A Critical Analysis of Russian Political Party's Websites According to Navigation, Structure and Content

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During the development of information technologies era political discourse passes actively into the Internet space. Politicians, parties and the organizations use web resources more often to represent their position on the most significant social and political issues. At the same time this trend becomes typical for countries with highly developed democracy, as well as for nations, gravitating to authoritarian management methods. In the latter countries the Internet serves almost the only means of expressing opposition views to the current government. In this regard, the role of political web resources seems quite significant to promote the ideas of freedom of speech and pluralism. There are rather large number of political parties functioning in Russia, which have not received their representation in the State Duma of the Russian Federation due to failure to percent barrier during elections. However, they have a wide circle of supporters in the majority of regions in Russia and highlight their activities through their own means of mass communication, including the official sites. In this paper, we consider three such features ranking russianpolitical parties on the Internet –"Union of Right Forces","Right Cause","Patriots of Russia" in terms of navigation, structure and content of their official websites.

Key words: Political Party's Website,Critical Analysis; Web-Based Political Content; Navigation, Structure, "Union of Right Forces", "Right Cause", "Patriots of Russia", Russia.

The political Internet space is a wide reach field for different genre of scientific research.Norris (2003), Ward & Gibson (2009) deal with the study of the activity of political parties in the Internet. The works of Gibson et al. (2003), Kluver et al. (2007) are devoted to the analysis of organizing and conducting the election campaign with the help of Internet.

The object of March's (2006) research performs directly functioning of russian political parties in the Internet. Van Selm et al. (2002)are learning German political parties and their usage of the Internet in their activities. Mukherjee (2009) touches upon the problem of link analysis of Indian political parties' web sites. Suduli (2007) analyzes the Irish Political Parties online.

The works of Koopmans & Zimmermann (2002), Margolis &Resnick, D. (2000),Romero-Fr=as & Vaughan (2009) reveal the peculiarities of realization of political communication on the Internet, turning the searchlight of science on the problem of political issues online, and also on the main political trends based on Web linking patterns.

The main purposes of this study are:
a) To analyze the structure and navigation of Russian political sites;
b) To determine general trends in the formation of the political discourse of the parties with the purpose of involving more members to

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its ranks;

c)   To identify strengths and weaknesses in the structure, navigation and content of political sites;

d)   To answer the question, what the website of a political party should be, so thatthe users wanted to subscribe andparticipate in the activities of the party.

Methodology of this research

For realization of these goals, we have focused our attention on three elements of the policy site - navigation, structure and content. Three Russian political parties "Union of Right Forces, "Right Cause", "Patriots of Russia" were selected as the object of research. The parties are chosen on the principle of opposition to the authorities, and their absence in the State Duma of the Russian Federation. We investigated all textual material presented on studied political sites. Textual

analysis includes the study of the section titles on their compliance presented in the content. During our research we used the methodological works by Anufrienko (2014),Cantijoch et al. (2014), Chadwick & Howard(2009), Kravtsov (2012).

Webometric critical analysis of "Union of Right Forces"

