Role of Media in Discussions of Political Parties Names of Modern Germany

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Abstract

The article considers the role of new media, which, as a tool for promoting of political communication, use nominative parts of the party brand. Discursive, stylistic methods of analysis are used; comparative analysis of the possibilities of traditional and new media has been conducted. The official websites and forums of parties and German leading online newspapers have been studied. It is noted that the participation of new media in the discussion of party names contributes to the development of civic activism, creates a new space for communication, but also can manipulate masses and damage the image. The article discusses the trend of strengthening the role of forums and blogs in forming a positive party image and attracting new communicator-voters.

Keywords: mass media; new media; political party; name of the political party; political communication; renaming; Germany.

Introduction

For a political party, the achievement of certain results in the elections and in the inter-election period involves the creation and promotion of its attractive image, which is formed by establishing the interaction between political forces and civil society. Media are considered to be the most important tool for shaping the image of political forces. They act as a link between the government and voters, maintain a dialogue between them, and are also able to have a significant impact on the perception of political parties in the individual and mass consciousness.

Today, due to the development of communication technologies and active usage of the Internet worldwide, the so-called new media come to the forefront, the possibilities of which in terms of

influencing the public have increased many times compared to traditional media. In recent years, Internet resources (electronic media, blogs, forums, social networks, video hostings) have become leaders in the information coverage of the activities of political parties and the formation of their image (Chizhov, 2016).

In this regard, it seems relevant to consider in this study the role of media resources, in particular new media, in shaping the images of political parties in modern Germany through their names.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to identify the new functions of modern media that they perform, affecting the nominative side of the image of a political party. As an object of study, the official and unofficial (nickname) names of the political parties of the Federal Republic of Germany have been selected; the subject of research are the functions of modern media, which are revealed in the discussions of these nominations.

The study of the impact of new media is primarily associated with the popularity of the Internet, as well as with a change in the format of political communication, namely the transition of traditional media to online platforms, the speed and significant scale of dissemination of information through network channels, as well as the availability of information to general public. New media are becoming both an environment of political communication and a means of its implementation.

If we consider the factors of the effectiveness of political communication, then among them a special place is occupied by the names of parties. An analysis of their role in the political communication of the Federal Republic of Germany allowed us to conclude that they are an important tool to increase its effectiveness along with the party's program and its real political actions (Tkachenko, 2016).

Obviously, to solve certain communicative tasks, the media can actively use the nominative part of party names, because it contains the words through which politicians strive to convey to the electorate the essence, principles, goals and objectives of the association, to precisely determine the sector of society their political activity protects. What new functions do modern media perform, affecting the nominative side of the image of a political party?

Literature Review

In search of an answer to this question, we addressed the official websites and discussion forums of parties, magazine and newspaper publications of leading German online publications. So, we managed to collect material for research on the basis of 13 modern media resources: Diskussionsforum der Piratenpartei, ZPF heute, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Handelsblatt, Spiegel Online, die Welt, Horizont.Net, Berliner Morgenpost, N-TV, Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, T-Online, Manager

Magazin, TAZ (internet links are listed in the list of references). The search resulted in a corpus of media texts, which are journalistic texts and statements of voters in online discussions (posts and comments), with a volume of about 200 media texts.

Methods

Selected texts were studied using the method of discourse analysis, which allows us to trace the relationship between the linguistic and extralinguistic side of modern media texts that affect the nominative part of the political brand. A special place is taken by a stylistic analysis of texts of this type in order to identify language techniques and determine their role in realizing the communicative perspective of the media text and affecting the audience. Moreover, special attention is paid to the functioning of the nicknames of the parties. In addition, the possibilities of new and traditional media regarding the names of political associations are investigated using comparative analysis.

Results

In today's media space, unofficial, so-called "nicknames" of political leaders are gaining popularity. Being public persons, they inevitably attract the attention of the public and the media, becoming the target for creating nicknames, i.e. additional names bearing evaluative connotations. So, the online edition of "Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger" offers a retrospective overview of the nicknames of German politicians (Ulusoy, 2011): Gerhard Schroeder - *Schrödi* "Shredi" (*hereinafter the author's translation*), *Bub* "Boy", *Cashmere-Kanzler* "Cashmere Chancellor"; Helmut Kohl - *Der Dicke* "Fat", *Der schwarze Riese* "The Black Giant", *Birne* "Pear"; Konrad Adenauer - *Der Alte* "The Old Man" and others.

