

# THE USAGE OF ONLINE COLLABORATION PLATFORMS BY PARTIES

*Strengthening the “Party on the Ground” or the  
“Party in Central Office”?*

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## ABSTRACT

Facing linkage problems, parties in Germany have started to respond to a changing media environment by reforming their internal structures of opinion forming and decision making, *inter alia* reacting to the rise of the social web and the successes of the Pirate Party whose party organization is to a large extent “digitalized”. Whether and how established parties implement and adapt Internet tools, i.e., whether these could contribute to more participation of the “party on the ground” or whether they strengthen the “party in central office” is the focus of this article. The case study on the employment of an online platform for drafting a motion for the party convention of the German Social Democrats in December 2011 reveals that the “party in central office” controlled the online procedure as well as the processing of the results to a remarkable extent—thereby constraining the participatory potential of the tool. At the same time, the case study indicates a quality of online collaboration platforms that might limit the instrumentalization of these tools by the party elites in the long run and possibly re-empower the “party on the ground.”

## KEYWORDS

e-participation; party change; Internet; web 2.0; Social Democratic Party of Germany

## Introduction

*M*odern democracies such as the Federal Republic of Germany are frequently referred to as “party democracies,” since political parties play a crucial role in policy-making and in political recruitment in these systems.



Within representational systems, parties serve as indispensable intermediating actors between the society and the political system—from a theoretical perspective. Nevertheless, the capacities of parties to work as “transmission belts” of the citizens’ needs and preferences into the realm of political decision making have been profoundly questioned within the last years. Allegedly, a growing gap has been emerging between the expanding dominance of parties within (not only) the political realm, on the one hand, and their “losing ground” within German society, on the other.<sup>1</sup>

Political parties are suffering from this loss of ground and party democracy is losing acceptance because of what has been described as a double-edged linkage problem.<sup>2</sup> First, concerning their function as the voice of citizens’ preferences, parties have become critically disconnected from the societal base<sup>3</sup>—a process that has been intensified by the growing heterogeneity of German society. Parties are confronted with a more complex system of preferences and diverse communication demands within the societal base, resulting in a “dealignment” of citizens and their representatives.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, parties are confronted increasingly with skepticism: in Germany, both governing and opposition parties have dramatically lost trust and support throughout the population in recent years.

The external linkage problem is accompanied by intra-party processes of dealignment.<sup>5</sup> The traditional concept of the member-based party is under attack. In Germany, the number of citizens who hold membership in a party has decreased over recent decades—a tendency that can be observed more generally in many Western democracies.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, intra-party democracy suffers from the inactivity of a majority of members who refrain from engaging in inner-party opinion formation and decision making.<sup>7</sup>

Employing new ways to integrate members in intra-party politics, the German Pirate Party, which has succeeded in elections on the state level, offers a seemingly attractive alternative. Whereas the established parties have lost members, the Pirates were able to increase the size of their membership by almost 300 percent between 2010 and 2012.<sup>8</sup> A facet of the Pirates’ appeal is seen to be their alternative way of using new information and communication technologies (ICTs) for the organization of intra-party decision making, thereby constituting new linkage structures between the party in central office and the party on the ground.<sup>9</sup> The Pirate Party works with a web-based participatory platform called “LiquidFeedback,” which allows for a continuous inclusion of (potentially all) its members in collaborative processes of drafting documents like party manifestos.<sup>10</sup>

The established parties have started to use online collaboration platforms as well, however, so far only sporadically.<sup>11</sup> Why, how, and with which con-

sequences do the “old” parties apply such online social tools? This is the key question of this article, which is framed by the debate about the media- and technology-fueled transformation of parties and its implications for the aforementioned linkage problems.

In the next section, we sketch how the change of the media system and ICTs could change parties as organizations. Having outlined this debate, the article then formulates expectations about the role online collaboration platforms might play in parties and what consequences they could have for the power structure within party organizations. A case study then analyzes the collaborative drafting of a section of a motion that was submitted to the federal party convention of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in December 2011. Methodologically, the case study adopts the approach other studies<sup>12</sup> have applied when analyzing and evaluating online-based political processes of participation: mixed methods consisting of content analysis, participant observation, and expert interviews.<sup>13</sup> The findings circle back to the debate about party change and provide insight into the potentials and limits of online social tools for intra-party decision making. The findings also allow conclusions to be drawn on how far the use of web-based technologies could contribute to solving the double-edged linkage problem of parties.