Let's consider in detail the substantive part of the studied web-resources of the authorities.Let's start with the website of the political party "Union of Right Forces" - www.sps.ru. The information published on the website of the party has an official character. As a rule, quotations headlines are used to emphasize the position of party members about socially important events and phenomena.It is important that in the majority of the headlines the ideological position of the party is emphasized.
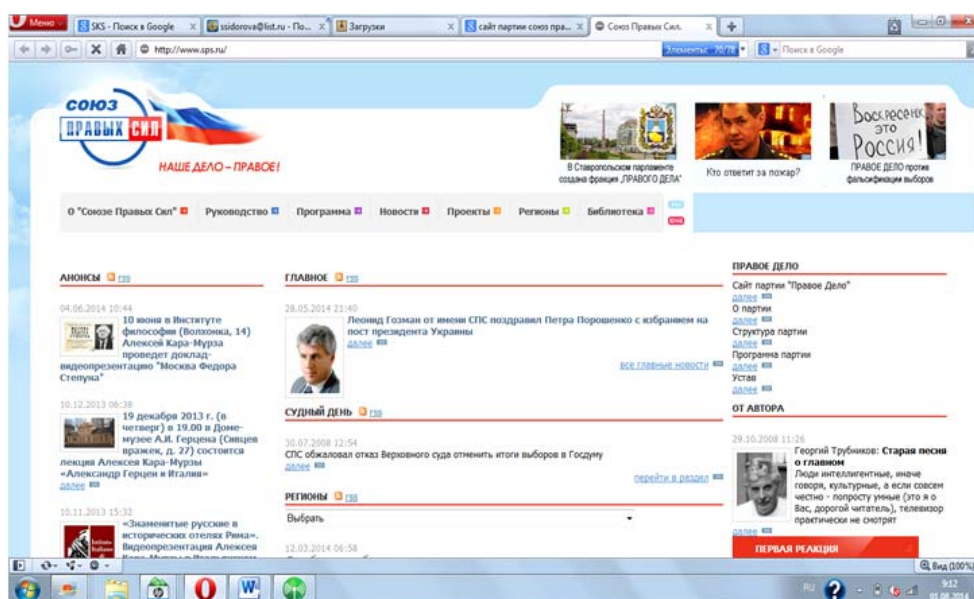

Fig.1. Screenshort of political party's website "Union of Right Forces"

The section "About the Union of Right Forces" (http://www.sps.ru/party/?PHPSESSID =0e1a99fe1fd5ec44bacf2fbaf8a31230) contains the information about regulations, documents, programs, Congress and Council of the party, the party hymn, etc.

The next section (http://www.sps.ru/ leadership/) contains full information about the party leadership; the links to the units are active, as they werein the previous division.In this case,

after the transition it is possible to find information about individuals of the party.

The remaining sections ("Program" (http://www.sps.ru/ideology/), "News" (http:// www.sps.ru/news/), "Projects" (http://www. sps.ru / projects /), "Regions" (http://www.sps.ru/regions/), "Library" (http://www.sps.ru/lib/)) also include a sufficiently rich information on its own topic. The website has a large archive of news for each region.

It is necessary to stress some remarks.The first is on the inaccuracy of the title section "Projects" because the user expects to see really specific projects (e.g., assisting the needy, building a socially important facilities, charity, etc.) carried out or being carried out by the party to make their public benefit. In fact quite a different content is placed in this section: from columns "A Century of Russian parliamentary" (http://www.sps.ru/?id=213128) and «15 Years of Freedom» (http://www.sps.ru /? id = 215282) to category «90th anniversary of the February Revolution» (http://www.sps.ru/?id=218984) and "Women's page" (http://www.sps.ru/?id=211375).

Secondly, the rubric "Projects", which has appeared on the website of the party in the section "Video", (http://www.sps.ru/?id=224015) suffers from a number of significant shortcomings. First of all the videos are not provided with the possibility of commenting.

Moreover some videos either do not open, giving an error (such as the video: "Oleg Basilashvili supported URF" (http://www.sps.ru/?id=224403), or do not exist theoretically (all videos related to Putin, "Nemtsov said on the first channel how Putin was on friendly terms withBerezovsky" (http://www.sps.ru/?id=224474), "Boris Nemtsov:Everybody is fed up with Putin"(http://www.sps.ru/? id=224472), "Boris Nemtsov challenges Vladimir Putin. Gozman's broken arm is ignored deliberately" (http://www.sps.ru/?id=224400).

