

Barbara Witte, Claudia Auer & Kirsten Rautenberg

Vote for us - But nothing more please!
Political online communication 2.0. in Germany

Zuerst erschienen in:

Médiatiques : récit et société. - Louvain-la-Neuve : ORM. - ISSN 1374-7452. -
2010, Nr. 47, S. 5-9

VOTE FOR US – BUT NOTHING MORE, PLEASE !

POLITICAL ONLINE COMMUNICATION 2.0 IN GERMANY

BARBARA WITTE, CLAUDIA AUER & KIRSTEN RAUTENBERG

To what extent do political parties use Web 2.0 on their websites ? This article gives an overview of the results of a study implemented during the election campaign of 2009 in Germany. The results generally show that German political parties offer too few participatory elements for the implementation of deliberative politics, although social networks are a first step in the right direction.

Election campaigns increasingly take place on the Internet. With Web 2.0 political parties gained technical possibilities for citizen participation in political decisions with the aim of implementing a deliberative democracy and (re)gaining legitimization. But to what extent do political parties use Web 2.0 on their websites? This article gives an overview of the results of a study implemented during the election campaign of 2009 in Germany. It shows the intercourse political parties have with Web 2.0 elements and gives an outlook on further findings from 2010. The study relies on the assumption that participation in political discussions could lead to a deliberative democracy.

The German political party system

Based on the legally fixed sovereignty of the people, set in Article 20 of the Basic Law¹ and the normative functions of political parties stated by the Political Parties Act, political party communication aims thoroughly inform citizens, reducing the complexity of political issues and ensuring decisions and mobilization. Thus, political parties shall participate in the formation of the political will of the people² and encourage and deepen political education to enable citizens to participate in the political process³. The Federal Constitutional Court allocates political parties the role of the « mediator through which the political will of the citizens can also be carried out in-between the ballots »⁴ and uses the word « feedback » in that context⁵. Parties thereby obtain the crucial function of making collectively binding decisions « in the name of the

people ». Resulting from that, political parties are to the highest degree dependent upon legitimization.

This is stressed by the negative quantitative and qualitative transformation of the electorate and the politically engaged populace. Participation in federal elections and membership figures decrease⁶ and voter behaviour becomes increasingly flexible⁷. In addition, party affiliations loosen and partisan ties erode, and trust in political parties is lower than in other public institutions^{8,9}.

Legitimization and the principle of deliberative democracy

Legitimacy ties the validity claim of political leadership to a communicative justification act¹⁰. It « consists of an empirical component (public trust and support) and a normative component (justifiableness according to norms, values, traditions) »¹¹. It determines and results from political communication¹², an idea reflected by the heuristic approach of input and output legitimation by Scharpf (1970): The democratic input mainly encompasses (1) the authorization of power holders, (2) responsiveness in the exercise of power and (3) the accountability of power holders¹³. It is based on the idea that legitimation and « collectively binding decisions should originate from the authentic expression of the preferences of the constitu-

Barbara Witte est Professeure à la Hochschule Bremen. Claudia Auer et Kirsten Rautenberg sont collaboratrices scientifiques respectivement à la Technische Universität Ilmenau et à la Hochschule Bremen.

ency in question »¹⁴. The democratic output contains the idea of « government for the people which implies that collectively binding decisions should serve the common interest of the constituency »¹⁵.

The developments described above stress the conclusion that the legitimization of German political parties erodes¹⁶. The lack of responsiveness of the political establishment¹⁷ which depicts one part of the democratic input might explain these developments. The mass media have manifested a one-way communication: The political party speaks, the citizens listen. Re-gaining input legitimation might succeed if a discourse is established between the political leadership and the citizenship as well as among citizens themselves.

This idea is applied by the concept of deliberative democracy from German sociologist Jürgen Habermas. It describes a public sphere where all citizens discuss public concerns with rational arguments resulting in a reasonable public opinion that informs all political decisions¹⁸. As the direct political influence of the citizens is rather limited in a mass democracy¹⁹, the public sphere functions as an intermediary system²⁰ mediating between citizens and political actors and offering a platform for discourse. In a media society the public sphere exists mainly in and through mass media²¹. But they have turned the public sphere into a "mass media public sphere" that is likely to be dominated by collective actors such as political parties instead of the potentially affected citizens themselves²². Since the mass media failed to support such communicative action, other actors are asked to fulfil this task.