## **Framework of Analysis and State of the Art: “Party Change” by Internet Communication**

Despite recurring crisis scenarios, party democracy has remained robust. To explain this resilience, research has focused on the way parties have managed to react to the changing environment in which they are embedded.<sup>14</sup> Scholarship on party change has illustrated the astonishing ability of parties to adapt to a fluid environment by reforming their structures and operations—characterizing them as “learning institutions.”<sup>15</sup>

One facet of this changing environment is the transformation of the media system, which is to a large extent driven by technological developments. In recent years, media change has been caused and formed by processes of digitalization, as the Internet and digital communication have emerged as popular means for political communication and participation.<sup>16</sup> Parties have responded. Empirical studies have identified a general readiness among party elites to apply new information and communication technology for internal as well as for external communication management.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, there is some controversy regarding the effects that increased use of the Internet could have on politics and political parties more

specifically. On the one hand, it was hoped that due to their reciprocal, interactive, and decentralized quality, Internet tools would open up internal party processes of opinion forming and decision making, allowing members and “friends” of parties to get involved more intensively, efficiently, and effectively. This boils down to what is called the participation thesis.<sup>18</sup> This normatively driven expectation has been countered by the rather skeptical view that the dominating top-down structures within parties would not be reversed, but reinforced by the application of new communication technologies, as party elites would be willing and eager to use them strategically for keeping control over the party structures. This approach can be labeled the instrumentalization thesis.<sup>19</sup>

The emergence of the web 2.0 has reactivated this debate in favor of the participation thesis, as the social web is characterized by its even more anti-hierarchical and egalitarian structures which should help in establishing and intensifying “bottom-up” processes of opinion forming and decision making within parties.<sup>20</sup> Yet, the rather general expectations concerning “the” Internet have given way to a more differentiated approach. The Internet is no longer understood as one monolithic medium but as a conglomerate of diverse applications. Even though they share a common technical platform, these applications differ drastically from each other in terms of their format, functions, contents, etc.<sup>21</sup> Taking this heterogeneity into account, expectations concerning “the” Internet and its effects on political organizations such as parties can only be formulated and analyzed with sensitivity to specific applications.<sup>22</sup> This need for a differentiated approach also applies for the web 2.0, which serves as an umbrella term for significantly different applications, each of which must be scrutinized separately in terms of its effects on political processes and actors such as parties.

In the following, we focus on online collaboration platforms as a single type of web 2.0 application and its impact on party politics. This group of tools is based on the wiki-principle and wiki-technique,<sup>23</sup> allowing for a large group of persons to participate equally, simultaneously, and transparently in the drafting, amending, and approval of documents.<sup>24</sup>

As mentioned above, right from its start the German Pirate Party has been using such tools to organize its internal decision making, underlining its identity as the party of the “digital era.” From a heuristic research perspective, however, it might be even more instructive to study the implementation of such tools within established parties, because this might result in the (technique-induced) change of existing structures of intra-party processes. This, again, could give insights into the scope and mechanisms of party change in general and provide information into the robustness of existing party structures.

The implementation of collaboration tools is driven by party structures that are characterized as a result of a process of oligarchization. This process has been a topic of party research for a long time. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, Robert Michels developed his “iron law of oligarchy” after observing a tendency of detachment between the professional component and the members of a party.<sup>25</sup> Recent developments of party organization, i.e., new processes of professionalization have revived interest in this “iron law.”<sup>26</sup> By enlarging the management structure and its role, parties have become “professional” campaign organizations in which the party in central office dominates the party on the ground.<sup>27</sup> The trend of professionalization and centralization also applies to the communication management of parties<sup>28</sup>—including the adaption of web-based applications within the communication repertoire.<sup>29</sup> This centralization gives the party leadership the power to decide on the employment of new tools such as online collaboration platforms, as long as these applications can be adapted and amended by the party. Seen from the perspectives of the party elites, it could be viewed as counterproductive to offer more opportunities for participation, as these could threaten the power resources of the parties in central and public office and strengthen the party on the ground. It has, however, been argued that opportunities to participate may also be offered symbolically, i.e., for “promotional purposes” and not for the sake of a “conversational interactive process.”<sup>30</sup>

