

How does party members' online communication impact on intra-party discourses? A conceptual view

Dennis Michels¹

ECPR General Conference 2018 Hamburg

S47 – P287 New Parties and the Digital Era

DRAFT! Please do not cite.

1 WHY STUDY PARTY MEMBERS' ONLINE COMMUNICATION?

Over the last decade, political parties are increasingly using social network sites (SNS) like Facebook or Twitter for political online communication. During election campaigns, parties use SNS to reach out to voters and mobilise support, which has been extensively analysed by academic research. Recently, scholars paid attention to new forms of digital affiliation of voters to parties during the 2012 presidential election campaign in France (Gibson et al. 2017), interaction on SNS between parties and citizens during the 2011 election campaign in New Zealand (Murchison 2015), the analysis of political topics addressed by politicians on Facebook and Twitter during the 2013 election campaign in Germany (Stier et al. 2018), or usage practices of digital tools by parties during the same 2013 campaign in Germany (Jungherr 2016). Surprisingly, there is very little research on online communication by parties outside of election campaigns. Online communication between party members during 'normal' times remain largely unnoticed.

Following this path, the article at hand will answer the question how party members' online communication on social network sites (SNS) impacts on patterns of intra-party decision-making by extending intra-party discourses to SNS that follow a distinct logic of communication. Thus, it adds to the research agenda of intra-party decision making that goes beyond the aggregation of votes by taking discursive exchange between party members seriously, as it has been suggested by Wolkenstein (2016, p. 323). However, the contribution will refrain from engaging in the ongoing debate on the conceptualisation of intra-party democracy (Borz and Janda 2018, p. 3; Rahat and Shapira 2017), which is often normative and related to democratic theory, and will instead single out characteristics of online communication and their impact on intra-party discourses. The results might be helpful for concepts of intra-party democracy, which are, however, beyond the scope of this contribution.

¹ Dennis Michels, NRW School of Governance, University of Duisburg-Essen, dennis.michels@uni-due.de

Studying political parties' internal online communication is of high relevance, as new ways of digital communication could reshape party organisations substantially (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley 2016; Reichard and Borucki 2015). To get an idea of how this could play out, one can think about how intra-party decision making depends a lot on interaction in formal and informal settings of a party, which mostly means communication between different individuals and subgroups of a party (Treibel 2012). Consequentially, it is conceivable that an increased usage of SNS for internal debates could alter a party's decision-making processes in three ways: First, the specific social media logic (van Dijck and Poell 2013) alters communication patterns of who can talk to whom about what and how, which also affects members of political parties engaged in collective decision-making. Furthermore, the social media logic influences whose causes and ideas will reach out to most people. Second, SNS open up new possibilities of connecting with each other, which might lead to the formation of new interest groups, discourse coalitions (Hajer 1993) and new ways of collective action (Bimber 2017; Bennett and Segerberg 2012). Third, new ways of setting the agenda of topics for internal decision-making (Pfetsch et al. 2016) can influence what party members engaging in collective decision-making talk about in the first place.

Before going into the analysis, it is important to point out why results of studies of online communication during election campaigns will be largely excluded. Donges and Jarren (2017, p. 173ff) argue that elections and their run up are exceptional times that impact vastly on parties' communication patterns. Sarcinelli even states that researching party behaviour during election campaigns is deceptive and leads to misinterpretations of party members' involvement and level of engagement in their party (Sarcinelli 2011, p. 226). Thus, it is assumed that the extensive orchestration of the campaign puts pressure on the party to temporarily cede internal struggles over party leadership or policy development and redirect their communication efforts towards the public, demonstrate unity, attract attention and convince voters to vote for their party (Donges and Jarren 2017, 173; 177; Korte and Fröhlich 2009, p. 168). During election campaigns, political parties are under special observance by the mass media (Donges and Jarren 2017, p. 177). Consequentially, the effect of mediatisation (Donges 2008), i.e. the change of communication patterns to match a mass media logic, is even stronger. During election campaigns, the party will accept unilateral decisions by party leaders that are announced to the media to demonstrate unity, even though these decisions might undermine otherwise institutionalised processes of consultation with different subgroups of a party (Korte et al. 2018, p. 164; Grunden 2009, p. 92). Intra-party decision-making processes, e.g. about new positions on certain policies, might therefore be misunderstood when they are studied during election campaigns. After the election, debates about leadership, policy development, or organisational reform (Gauja 2017), that have temporarily been ceded, will continue and parties return to internal

discussions about the future of their party organisation. It is therefore reasonable to take a closer look at internal dynamics of parties outside of campaign logics.