The cyberpublic and the fragmentation debate

In recent years, mass communication has increasingly moved into pre-medial areas such as weblogs or social online communities²³. Besides reflections about mobilization effects of political online communication²⁴, the process of fragmentation is discussed: The Internet and Web 2.0 applications create a « multimedia, multi-channel communication society »²⁵ that splits the public sphere into part-publics²⁶. « Thus, the existing national public spheres are undermined »²⁷.

The fragmentation of the cyber public directly leads to questions of « discursive contestation »²⁸. Some authors argue that « the Internet has been seen as offering citizens the opportunity to encounter and engage with a huge diversity of positions, thus expanding the public sphere »²⁹. Others state that people discuss (political) issues with like-minded others in rather homogenous groups and avoid differing viewpoints³⁰. According to Dahlberg (2007) « the public sphere is expanded by expanding discursive contestation and particularly by expanding contestation

of the boundary of dominant discourses »³¹. This however requires « multiple and vibrant spaces of deliberative discourse (intra-discursive contestation) outside the dominant; and [...] inter-discursive contestation (especially of dominant discourse) leading to openings and movements in discourse »³². According to Habermas these prerequisites are not yet met: «The Web offers the hardware for de-localisation of condensed and accelerated communication, but spontaneously offers nothing to oppose the centrifugal tendency. For now, the functional equivalents for the structures of the public sphere are missing in the virtual environments that re-collect the decentralized messages, select them, and synthesize them in a revised version »³³. The normative functions of political parties (see above) lead to the conclusion that these public arenas should also be offered by them.

So far, research has focused on the effects of Internet use on political engagement and political information (see above) but has neglected the communicator. By depicting the online engagement of political parties, the authors contribute to the "Internet-effect-discussion" from a communicator research perspective.

Combining the latest developments in German political engagement with issues of legitimization and fragmentation, the following questions arose constituting the basis for the study: Does the online communication of the federal political parties of Germany offer applications that hint at the development of a deliberative democracy?
- Which Web 2.0 applications are offered on the websites of the federal political parties in Germany?
- Do the federal political parties offer web applications that extend beyond simple references back to the parties, and thus allow inter-discursive contestation?

Method and results

The findings were collected in the research project « Future of the public sphere – the public sphere of the future » which analyses changes of the public sphere due to new Web 2.0 possibilities. The study of the German federal parties' online communication included the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) and The Left (Die Linke). The study is based on an examination of Web 2.0 elements offered on the websites of the mentioned political parties. All the elements relevant to the research questions were included. The categories for the analysis were developed on the basis of the Web 2.0 principles of openness, personalization, interactivity, participation and multimedia, as well as on the enhanced possibilities of information and relationship management³⁴. Regarding the difficulties of analyzing websites³⁵, the home pages

and first level pages were analyzed. The entire study will be completed in October 2011.

Under consideration of deliberative politics, the participatory elements of Web 2.0 reflect how far the party is willing to establish contact with the citizens. Participation was offered by the German parties mainly via profiles on social networks. All parties represented in the German Bundestag have their own YouTube channel. The second platform used most by the parties is studiVZ³⁶. Facebook is the best known social network worldwide³⁷ and is therefore used by every party except the CDU. Among the Web 2.0 possibilities the parties' own platforms³⁸ for members rank fourth among the Web 2.0 possibilities. However, this offer has only been developed in a limited fashion. Coming closer to the federal elections, changes could be observed. The micro-blogging service Twitter first was only used by the Green Party (March 2009); two months later the SPD and CDU used it, too³⁹. While the CDU in 2008 implemented on its website a survey as an offer for participation, the SPD and Die Linke still communicated traditionally via e-mail. But in 2009 the Green party added a comment function and a discussion forum. Taken together, the FDP ranks first when it comes to enabling participation. It initiated an info hotline, a wiki⁴⁰, a discussion forum, and a few months later a comment function. With these offerings, the political parties already come quite close to deliberative democracy. But this study does not analyse to what extent comments of citizens find entrance into party politics. Furthermore, live chats with politicians, influential elections e.g. for positions, and possibilities for uploading files such as photos were not offered.