Such a nominative strategy has not left behind the current German Chancellor - Angela Merkel. In the media, there are more than 50 nicknames used in relation to it (Shpar, 2017). The very first and quickly loved by political circles was the nickname *Mutti* "mommy", as a former federal minister of economics Michael Glos called her in 2008. As noted in the Spiegel magazine, she actually treated him "with special maternal tenderness" (Raether, 2017). Later, the CDU party (Christian Democratic Union of Germany), led by Angela Merkel from April 2000 to December 2018, received a nickname in the media sphere - *Die Mutti-Partei* "Mommy's Party". By doing so, media have repeatedly tried to express the main public complaints about the CDU policy: when an adult calls another adult by such a name, it is perceived as humiliation (Raether, 2017).

Attempts by the media to deface the political activities of Merkel and her party by using nicknames have failed. According to Till Raeter, journalist for the leading German newspaper *Süddeutsche*

Zeitung Magazin and his article “Mutti aller Schlachten,” the nickname “Mutti” helped the chancellor and her party, because the “mommy” metaphor hid her weaknesses (Raether, 2017). According to German media, the linguistic analysis of the image structure of the *kanzlerin angela merkel* concept has shown that “a positive image of the mother has developed on the basis of figuratively-metaphorical and figuratively-precedental components. It is inspired by maternal care for the ministers of his cabinet, the German nation, the EU countries, as well as the activities of the chancellor in resolving issues of migration policy”)Tameryan, Tsagolova, 2018(.

Another example of a party’s media nickname is *Die Nazi-Partei* “Nazi Party” for *Alternative für Deutschland* “Alternative for Germany, AfD” In 2017, the article “Soll man sie eine Nazipartei nennen?” (“Should I call it the Nazi party?”) by the online magazine “TAZ” raised questions: does the AfD party deserve its nickname and how much such an unofficial insulting name can damage the political image of the party (Roth, 2017). The president of the Jewish community in Munich and Upper Bavaria called AfD a Nazi party, because "the motto of its new party program can be summarized as" Jews, get out of Germany" (Jüdische Abteilung der AfD gegründet – Demo in Frankfurt, 2018). And in April 2019, Zenke Riks, a member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, in an interview with the WELT newspaper, also openly called AfD the “Nazi Party”, comparing its politicians with Nazis. According to Ricks (2019), such a name is the best suited for the party that openly speaks about "disposal of people". Thus, we can assume that the name *Nazipartei* has already been assigned to the party in the media and among German citizens.

Such unofficial nominations for political forces are a powerful weapon in political communication, since in the future “these newly created lapidary, but capacious expressions are fixed due to repeated reproducibility in the media space or in political circles, and have every chance of crowding out the original name, which nevertheless continues to officially exist”)Ivanova, 2013(.

More complicated is the case when the party itself makes a proposal to rename a political association, and the media instantly react and offer variants of names with mocking, often negatively evaluative, semantics. Thus, in an interview with the Rheinischen Post newspaper, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, deputy chairman of the FDP party (Free Democratic Party), said that she sees the party’s success strategy for the future in renaming. And although the Party Leader Christian Lindner was skeptical about this proposal and talked about the need to bring the old brand back to life (Neuer Name für die Liberalen? FDP-Vize schlägt Umbenennung der Partei vor, 2014), a wave of proposals from the voters came up in the media space. In other words, the media initiated the creation of such nominations, and online readers enthusiastically picked up the idea. The following items were proposed: *Die Bedeutungslosen* - “Meaningless” or UFP, *Unter-Fünf-Prozent-Partei* - “Party-below-five percent”. The online newspaper “ZDF heute” in its official

Facebook account openly encouraged its readers to offer their variants for a new party name for the FDP. The post got 149 comments. According to readers of the blog, a new name will not be the key to the success of the party in the elections. Through mocking titles, readers expressed their complaints about the political activities of the party: PUD, *Politisches Unkraut Deutschland* - "Political Weed of Germany", *Die Leichtmatrosen* - "Sailors of the Second Class"; PfS, *Partei für Sozialabbau* - "Party for cutting social spending"; ASPD, *Alte Säcke Partei Deutschlands* - German Old Sack Party; R.I.P. - "Rest in Peace"; GSD, *Geldschlucker Partei Deutschland* - "Germany Spender Party". A number of comments of a negative nature prove that the media did an excellent job with their defamatory function through party nomination (*Die FDP umbenennen, um das Image aufzupolieren*, 2019).

There is an interesting article by Roland Börs, a specialist in commercial advertising and communication, regarding re-naming of brands. In his opinion, renaming an established brand is the riskiest mission in marketing. And the key role, according to him, in the successful renaming and "survival" of a new name is played by the media. And for the FDP, they are the main stumbling block. After the failure in the elections in 2013, the media sphere has begun to ignore the party: journalists lost interest in it, its presence in the media decreased significantly. In such circumstances, we cannot hope for effectiveness of renaming the party (Börs, 2019).