On the basis of these considerations and applying a rational choice perspective, we expect the leadership of an established party to employ online collaboration platforms as a result of a cost-benefit calculation, i.e., only to a certain degree and in a way that does not jeopardize its control and power resources when opening processes of opinion forming and decision making—thereby at the same time ruling out the danger of manipulation by those outside of the party’s leadership core. Hence, the expectation follows that the party leadership will choose design and organizational structures that minimize the risk of losing control over the web-based participation process. Moreover, we expect that the party leadership tries to keep control over the processing of the results by installing mechanisms to eventually correct and filter the input of a participatory online process.<sup>31</sup>

Accordingly, we test two hypotheses in the case study, distinguishing two stages of the participatory process—implementation and processing:

- 1) During the phase of online participation and deliberation, the party leadership installs mechanisms that support its capacity to control the participatory process.

- 2) For the period after the phase of online participation, the party leadership applies procedures that enable it to control the way the output of the online participation is processed.

Any counter-evidence to these expectations, i.e., any effective limitations on the control capacities of the party leadership would provide evidence for the existence of a robust inherent logic of the tool.

## **Case Study: onlineantrag.spd.de**

In the case study, we draw on the employment of the online collaboration platform “onlineantrag.spd.de” by the SPD. Between 4 August and 19 September 2011, members and non-members were invited to participate in the drafting of the section “Labor and Economy in the Digital Society,” part of the main motion on “Freedom, Justice and Solidarity in the Digital Society” submitted to the federal party convention in December 2011. The online proposal was an exception, as all the other motions of the party convention had been generated with the usual procedure: according to the statutes of the SPD, only regional or thematic units and the board of the party are entitled to introduce a motion. The motions are usually crafted by groups of experts or party officials.

The idea of drafting a part of the main motion online has been embedded in the organizational reform of the Social Democrats. The party reform project was at the center of the federal convention in December 2011, aimed (among other objectives) at widening the participatory channels for the party’s members, as well as for non-members.<sup>32</sup> The “onlineantrag” was supposed to serve as an experiment for such a widening of the participatory repertoire.<sup>33</sup> By offering this participatory online platform, the party officially claimed to provide a new channel especially to young people who are not interested in engaging themselves in the regular party organization or for people who would like to concentrate on special topics.<sup>34</sup> The party management chose as the subject of the online-based participation procedure a net-related policy issue. This choice as well as the kind of tool selected can be seen as a reaction to the successes of the Pirate Party at the state level, especially in the Berlin election of September 2011 when the party received almost 9 percent of the vote.<sup>35</sup>

Within the SPD party structures, the media commission of the party board and a unit within the party management (SPD-Newsdesk)<sup>36</sup> were involved in the development of the motion. The term “party leadership” in

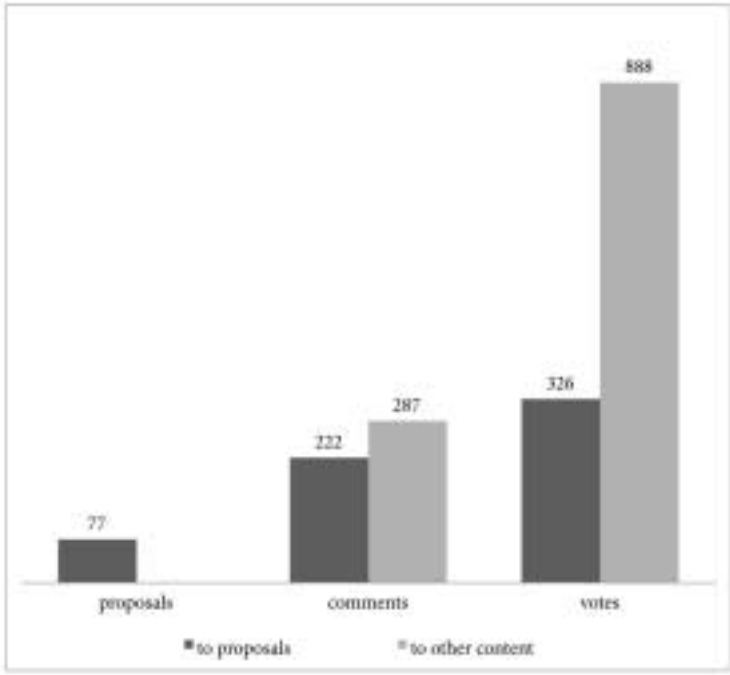
the following refers to both the political and the administrative branches.<sup>37</sup> Technically, the online platform “onlineantrag.spd.de” was based on the open source and social software “adhocracy,”<sup>38</sup> which had been modified for its use by the Social Democratic Party. In the adapted version, the platform provided three modes of participation: (1) to develop and revise proposals; (2) to give comments; and, (3) to vote.