In 2008 and 2009 offers of Web 2.0 elements increased to different extents without a clear pattern except for the fact that overall the CDU offers the fewest amount of features on its site while the SPD provides the most. By 2009, RSS Feeds⁴¹ could be found on each of the websites, as well as Geotagging and bookmarking. Interestingly, the parties increasingly offered multimedia-based content. In comparison to 2008, parties uploaded a greater number of videos on their websites as videos played a central role in online election campaigns. With this, parties adapted their online strategies to the usage patterns of the population: Between 2008 and 2009 the use of videos increased from 55 to 62 percent⁴².

Interpretation

In 2008 participatory elements for involving citizens in political issues were few and increased only in a limited manner. As a result, from 2008 to 2009 there is no evidence of a move toward participation. In comparison, the FDP offers the greatest amount of possibilities for citizen

contact, followed by the Green Party, the CDU, SPD and Linke. The FDP also ranks first in the number of possibilities for participation, followed by the SPD. Third place is shared by the CDU, Linke and Die Grünen.

Social network platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and studiVZ⁴³ have been recognized by all parties of the Federal German Government. To solicit the votes of adolescents, the parties have to follow them onto the Internet. In 2008, a study by Allensbach showed that the Internet has surpassed the newspaper as the most popular information source for the below 40 year old constituency⁴⁴. On platforms such as studiVZ, the parties have adapted to the conventions of the network to attract young people. Personal home pages of politicians have been the standard for years, but during election campaigns the parties have also discovered social networks as a means for getting their message out. In terms of participation, it is primarily Facebook which is used by parties for entering into dialogue with people. On Facebook, protest campaigns are advertised, and users can comment on the current political state or participate in live chats. Twitter is used as an instrument for attracting interest but not for participation. The tweets of SPD and Die Grünen lead to their respective homepages, while the CDU simply advertises its political agenda.

Only the FDP started offering participatory elements on its website. Via discussion forum and wiki, the party gives citizens the possibility to engage with party politics.

With Web 2.0, parties could establish points of intersection in order to promote deliberation. But so far the results generally show that German political parties offer too few participatory elements for the implementation of deliberative politics, although social networks are a first step in the right direction. As people are given too few opportunities to discuss contents, the communication remains top-down: the party dictates the content while the public listens (results of 2008/2009). Therefore, there is no chance of a dehierarchization of political communication.

The present study is still missing guided interviews with party leaders. A completed study of the authors in the Federal State of Bremen allowed a number of conclusions that can be transferred to this study. The main problem in Bremen was the scepticism regarding illegal content which could potentially be posted by users⁴⁵. The operators of the web pages feel responsible for the content and have only limited personnel and financial resources for their control. During election campaigns there are sufficient funds, but apparently they are used seldom if at all for participation on the Internet, possibly because the scepticism is greater the more a Web 2.0 application includes the users⁴⁶.

German politicians mainly rely on videos on their websites. YouTube is the market leader among video platforms⁴⁷, so it is logical to use it, especially for reaching young people. Another reason for focusing on videos on the Internet is that 60 percent of German households have a broadband connection⁴⁸ and therefore easy access to videos. Furthermore, the use of videos on the Internet has strongly increased. 62 percent of « onliners » used videos in 2009. A whopping 98 percent of 14 to 29 year old users viewed videos on the Internet casually, 83 percent weekly⁴⁹.