Among the positive moments it is necessary to allocate the following:

1. The presence of the rubric "Readers' Letters" (http://www.sps.ru/?id=657) in the section "News", which creates the impression that the party puts emphasis to public opinion and feedback.
2. The appeal to different socio-demographic groups through separate headings in the section "Projects" ("Women's Page" (http://www.sps.ru/?id=211375), "Youth Page" (http://www. sps.ru /? id = 653), "URF"pleads in behalf of Russian scientists" (http://www.sps.ru/?id=216029).But here the question arises why only these three categories of citizens have been selected.
3. The site has a blog in the social networks "Vkontakte" and "LiveJournal".
4. The website of the party "the URF"has the English version (http://www.sps.ru/party/english/)which is the main position of the party and its activities, indicating the desire of the party to have colleagues at the international level.
5. The progress and the development of political processes, which are reflected on the website, are not limited to news and information materials. The inclusion of such columns as "What papers say" (http://www.sps.ru/?id=204046), "First reaction" (http://www.sps.ru/?id=190339), complements the content of the site with materials of journalistic nature, interviews and analysis, that underpin the perspective of problems by the creators of the political website.

As a result, we can conclude that www.sps.ru is a political site which is quite easy to perceive by the audience. However, in our opinion, more likely it resembles a standard site of the party, rather than the website of that party, which is trying to be in the lead.

Webometric critical analysis of "Right Cause"

The resource "www.pravoedelo.ru"ranks on a par with the examined website. It represents the activity of the party "Right Cause".A single-level navigation system is used to structure this site, which means a small amount of content. For example, from the 5th of June 2013 till the 24th of July 2014 a total of 52 publications have been used in in the news section of the party "Right Cause" (http://pravoedelo.ru/news/).

It should be noted that the site has a link to the previous version (www.old.pravoedelo.ru), which, in our opinion, was richer from the point of view of the text, and the illustrations. It seems odd why the party leadership decided to turn the site in quite a commonplace, not credible to the party content, calling into question its status as a political party. This site reminds rather the author's blog. The content of the articles deal with the state authorities of the Russian Federation, as well as headlines show that the party opposes itself to the current government. Irony and / or sarcasm are often used in the text urged to incite citizens to distrust and dissatisfaction with the government and the President.
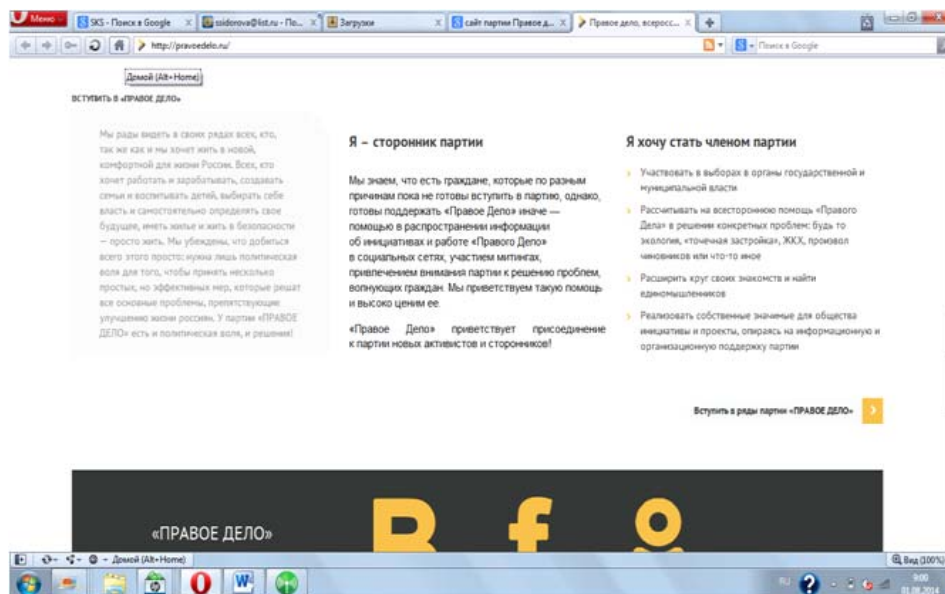
Fig. 2. Screenshort ofpolitical party's website "Right Cause"

As an example, we can cite the following headlines: "Forward, Russia, into totalitarianism!" (http://pravoedelo.ru/news/read/72/), "Sabotage of the reunion or deception of the people in the Crimea?" (http: //pravoedelo. ru/news/read/74 /), "Unpopular measures of a very famous Minister" (http://yaroslavl.pravoedelo.ru/news/read/10/), "The Stalinist Putin" (http://pravoedelo.ru/news/ read/ 68 /), etc.