To take advantage of the participation options, users were required to register on “onlineantrag.spd.de.” “Passive participation” was not constrained at all—the process was completely visible for all Internet users from the beginning to its end. During registration, the users could choose either to fill in their real name or to use a pseudonym. Information on party membership was not requested, but several users nevertheless voluntarily added it to their profiles. Direct interaction between the users of the platform was made possible by an integrated communication tool. For the first time on an adhocracy-based collaboration platform, a community management system was established to monitor and structure the proceedings on the platform.<sup>39</sup> The community manager—together with the responsible officeholder of the party management—was also in charge of the aggregation and first-step processing of the online input.

The participatory process was divided into two phases. For the first period (4 August to 13 September), the initiators uploaded six key questions on the topic “Labor and Economy in the Digital Society” to which the participants could respond by writing proposals and comments. In a second phase (13 September to 19 September), the users were invited to vote on the proposals that had been submitted and discussed. According to the guidelines on onlineantrag.spd.de, the proposals with the strongest backing within the community should have been considered in the draft version of the motion section. Within the total online time span, 408 participants registered<sup>40</sup> who utilized to the options to participate (submitting a proposal, commenting, voting) quite heterogeneously (see Figure 1).

Regarding the six key questions, the participants submitted a total of seventy-seven proposals and 222 comments to the proposals; a total of 326 votes were cast regarding the user-generated proposals (see Figure 1). Taking into account all activities on the platform, the number of comments totals 509 and the number of votes (including votes on comments) amounted to 1,214. These activities were not distributed equally over the users of the platform: a majority of the participants (66 percent) were not active at all; only a minority of 3 percent resorted to all three forms of participation. Most of the proposals submitted by the participants were not opened for collaborative drafting by their submitters. Out of the eighteen

**Figure 1:** Activities on Platform (Forms of Participation)



Source: [www.onlineantrag.spd.de](http://www.onlineantrag.spd.de); authors' calculations.

proposals that were shared for co-drafting, only four were amended by other participants.

Once the phase of discussion and voting on the platform was closed, the processing of the online-generated input into a chapter of the main motion was up to the community management and the involved representatives of the party management—the platform participants could not take part in this process. As a result of the processing, the proposals were sorted into three groups: “accepted,” “rejected,” or “not issue-related/other issue.” The status “accepted” was assigned to twenty-five proposals and “rejected” to eight. Most of the proposals (n=42) were classified as “not issue related/other issue” (see Table 1). The rules applied to classifying the proposals were not evident. For example, six proposals were “rejected” although they were related to the topic of the motion and had received support from the majority of the participants. One of these six proposals was later integrated into the section of the motion despite being classified as “rejected” before.



**Table 1:** Classification of Proposals by Participants and Community Management

		Voting by Participants			Total
		Adoption	Rejection	Balanced	
Classification by Community Management	“accepted”	24	0	1	25
	“rejected”	6	0	2	8
	“other issue”	21	5	16	42
	no status assigned	0	0	2	2
Total		51	5	21	77

Source: onlineantrag.spd.de; authors’ calculations.

Taken together, 18 percent of the final motion section is related to the output of the online discussion; nineteen of the thirty-three proposals that had been characterized as issue-related have been integrated into the document, out of which six were taken up word-for-word. The remaining thirteen were adapted in a rather abstract form into the motion (see Table 2).

**Table 2:** Processing of the Online-generated Proposals–Degrees of Adoption/Abstraction

	Frequency	Percent
Literal adoption	6	18.2
Similar formulation	7	21.2
Abstract adoption	6	18.2
Not adopted	14	42.4
Total	33	100

Source: onlineantrag.spd.de; authors’ calculations.