Conclusion and outlook

The German political system is faced with two developments. Political engagement declines and puts the legitimation of political parties into question while the spreading of new online media fragments the public sphere into parts. The Internet and especially Web 2.0 could be a way to direct exchange between the populace and political actors. It is the online media that are « predestined to organise discourse among remotely living and diachronically communicating participants »⁵⁰. But as Dahlberg (2007) states,⁵¹ a re-democratisation in view of the fragmentation of the public only exists if platforms are offered for inter-discursive contestation, especially of the dominating discourse⁵². Political parties ought to be possible carriers of these platforms. The question is in what way political parties can serve as a kind of junction in order to reunite the possibly fragmented parts of the public. For this purpose they must operate in social networks and offer participation possibilities on their own websites in order to connect the fragmented public. With this junction between political discourses, the fragmentation could potentially be bridged.

But the results from 2008 and 2009 show that the parties do not offer possibilities for participation. The activity on social platforms is solely for marketing purposes, not political participation. Political parties follow young adults on the Internet in order to approach a possible new electorate and to bind electors. There are possibilities for users at least at studiVZ and Facebook to leave comments and discuss political content. The FDP has started to offer participatory elements such as a discussion forum and a wiki. These offers can be a beginning for integrating people into political decision making processes⁵³. These few offered applications are first and foremost geared toward like-minded groups, but inter-discursive contestation is not possible. New analysis in late 2009 and early 2010, however, shows a change in reference to participation. Political parties increasingly implemented Web 2.0 applications such as live chats for discussing current topics with citizens. The FDP and The Lefts offer new Web

2.0 elements to integrate citizens into political issues. For example, in February 2010 the FDP asked citizens to decide on the election program. This can definitely be called progress toward participation. It seems probable that other parties will follow. If political parties include opinions and ideas of citizens in their political work, Web 2.0 features may become the basis for more democratization. That would change the political communication: It could be the end of top-down communication and the beginning of more democratisation⁵⁴.