As a confirmation of this position, we can mention the fact that the leading German publication "Frankfurter Allgemeine" ignored the statement about the possible change of the FDP name, and the headlines of the other media resources displayed a negative attitude to this: *Die FDP umbenennen, um das Image aufzupolieren* - "Rename the FDP to polish the image" (*Die FDP umbenennen, um das Image aufzupolieren*, 2019); *Ist der Name schuld? FDP-Vize schlägt Umbenennung der Partei vor* - "Is the name to blame? Vice-chairman of the FDP proposes to rename the party" (*Ist der Name schuld? FDP-Vize schlägt Umbenennung der Partei vor*, 2014); *Was die FDP von Schokoriegeln lernen kann?* "What can FDP learn from chocolate bars?" (*Was die FDP von Schokoriegeln lernen kann*, 2014); *Die FDP braucht einen neuen Namen. Sterben die Liberalen aus? Die FDP steckt in der tiefsten Krise ihrer Geschichte, jetzt wird sogar über eine Umbenennung der Partei gestritten* - "The FDP needs a new name. Are liberals dying out? The FDP plunged into the deepest crisis in its history, which even led to disputes about a name change" (Nelles, 2014).

It is important to note that a changing media system creates new conditions for political communication. Thus, official websites, discussion forums and blogs of political parties have become a platform for discussions that allow participants to establish feedback, which can contribute to the formation and maintenance of a positive image of the party. So, Piratenpartei

Deutschland “Pirates of Germany”, constantly looking for a suitable name for its political association since 2010, in October 2018, at its new discussion forum, invited subscribers to speak out about changing the name to *Piratenpartei Europa Nationalverband Deutschland* - “European National Union of Pirates of Germany”)Diskussionsforum der Piratenpartei, 2018(. Internet users actively expressed their opinions. According to the survey, the modification of the name with the addition of the archaic component “*Nationalverband*”, which majority of readers associate negatively with right-wing conservative and extremist forces, (and it also entails lengthening the name of the party or turning it into an abbreviation), did not find support from the audience. But the German Pirate Party managed to reach a new level of interaction with the electorate. So, the political forum made it possible to determine what the target audience likes and in what way the brand is inferior to its competitors; It made it possible to know the needs of audience, their perception of the party, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the brand.

Discussion

The results obtained allow us to conclude that party nicknames in the media can pursue both a positive effect - to elevate the party over competitors, reduce the social distance between it and voters, as shown in the CDU example, and negative - denigrate the image of the rival party, increase the social distance between politicians and society – the nickname of the AfD party is an example of the negative effect.

At the same time, media are an effective tool for forming an unattractive image of the party. Owing to their ability to convince, nicknames of party names often fulfill the function of discrediting political opponents. Due to their expressiveness, they are easily remembered, capable of being stored for a long time in memory, evoke persistent associations and stereotypes associated with the object of evaluation, and are also capable of evoking a certain attitude to political power. However, it can be assumed that the manipulation of such “gray” technologies in the media space is a dangerous game that can cause serious political conflicts.

The study showed that the interest of the Internet audience in party blogs and forums is growing. Thanks to them, political parties can get an operative description of current state of opinions of an online audience, which makes them a full-fledged medium of political communication and an effective tool for forming the party’s image in the public mind. The electorate gets the opportunity to be heard and express their complaints and dissatisfaction with party policies by using mocking nicknames.

As for the renaming of political forces, the media here play a key role. Media can help the party in conducting a successful, painless brand renaming, or become the main obstacle for the party in this

risky way.

Conclusion

Thus, an analysis of new media resources has shown that discussions of the official and nicknames of political parties in Germany, along with the familiar ones, open up new media goals in modern conditions of political communication. Compared to traditional media, the potential of the new ones is much higher, they undoubtedly have a number of advantages, but they also carry certain risks, associated, first of all, with the possibility of manipulative impact on general populations. On the one hand, the participation of new media in political communication contributes to the development of civic activism in making decisions important for parties, forms a new political culture, and creates a new space for communication. For political parties, new opportunities for creating a positive image and attracting new communicator voters open up. On the other hand, new media technologies can have a negative impact on the perception of political power in society. The manipulative and defamatory capabilities of the media are very high.

We see the prospects for further study of the problem in examining the comic devices on the material of the unconventional names and nicknames of political parties in Germany in the modern media space, as well as in a detailed study of the general strategies for renaming parties. In addition, the developed approach can be used in the study of political communication in other countries with a different culture of naming parties and their “renaming” both from the inside and from the outside – by the media and voters.

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