Twelve proposals which had received the support of a majority of participants were not considered in the draft for reasons that were not explained.

After its final drafting, the motion chapter was published on “onlineantrag.spd.de” and on “spd.de” and then via the party board submitted to the *Antragskommission* (motion commission) of the federal party convention, following the path of a regular motion for a party convention according to the statutes of the SPD. The complete motion was unanimously adopted by the delegates at the party convention in December 2011. Within the (rather short) debate about the document, the special procedure applied to draft the section was addressed explicitly, e.g., by labeling the motion as

the “most democratic” one of the party convention because of the large number of people involved in drafting it.<sup>41</sup>

What are the lessons of this case? Its study seems to support the expectations that were formulated at the beginning of the paper, assuming that the party leadership would try to keep control over the process itself and the processing of the input. The case study provides clear evidence for these assumptions, first concerning the way the tool was adapted and organized. The initiative for the usage of the platform was started top-down within the party management as part of the organizational reform that aimed at involving members and non-members more often and more intensively in the intra-party decision making. Moreover, the adhococracy software has been significantly adjusted for its implementation within the SPD by establishing a community management system, which is not a regular component of the tool.<sup>42</sup> The role of the community manager was especially strong in the final processing of the online-generated proposals. Furthermore, the online discussion was structured beforehand and constrained thematically by the party leadership. By setting the key questions as issue guidelines, the organizers specified right from the outset which topics could be addressed. Finally, although the final version of the motion chapter was uploaded to the platform, the participants could not comment on or discuss it.

In the way the input was processed, this case study also finds strong indicators supporting the expectation that by setting constraints the party leadership tried to remain in control over process and result. The first constraint lays in the selected objective for the online participatory procedure: the procedure was employed to draft only one section of a main motion that did not play a central role in the party convention that rather circulated around general debates on European integration and the planned party reform.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the section itself did not contain any concrete policy directions for the party in government or in parliament. A second constraint concerns the procedure by which the online proposals were aggregated and transferred into the motion. The mode of selection did not follow evident rules, save for the criterion that the proposals had to fit thematically. Whether or not a proposal was finally integrated was up to the decision of the platform moderators, missing an objective selection algorithm such as the number of supporters or comments. Finally, most of the online-generated proposals were not taken up word-for-word—the majority of them were modified before being integrated into the motion section. Several proposals were changed almost beyond recognition.

To sum up: this case study gives strong support to the expectations that were derived from theoretical and research debates. The party leadership organized the participatory online process as a “top-down” procedure and

kept control over the process and output by employing several filtering and moderating mechanisms.

## Perspectives on “Digital Parties”

The case study showed that the leadership of an established party tried to implement an online-based procedure of participation in a way that largely did not endanger its power resources. The findings give support to the instrumentalization thesis, indicating that party elites would be willing and eager to use media techniques strategically for keeping control or gaining more—certainly not for losing it.

The findings, however, can be read in another direction as well. The case study also reveals aspects that could be viewed as support for the participation thesis, when “bottom- up” potential shone through. One potential refers to the general chances of members and non-members to participate in intra-party proceedings—here the drafting of a section of a main motion for a federal party convention. The online procedure allowed members of the Social Democratic Party to take part in the process regardless of their belonging to a regional or issue-related party faction.

Moreover, by *de facto* opening the process to persons without party membership, both non-members and members enjoyed equal rights in submitting or commenting on proposals, as well as in voting on them. The technical platform principle of anonymity brought down the barrier between members and non-members, as the participants were not required to provide information about whether they were members of the party or not—at any rate, party membership was not a precondition for registration. This approach strengthens what has been called the “friends” sector of parties. Hence, the new opportunity of voice for members and non-members provided by tools like these are remarkable.