The impact of new, digital ways of communication on the party organisation itself has not been intensively researched so far. Most studies focus on online communication between parties and the public (Nielsen and Vaccari 2013; Vowe and Henn 2016), instead of internal online communication between and amongst party members. An exception is Dommett's (2018) analysis of party elite's acceptance of interactive digital technologies in the UK. She stresses that party elites showed a great interest in using digital technology to facilitate internal interaction between members (Dommett 2018, 6). However, she focused on communication tools that were introduced by the parties themselves instead of public social network sites like Facebook and Twitter that will be dealt with in this contribution. Another recent study by Gerl et al. (2018) examined the degree of participation of party members of the German Green Party on an internal online platform that was installed to discuss policy issues and generate policy proposals. Their findings show rather low overall participation, not differing substantially from offline participation. Whereas their goal was to show who participates in online communication environments and how this differs from offline participation, the goal of the article at hand is to point out the social media logic that can foster popularity of single actors or new ways of connecting with each other, new possibilities for collective action and new possibilities of influencing the intra-party agenda. If it is assumed that the same people who participate offline also engage in online communication, it is even more interesting to see what new possibilities they encounter that can change parties' decision-making processes profoundly.

Therefore, this article answers the question how party members' online communication on social network sites (SNS) impacts on patterns of intra-party decision-making by taking into consideration characteristics of intra-party discourses that are extended to SNS. Following Gauja's (2017, p. 14) theoretical claim for "constructivist variants of institutionalist analysis" in party research, this article will use the discursive institutionalism approach by Schmidt (2012; 2010) combining it with both the concepts of discourse and discourse coalitions by Hajer (2002; 1993) to understand communication and decision-making dynamics inside parties and bring them into contact with insights about online communication on SNS (van Dijck and Poell 2013; Bimber 2017; Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Pfetsch et al. 2016).

The article consists of two major parts. In the first part political parties will be presented as sets of institutions from a discursive institutionalism perspective. This will be followed by a conceptualisation of decision-making processes in political parties and an explanation of how discourses about intra-party decision-making processes have been dominated by party leaders until now. The second part

presents concepts of digital collective action, social media logic and agenda setting on SNS and explains how they affect intra-party discourses on collective decisions.

2 INSTITUTIONS, DISCOURSE AND DISCOURSE COALITIONS WITHIN POLITICAL PARTIES

As the article mainly draws on both the concepts of discursive institutionalism by Schmidt (2012) and discourse and discourse coalitions by Hajer (1993), it is necessary to define the notion of discourse. This counts all the more as there are numerous definitions and applications of the concept, depending not only on discipline, but also on language (Keller 2011, p. 13). It is important to notice that these conceptualisations are meant to cover both offline and online discourses for the purpose of this contribution. According to Hajer (2002, p. 63), discourse can be understood as “an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena. Meaning is thus produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices”. To distinguish it from the concept of discussion, Hajer (2002, p. 64) states that discourse “refers to a set of concepts that structure the contributions of a group of participants to a discussion” and “a particular pattern to be found in a discussion, and hence a term reserved for something the analyst finds”. Simply put, discourses consist of a set of specifically defined concepts or schemes. Often, there is more than one discourse about the same phenomenon, using different concepts for the same phenomenon and thereby creating different stories about the same issue. As an example, one can think about the question if the arrival of refugees from foreign countries is a humanitarian issue or a security issue. The security discourse would exist together with the humanitarian discourse in this case.

Hajer’s concepts of discourse and discourse coalitions are originated in policy analysis, but they are easily transferable to party research, as will be seen later. Hajer speaks of arguments and struggles over ideas between interest groups, politicians, governments, the media and other actors on a state level. He explains that these actors group around different storylines that use the discourse’s concepts they are relating to, to describe specific policy problems and solutions. In his example of acid rain in Great Britain in the 1980s and 1990s, different discourses were used by actors to define acid rain and environmental pollution either as a rather scientific problem that needs pragmatic and reactive solutions when it occurs, or to redefine the concept of nature as a whole, into a resource that needs to be protected proactively (Hajer 1993, p. 48ff).