Among the main drawbacks of the site we can list the following:

1. Articles criticizing the solutions of the current government of the Russian Federation are written in the form of short notes; they lack the analytical component, which would allow to convince the reader in the correctness of the expressed opinions.

2. The section "News of the party "Right Cause" doesn't match its name because it contains criticism of the authorities of the Russian Federation, instead the information about the activities of the party itself.

3. Let's also note the low journalistic professionalism of the publications because summary style "What? Where? When"does not require special knowledge and experience. Headlines of such articles tend to be informative, for example: "Government

Conference of theRD of the Party in Pskov region", "Pskov Delegates adopted the law connected with simplified filters during the gubernatorial election","Congratulations on Easter holiday". In this regard, there is a strong doubt that professional journalists are engaged in the work of the site.

4. The information presented in the sections "Party" (http://pravoedelo.ru/party/), "The leadership of the party" (http://pravoedelo.ru/rukovodstvo/), "The Charter" (http://pravoedelo.ru/party/charter/), and others is presented as a solid text mass.The text is not devidedinto sections, and it is not diluted with photographs or other types of material.

5. The party program (http://old.pravoedelo.ru/party/program)and picture-stories (http://old.pravoedelo.ru/photo) which were in the old version of the site are absent now.

Among the positive aspects of site content we can note the following:

1. The party is presentedin such social networks as "VKontakte" (http://vk.com/pravoedelo), "Facebook" (https://www.facebook.com/pravodelo   ), "Odnoklassniki" (http://www.odnoklass

niki.ru/pravoedelo).

2. Section «Projects of the party "Right Cause", in contrast to the website of the party "URF", contains real-world projects –"Save a tree" (the collection of waste paper, http://pravoedelo.ru/project/saveatree/), "Public watch" (it defends the interests of members of the public, http://pravoedelo.ru/project/9/), "Live - link" (all requests are broadcasted live, http://pravoedelo.ru/project/10/). Also, citizens have the opportunity to offer their projectsusing the function"I have an idea of the project" (http://pravoedelo.ru/project/idea/). However, it is worth mentioning drawbacks of this section, exactly the absence of reports on carried measures and their results. Each project reveals only its essence and gives contact information about its curator.

In general, it seems that the party "Right Cause" has been created recently (which is not true, since the party was formed in 2008) and, in this regard, it is very interested in increasing the number of supporters. This feeling comes from the fact that the website pays a lot of attention to attract the audience to its ranks.

The examples of headings are the following: "Join in "Right Cause", "I am a supporter of the Party", "I want to become a member of the party»,» Join the ranks of the party "Right Cause").

Webometric critical analysis of "Patriots of Russia"