Nevertheless, this supply did not find a corresponding demand on the part of the Internet users. Only about 400 persons registered. Referring to the classification of social media users as “active,” “reactive,” or “passive,”<sup>44</sup> the largest share of the registered users turned out to belong to the last category—participatory features were used only reluctantly. This might be due to the special character of the policy field and the late and weak mobilization of potential participants. But, it might also point to general problems of mobilizing citizens. Research on political participation has generally pointed to robust constraints which cannot be tackled by participatory (online) engineering. Most importantly, the subjective importance of politics is low.<sup>45</sup>

As it was the first application of such a participatory instrument within the SPD, the initiative did not encounter an established online participatory culture. When such tools are employed more often, this specific participatory culture might emerge and enhance the willingness—at least of members belonging to an information elite—to participate significantly. The “online-antrag” has been succeeded by other tools within the Social Democratic Party. For example, the SPD parliamentary group has established a continuous “*Zukunftsdialog*” (“future dialogue”) as part of its external communication with citizens and organizations, aimed at integrating citizens’ views into the work of the parliamentary group.<sup>46</sup>

Other parties, especially the Pirates, have established much more of such an online participatory culture. For example, the party convention of the Pirates, which took place in the same month as the SPD convention, was to a large extent prepared and accompanied online. Members of the party—all individual “Pirates” are entitled to introduce motions—could present, discuss, and amend draft motions before the party convention via several online collaboration platforms. The motions for the convention were selected on the basis of the number of online endorsements, minimizing the role of the convention committee in setting the agenda.<sup>47</sup> However, the final decision about which motions the party convention should address at all was in the hands of all the members who took part in the convention.

There is much to support the expectation that more initiatives of this kind will be launched within the next few years in all German parties. The successes of the German Pirate Party in 2011 and 2012 have put pressure on the established parties to make use of online collaboration tools more intensively—thus, at the same time responding to the rise of a new generation of what has been labeled “digital natives,” i.e., people for whom the use of online communication has become an indispensable part of their lives.<sup>48</sup>

As these tools might become more important within parties, research needs to focus on the question of who exactly profits from such new ways of communication. Will it be only those who have been well-connected and active so far (within or beyond the party)? Or, is it possible to mobilize people who were not politically involved before?<sup>49</sup> Studies on the political use of the Internet in Germany so far give evidence to the online stabilization of existing offline disparities in political participation.<sup>50</sup>

At this point of time, it is unclear whether the party management will profit from using this tool for rather “promotional purposes.” Once these Internet tools have been used more frequently, it will become evident whether and how the online collaboration platforms unfold a robustness that might constrain the potential of the party leadership to instrumentalize

them. As with all innovative communication techniques, these platforms bring along their own format and logic (e.g., the aforementioned anonymity or openness) and could unfold dynamics which evade encompassing control by the party leadership. In this context, we expect the agencies and entrepreneurs who construct and provide these platforms to become influential actors, since to a great extent it is they who make the decisions on the algorithms and formats of these media techniques. In the long run, party leadership might lose control, which is not necessarily bad for the acceptance of the party system in Germany. As a response to the recent disarray of the Pirate Party and its collapse in the polls, however, the established parties might become reluctant to embrace such technologies any further.

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  22. See also Hartwig Pautz, "The Internet, Political Participation and Election Turnout. A Case Study of Germany's [www.abgeordnetenwatch.de](http://www.abgeordnetenwatch.de)," *German Politics and Society* 28 (2010): 156-175.
  23. Jan Schmidt, *Das neue Netz. Merkmale, Praktiken und Folgen des Web 2.0* (Konstanz, 2011).
  24. Anja Ebersbach, Markus Glaser, and Richard Heigl, *Social Web* (Konstanz, 2011).
  25. Robert Michels, *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie. Untersuchungen über die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens* (Leipzig, 1911).
  26. Uwe Jun, "Volksparteien under Pressure: Challenges and Adaptation," *German Politics* 20 (2011): 200-222. One development, among others, is the transformation from catch-all party organizations to a more complex type of relationship between leadership and membership outlined by concepts such as the "corporatist catch-all party." See Sarah E. Wilarty, "Angela Merkel's Path to Power: The Role of Internal Party Dynamics and Leadership," *German Politics* 17 (2008): 81-96.
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  29. Hagen Albers, "Onlinewahlkampf 2009," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 51 (2009): 33-38.
  30. Lilleker et al. 2010 (see note 12).
  31. See also Nigel A. Jackson and Darren G. Lilleker, "Building an Architecture of Participation? Political Parties and Web 2.0 in Britain," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 6 (2009): 232-250; Jennifer Stromer-Galley, "Online interaction and why candidates avoid it," *Journal of Communication* 50 (2000): 111-132; John C. Tedesco, "Examining Internet Interactivity Effects on Young Adult Political Information Efficacy," *American Behavioral Scientist* 50 (2007): 1183-1194.
  32. Astrid Klug, "Die Organisationsreform der SPD 2010/2011," in Mörschel and Krell (see note 4), 159-174.
  33. Interviews with Nehren and Reichert (see note 13).