- 1 cf. BUNDESZENTRALE FÜR POLITISCHE BILDUNG, *Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn, 2002.
- 2 cf. *Ibid.*, Art. 21.
- 3 cf. GESETZ ÜBER DIE POLITISCHEN PARTEIEN. http://www.bpb.de/wissen/INTCH5,0,0,Allgemeine_Bestimmungen.html. Retrieval date: 17.02.2008, §1 (2).
- 4 BUNDESVERFASSUNGSGERICHT 44, 125. <http://www.servat.unibe.ch/dfr/bv044125.html>. Retrieval date: 17.02.2008, II, 2. (own translation)
- 5 cf. BUNDESVERFASSUNGSGERICHT 85, 264. <http://www.servat.unibe.ch/dfr/bv085264.html>. Retrieval date: 17.02.2008, B I, 1.
- 6 In 2009 the participation at the federal elections decreased down to the lowest turnout with 70,8 per cent participation. Cf. K. SCHORN, B. GISART, « Wahlverhalten bei der Bundestagswahl 2009 nach Geschlecht und Alter. Ergebnisse der repräsentativen Wahlstatistik » in STATISCHES BUNDESAMT (Ed.): *Wirtschaft und Statistik*, 3/2010. <http://www.destatis.de/jet-speed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Content/Publikationen/Querschnittsveroeffentlichungen/WirtschaftStatistik/Wahlen/Wahlverhalten2009,property=file.pdf>2010: 223).
- 7 cf. K. v. BEYME, « Funktionswandel der Parteien in der Entwicklung von der Massenmitgliederpartei zur Partei der Berufspolitiker » in O. W. GABRIEL, O. NIEDERMAYER, R. STÖSS (Eds.), *Parteiendemokratie in Deutschland*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2. aktualisierte Auflage, Bonn, 2001, p. 330; G. STROHMEIER, « Die Modernisierung der Wahlkämpfe in Deutschland » in M. KARP, U. ZOLLEIS, *Politisches Marketing – Eine Einführung in das politische Marketing mit aktuellen Bezügen aus Wissenschaft und Praxis*, LIT Verlag, Münster, 2004, pp. 60.
- 8 cf. INFRATEST DIMAP, *Institutionenvertrauen*, 2009. <http://www.infratest-dimap.de/typo3temp/pics/5fb7240687.gif>. Retrieval date: 19.10.2010.
- 9 cf. for detailed information: WITTE, B., RAUTENBERG, K., AUER, C. (2010): *No profound change: Web 2.0 and the German election campaign*. <http://www.medias09.univ-cezanne.fr/index.php?id=4938>. Retrieval date: 20.10.2010
- 10 cf. U. SARCINELLI, « Legitimität » in O. JARREN, U. SARCINELLI, U. SAXER (Eds.), *Politische Kommunikation in der demokratischen Gesellschaft – Ein Handbuch mit Lexikonteil*, Westdeutscher Verlag GmbH, Opladen/Wiesbaden, 1998b, p. 253.
- 11 C. MEYER, « Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit », *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol 37, n° 4, 1999, p. 619.
- 12 cf. cf. U. SARCINELLI, « Legitimität », *op. cit.*, p. 254.
- 13 C. MEYER, « Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit », *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol 37, n° 4, 1999, p. 619.
- 14 F. W. SCHARPF, *Interdependence and Democratic Legitimation*, MPIfG Working Paper 98/2, September 1998. <http://www.mpiifg.de/pu/workpap/wp98-2/wp98-2.html>. Retrieval date: 20.06.2009.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 J. HAYWARD (Ed.), *The Crisis of Representation in Europe*, Frank Cass, London, 1995; U. v. ALEMANN, *Das Parteiensystem der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn, 2003, p. 187.
- 17 cf. C. LEGGEWIE, C. BIEBER, « Demokratie 2.0 – Wie tragen neue Medien zur demokratischen Erneuerung bei? » in C. OFFE (Ed.), *Demokratisierung der Demokratie – Diagnosen und Reformvorschläge*, Campus Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt/Main, 2003.
- 18 cf. Habermas in J. GERHARDS, « Öffentlichkeit ». In O. JARREN, U. SARCINELLI, U. SAXER (Eds.), *Politische Kommunikation in der demokratischen Gesellschaft – Ein Handbuch mit Lexikonteil*, Westdeutscher Verlag GmbH, Opladen/Wiesbaden, 1998a, p. 268.
- 19 cf. U. SARCINELLI, « Parteien und Politikvermittlung: Von der Parteien- zur Mediendemokratie? » in EBD. (Ed.), *Politikvermittlung und Demokratie in der Mediengesellschaft – Beiträge zur politischen Kommunikationskultur*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn, 1998a, p. 436.
- 20 cf. J. GERHARDS, « Öffentlichkeit ». In O. JARREN, U. SARCINELLI, U. SAXER (Eds.), *Politische Kommunikation in der demokratischen Gesellschaft – Ein Handbuch mit Lexikonteil*, *op. cit.*, p. 269.
- 21 cf. *Ibid.*, p. 694.
- 22 cf. Habermas in *Ibid.*, p. 272.
- 23 cf. U. SAXER, *Politik als Unterhaltung – Zum Wandel politischer Öffentlichkeit in der Mediengesellschaft*, UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, Konstanz, 2007, p. 89.