Now we will analyze a site of political party "Patriots of Russia".On the main page at the left there is a menu at the left side of the main page which consists of the following sections: "News", "Governing bodies", "Documents", "Regional offices", "Deputies". Also there you can see links to a newspaper site "Patriots of Russia" (http://www.patriotrus.ru/), the party leader Gennady Semigin (http://www.semigin.ru/), the section «Mass Media about the Party», photo and video gallery are also located here.
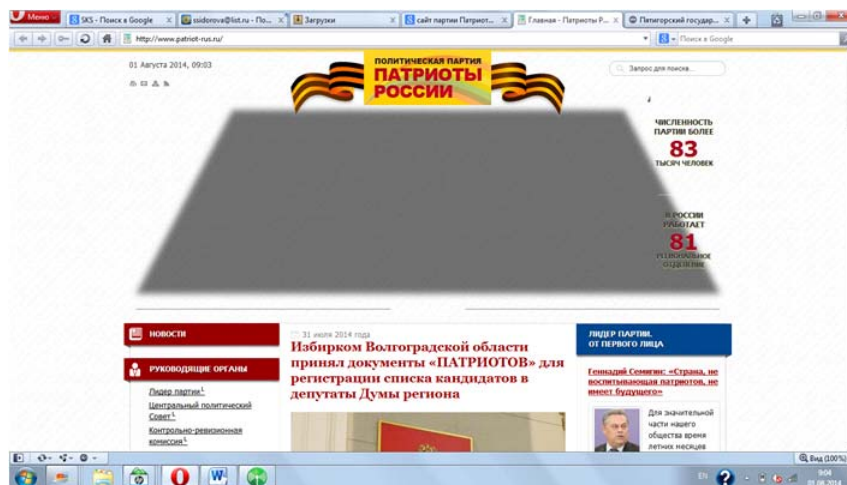

Fig. 3. Screenshort of political party's website "Patriots of Russia"

In the top part of the site against the background of 5 replacing each other photos there are three slogans of the party that reflect the main political priorities and cultural wealth: "Justice for all makes happiness for everyone", "Patriotism is an active love for the country", "Patriotism is above policy". As we see, the party bases its political ideology on upholding the principles of justice and patriotism. The analysis of publications and their heading parts showed that these two subjects are traced practically in all articles, emphasizing the thought that "Patriots of Russia" tries to solve the most acute social issues of russianpeople.

At the central place of the web-page there is the news line. On the right there is the announcement of latest news of the day, information for those who wants to enter and/or support the party, a social survey in the form of voting.

Among the main shortcomings of a site we will note the following:

1. Lack of creative approach to the website development which reminds the electronic newspaper, rather than an official site of a political party because of its poor design and navigation system.

2. The page of the party leader Gennady Semigin didn't open at the time of viewing, giving out an internal error of communication. This fact speaks about a low technological level of ensuring work of a site.

3. Also the section devoted to information about the implementation of social projects of the party is missing on the website, that is, in our opinion, one of the important criteria of effective activity of any party. Besides, "Patriots of Russia" position themselves as socially-oriented party.

4. The structure of the site is not directed to implementation of two-way communication with the users and/or party members. The availability of the section "Public Reception" gives the only opportunity to write a letter. It is impossible to track reader's opinions and the speed of response of the party leader and its administrative board to the citizens' requests.

5. The website in no way presents itself in social networks, and also has no English version.

Unfortunately, we have not found any strong elements in the structure and content of the website that could be attributed to the positive moments.

As a whole, the site has rather simple navigation, predictable structure and purely informative context of the laid-out materials that don't promote attraction to its ranks of a large number of people.

RESULTS

The analysis of the presented sites gives grounds to say that, firstly, the existence of formal political Internet resource, reflecting the basic ideology of the party, is a necessary condition for the existence of any even small party. Secondly, such sections as "Video" and "Photo reports" become important elements in the structure of a site. Parties which have these headings in the structure are characterized by the greatest attendance and activity of users.Thirdly, it is possible to speak about the tendency of political sites integration into social blogs. But this topic requires a separate in-depth research. Fourthly, the political parties on the Internet often tend to raise their rank by criticizing the state authorities. Fifth, the political leaders come to understanding the importance of implementation of a feedback with their voters as an essential part of their daily activities.

Thus, in order to make the website of a political party popular and frequently visited, it must contain the following elements: 1) blocks "Video" and "Photo reports"; 2) criticism of the state authorities and their suggestions for solving social, political and other problems; 3) representation in social blogs, networks, etc.; 4)to be as close as possible to the peoplethrough the implementation of continuous feedback, which was presented on the website.

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