By discourse coalition, Hajer (1993, p. 45) means “a group of actors who share a social construct”, i.e. who use the same definition of concepts (e.g. acid rain), often supported by older, similar concepts that are attached to a historical, already existing discourse. The simultaneous existence of different

discourses on the same subject is a crucial point for the analysis of *political* research subjects, as it points at the struggle over ideas between actors that might eventually lead to political decisions and action. As Hajer (2002, p. 63) puts it, when speaking about the so called argumentative turn in social sciences, it is “not so much our analysis of the ‘arguments’”, but rather the *arguing between actors* that is meant. The “struggle over ideas” has been called the essence of the political process by representatives of the argumentative turn (Stone 2002, p. 11). Discourse analysis in accordance with the argumentative turn “tracks the way that people *position* one another through language use” (Hajer 2002, p. 63, original emphasis). By citing Billig (1987, p. 91), Hajer (1993, p. 45) underlines that “one should not examine merely the words within that discourse or the images in the speaker’s mind at the moment of utterance. One should also consider the positions which are being criticized, or against which a justification is being mounted. Without knowing counter-positions, the argumentative meaning will be lost”.

Schmidt (2012, p. 85) has a slightly different take on discourses in her theory of discursive institutionalism. She talks about discourse as “theorization not just as the representation or embodiment of ideas – as in discourse analysis [...] – but also as the interactive processes by and through which ideas are generated in discourse coalitions and discursive policy communities more generally [...] and communicated to the public”. The interactive dimension of discourses stressed by Schmidt is essential in understanding how ideas are transformed into discourse, e.g. by introducing new concepts or reframing old concepts. This article uses Hajer’s definition of discourses as sets of concepts and schemes that can be discovered as patterns in a discussion and combines it with Schmidt’s notion of interactive processes that underline the process of exchanging arguments and ideas, which leads to the formation of groups of common interest, i.e. discourse coalitions. As the concept of discourse coalitions was introduced by Hajer, it forms a nice juncture between both authors’ approaches.

Turning to the topic of this contribution, intra-party decisions, it is plausible to say that intra-party decision-making is generally structured like policy-making in its actual meaning in terms of different interest groups struggling over ideas that are to be implemented in a political process. In a policy-making process, not only policy makers, but also interest groups like companies, industry, NGOs, trade unions or even media organisations and journalists engage in discussions and use different discourses and story lines on issues to represent their ideas and preferences about a topic. They struggle over their ideas in order to convince others, they engage in discursive interaction and form discourse coalitions, to influence policy-makers and make them consider their story when drafting the policy.

Regarding intra-party decisions, this process of discursive interaction, struggle over ideas and forming of discourse coalitions happens as well, as in the end, intra-party politics is politics as well. For instance,

in the process of developing new policy positions for a political manifesto, intra-party struggles on policies happen in a similar way as on state level from a discourse point of view, only including different actors and some different institutional rules. This is because parties are fragmented entities consisting of different subgroups of party members, who partially organise themselves in factions or interest groups of various kinds and on different levels (Scarrow and Webb 2017, p. 7f; Jun and Höhne 2010) and struggle for influence over the party and its collective decisions (Berge and Poguntke 2017, p. 138ff). Inside parties, these different factions, i.e. groups of party members that represent different ideological stances, use different story lines about the same issues and try to persuade the decision-makers of their version of reality by relating to different discourses. When it comes to policy positions, even actors from outside the party might try to influence party actors to adopt decisions that are in line with their ideas. Often companies and NGOs cultivate close relationships to influential party members to increase the chances that their ideas and interests will be represented inside the party.

Consequentially, discourse coalitions will form around story lines about intra-party decisions as well. The different groups will consist mostly of party members with certain shared ideas, however, they can be supported by journalists or NGO-representatives or other non-party actors as well. Even when it comes to intra-party decisions about, e.g., a new party leader, there will be different story lines of different intra-party subgroups about who should be the next party leader, according to what criteria and why. The patterns of their reasoning and the concepts used will reflect different discourses on what is a good party leader at a certain point of party history and why. In the process of every single intra-party decision, there will be struggles, arguments, discussions and different story lines represented by different intra-party groups about how to take that decision and why. Often, the most influential of these groups is the party leadership, as will be shown later.