- 24 See among other M. J. JENSEN, J.N. DANZIGER, A. VENKATESH, «Civil Society and Cyber Society: The Role of the Internet in Community Associations and Democratic Politics», *The Information Society*, Vol 23, n° 1, 2006, p. 41; C. LEGGEWIE, C. BIEBER, « Demokratie 2.0 – Wie tragen neue Medien zur demokratischen Erneuerung bei ? » in C. OFFE (Ed.), *Demokratisierung der Demokratie – Diagnosen und Reformvorschläge*, Campus Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt/Main, 2003; H.-G. WELZ, « Politische Öffentlichkeit und Kommunikation im Internet » in BUNDESZENTRALE FÜR POLITISCHE BILDUNG (Ed.), *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte B 39-40/2002*. <http://www.bpb.de/files/51GR9W.pdf>. Retrieval date: 30.01.2008; S. BOULIANNE, « Does Internet Use Affect Engagement? A Meta-Analysis of Research », *Political Communication*, n° 26:2, 2009, pp. 193-211.
- 25 K. KAMPS, « Kommunikationsmanagement in der Politik: Anmerkungen zur "zirkulären" Demokratie », in J.-U., NIELAND, P. RÖSSLER, H. SCHATZ (Eds.), *Politische Akteure in der Mediendemokratie – Politiker in den Fesseln der Medien?*, Westdeutscher Verlag GmbH, Wiesbaden, 2002, p. 104.
- 26 J. HABERMAS, *Ach, Europa*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2008; B. WITTE, « Journalismus – Partizipation – Öffentlichkeit » in A. ZERFASS, M. WELKER, J. SCHMIDT (Eds.), *Kommunikation, Partizipation und Wirkungen im Social Web*, Vol. 2: Strategien und Anwendungen: Perspektiven für Wirtschaft, Politik und Publizistik, Herbert von Halem-Verlag, Köln, 2008.
- 27 J. HABERMAS, *Ach, Europa*, op. cit.
- 28 L. DAHLBERG, « Rethinking the fragmentation of the cyberpublic: from consensus to contestation », *New Media & Society*, Vol. 9, n° 5, 2007, p. 827.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p.828; N. DÖRING, *Sozialpsychologie des Internet. Die Bedeutung des Internet für Kommunikationsprozesse, Identitäten, soziale Beziehungen und Gruppen*, 2., ed., Göttingen, Hogrefe, 2003; J. G. BLUMLER, M. GUREVITCH, « The New Media and Our Political Communication Discontents: Democratizing Cyberspace », *Information, Communication & Society*, n° 4(1), 2001, pp. 1-13.
- 30 C. SUNSTEIN, *Republic.com*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001.
- 31 L. DAHLBERG, « Rethinking the fragmentation of the cyberpublic: from consensus to contestation », op. cit., p. 836.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p.836.
- 33 J. HABERMAS, *Ach, Europa*, op.cit., pp. 16 (own translation).
- 34 Cf. J. SCHMIDT: *Weblogs – Eine Kommunikations- und soziologische Studie*, UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, Konstanz, 2006.
- 35 M. WELKER et al., « Die Online-Inhaltsanalyse: methodische Herausforderung, aber ohne Alternative ». In: ders.: *Die Online-Inhaltsanalyse*. DGOF Neue Schriften zur Online-Forschung 8, Köln, 2010, Herbert von Halem Verlag.
- 36 StudiVZ is a very famous German social network platform on which students can network. It is similar to the Anglo-American Web 2.0 platform Facebook.
- 37 HITWISE (2009): «Top Social Networking Websites ». <http://www.hitwise.com/datacenter/main/dashboard-10133.html>. Retrieval date: 29.06.2009
- 38 Such as « meinespd.net » and « myfdp.de » for reaching and mobilizing members.
- 39 The research only considered the use of Twitter by the parties. The activities of individual politicians on Twitter were not considered.
- 40 In this wiki citizens could participate in the production of party position papers.
- 41 This application gives users up-to-date information once they have registered for that feed.
- 42 B. VAN EIMEREN, B. FREES, « Nutzungsoptionen digitaler Audio- und Videoangebote », *Media Perspektiven* n° 7, 2009, pp. 349-355.
- 43 In Germany, studiVZ ranks fourth among the most widely used web portals and is more frequented than the website of the most popular German newsmagazine « Spiegel Online » (cf. IVW 2009).
- 44 R. KÖCHER, «Veränderungen der Informations- und Kommunikationskultur », *Allensbacher Computer- und Technik-Analyse 2008*. <http://www.acta-online.de/> Retrieval date: 15.01.2009.
- 45 Cf. B. WITTE et al., « Marketing statt Mitmach-Netz? Web 2.0-Nutzung von Bremer Parteien und Medien » in J. WOLLING et al., *Politik 2.0? Die Wirkung computervermittelter Kommunikation auf den politischen Prozess*, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden, 2010.
- 46 Cf. T. BRUNAUER, « Social Software in politischen Kampagnen: Strategien von politischen Organisationen in Österreich » in ZERFASS, ANSGAR; WELKER, MARTIN; SCHMIDT, JAN (Eds.), *Kommunikation, Partizipation und Wirkungen im Social Web*, op. cit.
- 47 HITWISE, « Top Social Networking Websites » <http://www.hitwise.com/datacenter/main/dashboard-10133.html>. (2009) Retrieval date: 29.06.2009.
- 48 BITKOM, « Schmalband-Internet wird kaum noch genutzt » http://www.bitkom.org/de/presse/8477_59547.aspx. (2009) Retrieval date: 29.06.2009.
- 49 B. VAN EIMEREN, B. FREES: « Der Intergetnutzer 2009 – multimedial und total vernetzt? », *Media Perspektiven*, n° 7, 2009, pp. 334-348.
- 50 C. LEGGEWIE, C. BIEBER, « Demokratie 2.0 – Wie tragen neue Medien zur demokratischen Erneuerung bei? » in C. OFFE (Ed.), *Demokratisierung der Demokratie – Diagnosen und Reformvorschläge*, Campus Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt/Main, 2003, pp. 144, own translation.
- 51 L. DAHLBERG, « Rethinking the fragmentation of the cyberpublic: from consensus to contestation », op. cit.
- 52 J. HABERMAS, *Ach, Europa*, op.cit.
- 53 If this will happen is a question for content analysis or –in the research project following– qualitative interviews. Further analysis of the developments in and after the election campaign 2009 and 2010 by the authors follow.
- 54 The final results will be published in 2011.

