand that the role of the media is to be critical and journalists will ask hard questions.

*The role of the news media is to be critical in everyone's direction. Their job is to ask questions. In addition to bringing perspectives to the debate, they are trying to control the whole thing [the political discussion in the media] in some way. [I11]*

The reporting cannot always be positive towards the clients' cause. Conflicts are often caused by earlier negative reporting or journalists' attitudes towards the client. Consultants also believe that if any conflicts exist, this is due to the lack of arguments for the significance of the topic or due to inappropriate communication, for instance asking the journalist to write an article too demandingly. Consultants also prepare their clients for cases where the media is not willing to report or write an article at all. In such cases consultants suggest to try social media or paid articles.

### ***The benefits of political background***

Lobbyists' previous political background increases their knowledge of how organisations function in political advocacy. A political background develops media literacy and the skill to know how political topics emerge in the media. A political background also develops skills to recognise the motives and backgrounds of journalists, and what kind of topics from political decision making they want to raise for public discussion.

*It is definitely beneficial that you know a lot of people from the media and politics. You know how the news media works and you have knowledge of how political decision-making works. These are just the basics of this work. [I9]*

A political background strengthens the abilities needed in communication and media relations, as the communication is not merely a support function in politics but a core area of the work. Participating in politics helps to build strong relationships and networks with journalists and the media. A political background also helps to formulate the facts in the form desired by the media. This experience and acquired social capital help the consultant, in cooperation with the client, to influence the media and political decision making.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

The results show that the media dimension is an important part of PR's lobbying consultancy in Finland. The diversification of communication channels has supported the use of the media in lobbying. The consultants continue their political careers as PR consultants, as their previous career allows for good contacts and knowledge of the Finnish political system. This indicates that the value of the human element of PR has become increasingly important in lobbying and communication management. The main role of PR consultants is to explain political decision-making to their clients and the media and to help to monitor the political decision-making. PR consultants suggest new ideas and suitable themes to the media, as the media is used in political communication as a source of information. Politicians regularly follow the media and journalists that are well-known in the Finnish media field. The use of media in lobbying is systematic, but also risky. News coverage can be negative and media attention can influence decision making against expectations. Consultants start as strategy consultants and then later on continue as process consultants. As a process consultant the PR consultant supports his or her clients in the background work of lobbying, advises on media planning and participates in the operationalisation of media communication. PR consultants also teach their clients how to communicate social issues to the media, they create a political agenda for their clients, and participate in framing media messages. Overall, the Finnish PR consultants influence media and journalists strategically in lobbying. This study found four main strategies. First, PR consultants take advantage of their previous political experience and networks. Second, they construct the political agenda for media communication. Third, they organise a network of media representatives to influence, and fourth, they frame political messages to the news media.

This study indicates that Finnish PR consultants want to be active political interpreters, who together with their clients engage in shaping the political agenda and discourses. This development is driven by the fact that the political decision-making in Finland has become more unpredictable, hectic and complex. Finnish PR consultants consider media relations as a useful practise in lobbying and media is considered to have political power. Consultants seek to get media attention to gain some level of political power or credibility for their clients. In this process, the previous political experience, knowledge of the political systems and analysis, ability to think strategically and knowledge how to frame the messages to the media is valued among PR consultants.

This study gives important insights into the relationship of PR consultants and journalists in political decision making. By presenting findings from PR consultants' interviews, it contributes to the growing research literature on Nordic lobbying. This chapter has also attempted to fill the research gap of how PR consultants influence the news media. Yet, this study also has its limitations and calls



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for further research on a number of issues. First, it is a single-country study based on a limited number of PR consultants. The lobbying strategies were investigated based on the interviews of Finnish PR consultants who had earlier political background or were currently active in politics. The purposive sampling used in this study limits the findings to this certain group of PR consultants.

Consultants' strategic use of media in lobbying supports the analysis of Pfetsch *et al.* (2014) that backstage agenda-setting has a big strategic role in Finnish political decision making. Consultants systematically take advantage of news framings, agenda setting and priming – actions that have strong and long-term effects on audiences (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). The PR industry has increased its influence in Finnish political communication and media landscape. The development follows the same footprints as in the other Nordic countries (e.g., Allern, 2011; Larsson, 2009; Tyllström, 2009). Nevertheless, the literature on the PR industry needs more theory and data about PR consultants' impact on political decision making. For the future, the identification of PR consultants' media strategies offers various options for further research. Future studies should include a larger sample of actors and studies should be done in other regional contexts. A larger sample or context would give more information about the link between PR consultants and political decision making. More studies are also needed to analyse how PR consultants and their media strategies impact politicians and political decision making. Moreover, further studies based on media cases or political media actors would bring meaningful results.

The current study is a contribution to the ambit of PR and lobbying, and it provides practical and theoretical implications. From a theoretical point of view, it provides a methodological basis to examine the involvement of consultants in policy making as well as the use of the news media in lobbying. In addition, it allows to compare PR consultants' media lobbying strategies in different contexts and political decision-making cultures. From a practical point of view, the research provides journalists insights into the importance of the news media as part of political communication, as well as information on the attitudes of PR consultants towards the use of the news media as part of lobbying. This might give journalists tools to recognise unappropriated influence in the news coverage of political decision making. For lobbyists, the results of this study provide an opportunity to evaluate their lobbying practices as well as the current ethical aspects of lobbying. For PR professionals, the results allow them to look at their own role as a lobbyist and to assess the requirements of lobbying in managing strategic communication.

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### **Appendix**

The structure of semi structured interviews

Interview questions:

1. What is the significance of indirect influence (lobbying) and the news media in your work?
2. How often do you use such tools yourself or recommend them to your clients?
3. What is the practical work related to the news media influence from your point of view?
4. How do you connect with journalists and the news media?
5. What kind of materials do you use when contacting journalists and the news media?
6. Why do you choose the news media or journalists as your target for influence or advocacy?
7. Can you give examples of cases where you choose the news media as a means of influencing (lobbying) rather than direct political influence?
8. How do you evaluate the success of the news media influence?
9. How effective or efficient do you find the news media influence to be for your clients?
10. What kind of conflicts or problems may have arisen with the news media or journalists?
11. Do you think political background or work experience is useful influencing (lobbying) the news media? If so, what are the benefits?
12. Do you still want to tell us about another topic or go back to an earlier question?

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