34. Theresa Bücken, "Das Internet stärkt politisches Engagement—und somit die Parteien. Der Newsdesk im Willy-Brandt-Haus als Beispiel," *Neue Gesellschaft, Frankfurter Hefte* 11 (2011): 13-17.
35. Interview with Nehren (see note 13).
36. The newsdesk is a newly created editorial office which is located at the SPD party central office. It is responsible for the content on [www.spd.de](http://www.spd.de), the online news and party portal that was relaunched in 2010. See also Bücken (see note 34).
37. Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, "The Evolution of Party Organizations in Europe. Three Faces of Party Organization," *American Review of Politics* 14 (1993): 593-617.
38. The software "adhocracy" is developed by Liquid Democracy e. V.
39. Interview with Reichert (see note 13); in online-based participatory projects community managers serve as mediators between the initiators of projects and its participants. For detailed information, see also "Bundesverband Deutscher Community Manager," available at <http://www.bvcm.org>; accessed 25 September 2012.
40. Since it was not possible to conduct a survey of the participants on "onlineantrag.spd.de," no further information about their socio-demographic characteristics, party membership, motivation etc. could be collected and analyzed.
41. "Debatte: Netzpolitische Grundsätze—SPD -Parteitag 2011," SPDvision; available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kA2X-hcdxU&feature=plcp>; accessed 25 September 2012.
42. "Über adhocracy.de," Adhocracy.de; available at [https://adhocracy.de/\\_pages/about/uber-adhocracy](https://adhocracy.de/_pages/about/uber-adhocracy); accessed 25 September 2012.
43. Susanne Höll, "Geschlossen, nicht langweilig. Bilanz des SPD-Parteitags in Berlin," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 December 2011; available at <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/bilanz-des-spd-parteitags-in-berlin-geschlossen-aber-nicht-langweilig-1.1228258>; accessed 25 September 2012.
44. Daniel Michelis and Thomas Schildhauer, eds., *Social Media Handbuch. Theorien, Methoden, Modelle und Praxis* (Baden-Baden, 2012), 20; see also Jakob Nielsen, "Participation Inequality: Encouraging More Users to Contribute," Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox, 9 October 2006; available at [http://www.useit.com/alertbox/participation\\_inequality.html](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/participation_inequality.html); accessed 25 September 2012.
45. Dieter Fuchs, "Participatory, Liberal and Electronic Democracy," in *Participatory Democracy and Political Participation. Can Participatory Engineering Bring Citizens Back In?*, eds., Thomas Zittel and Dieter Fuchs (London, 2007), 29-54.
46. Zukunftsdialog (future dialogue) of the SPD parliamentary group: <https://zukunftsdialog.spdfraktion.de/>; accessed 19 March 2013.
47. For more information about the online motion drafting of the Pirate Party see: [www.wiki.piratenpartei.de/Bundesparteitag\\_2011.2/Antragsportal](http://www.wiki.piratenpartei.de/Bundesparteitag_2011.2/Antragsportal); [wiki.piratenpartei.de/Bundesparteitag\\_2011.2/Antragsfabrik](http://wiki.piratenpartei.de/Bundesparteitag_2011.2/Antragsfabrik); [www.lqfb.piratenpartei.de/](http://www.lqfb.piratenpartei.de/); accessed 15 May 2012.
48. John Palfrey and Urs Grasser, *Born Digital: The First Generation of Digital Natives* (Philadelphia 2008).
49. These questions are covered by the controversy between the mobilization and normalization hypothesis. See, for example, Andrew J. Chadwick, *Internet Politics. States, Citizens and New Communication Technologies* (New York, 2006); Fadi Hirzalla, Lisbet van Zoonen, and Jan de Ridder, "Internet Use and Political Participation: Reflections on the Mobilization/Normalization Controversy," *The Information Society* 27 (2011): 1-15.
50. Martin Emmer, Gerhard Vowe and Jens Wolling (see note 16).