"VOTE FOR US - BUT NOTHING MORE, PLEASE" : ABSTRACT

Dans quelle mesure les partis politiques utilisent-ils les possibilités offertes par le Web 2.0. sur leur site web? Cet article fournit un aperçu des résultats émanant d'une étude globale menée en Allemagne au cours de la campagne électorale 2009. Deux questions de recherche guident cet article :

- quelles sont les applications du Web 2.0. proposées sur les sites web des partis politiques fédéraux en Allemagne ?
- Ces partis offrent-ils des applications qui, au delà de la simple référence à leurs partis, autorisent une contestation inter-discursive ?

Les résultats exposés ici émanent du projet de recherche « Future of the public sphere – the public sphere of the future ». Celui-ci cherche à mettre au jour les transformations de l'espace public qui résultent des possibilités offertes par le Web 2.0. L'étude porte sur la communication *online* des partis suivants: les Chrétiens Démocrates (CDU), le Parti Social Démocrate d'Allemagne (SPD), le Parti Démocrate Libre (FDP), les Verts (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) et La Gauche (Die Linke). En référence aux théories de la démocratie délibérative proposées dans la veine des travaux d'Habermas, les potentialités participatives du Web 2.0. permettent de voir à quel point les partis politiques tentent d'établir un contact direct avec les citoyens. En effet, grâce au Web 2.0., les partis pourraient établir des points de rencontres dans le but de favoriser la délibération.

Néanmoins, les résultats pour les années 2008 et 2009 montrent que les partis n'offrent pas, sur leurs sites, de possibilités de participation. Leur action sur les plateformes web se limite uniquement à des fins de marketing. On y trouve en effet trop peu d'éléments participatifs pour conclure à une réelle mise en oeuvre d'une délibération politique avec le citoyen. Et ce, bien que l'utilisation des réseaux sociaux constitue un premier pas en cette direction. Dans la mesure où trop peu d'opportunités de discussion des contenus sont offertes aux citoyens, la communication demeure "top-down" : le parti édicte les contenus politiques tandis que les récepteurs écoutent son message. Il n'y a dès lors aucune chance de "déhierarchiser" la communication politique. Les résultats de l'étude ouvrent toutefois des perspectives. En effet, les nouvelles analyses menées sur la fin de l'année 2009 et le début de 2010 montrent un changement quant à l'ampleur des ressources utilisées à des fins de participation citoyenne. Les partis politiques font un usage de plus en plus accru des applications participatives du Web 2.0. telles que les chats permettant de discuter en direct de sujets d'actualité avec les citoyens-internautes. Cela augure peut être la fin du modèle "top-down" de la communication politique, voire une ère de démocratisation renforcée.