To give an example, one can imagine how, e.g. subgroups of a party discuss the party's position on refugees by referring to them either as humans that need to be protected or as potential labour force for the domestic economy or maybe as people of foreign origin and culture that need to be integrated into society. The different concepts are expressions of different discourses that exist within a party. Through discursive interaction the party members learn about different ideas on the topic and eventually form discourse coalitions to gain support for their positions. The most influential and convincing story line might determine the result of the intra-party decision on migration and refugee policies that, in turn, will be the party's position when engaging in discussions with other actors, e.g. other parties.

Turning back to Schmidt's discursive institutionalism, it already becomes clear from its name that discourse is only the first half of her theory, which also discusses the role of institutions. In the article

at hand, political parties are conceptualised as sets of institutions that form the institutional environment for all party members, which is further elaborated on in the next chapter.

2.1 POLITICAL PARTIES AS INSTITUTIONS

This article understands political parties first and foremost as sets of institutions and institutional environment for party members. In party organisation research this approach might be rather unusual, as a lot of party research that explains party organisations is structured along the well-known ideal types mass party, catch-all party, cartel party, etc. (Scarrow and Webb 2017, p. 15). However, in line with Scarrow and Webb (2017, p. 6), these ideal types are “regarded as heuristic devices [...] rather than lawlike statements that are worth keeping if it turns out they bear little relation to actual circumstances” and are therefore dismissed for the purpose of this article. The conceptualisation of parties as institutions that are (re-)produced through discursive interaction of party members has the advantage of connecting structure with agency, i.e. accounting for the influence of formal and informal structures of political parties as well as practices and discourse, which places a focus on the agency of party members. Moreover, the approach is open for research on all levels of analysis, from the interactions of party members (micro) to collective decisions by the party members (meso) and an outside view of the parties as unitary actors in a bigger environment such as the party system (macro).

Accounting for the influence of both structure and agency is a crucial point when talking about discourse coalitions of groups of actors. One of the key issues in most institutionalist theories, according to Gauja (2017, p. 14), is the too often neglected “motivation of key actors and their place within particular institutional environments”, i.e. the overemphasis of environmental structure at the expense of agency. Instead, she supports constructivist versions of institutionalism that take ideas and discourse among actors seriously. She suggests focussing on discourse between actors who construct “their realities and fields of action, [...] less impeded by institutional constraints”. The idea about how the organisation works and ought to work are interactively (re-)constructed by a collective of actors, states Gauja in accordance with Lowndes and Roberts (2013, p. 99). Therefore, the “perceptions of party actors as to their institutional environment are just as – if not more – important than the environment itself.” This view is strongly supported by Wolkenstein (2016, p. 323) who criticises that scholarship on intra-party democracy and decision-making in political parties “primarily concerned with procedures of aggregation – procedures in which votes (for a candidate or a policy) are taken and counted”. Instead, Wolkenstein suggests, party research should take seriously “procedures of deliberation within parties – discursive exchanges between party members, in which they form their preferences about particular policies or candidates by weighing arguments for and against” (Wolkenstein 2016, p. 323).

This contribution follows Gauja's and Wolkenstein's ideas by drawing on Schmidt's (2012; 2010) version of discursive institutionalism and Hajer's (2002; 1993) concepts of discourse and discourse coalitions. According to Hajer (1993, p. 46), institutions solidify when many people use a discourse to conceptualise the world. The process he calls *discourse institutionalisation* results, e.g., in organisational practices or traditional ways of reasoning. As a consequence of institutionalised discourses, actors are socialised into the frame of the discourse over time, i.e. the institutions influence them. This is how discourses become institutions.

Schmidt describes institutions as "'meaning context' in which ideas, arguments, and discourse make sense, such that speakers 'get it right' in the ideational rules or rationality of a given setting by addressing their remarks to the 'right' audiences at the 'right' times in the 'right' ways" (Schmidt 2012, p. 105). In fact, she does not move far away from the classical sociological understanding of institutions as regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive rules of society (Scott and Davis 2007, p. 258ff). Even though this understanding could be criticised, it will be accepted for the purpose of this article. Furthermore, Schmidt describes institutional context as "'forum' within which the discourse proceeds, following a particular logic of communication", even when participants are not of the same opinion. Both Hajer's and Schmidt's concepts of institutions are combined in this article: Whereas Hajer stresses the process of discourses becoming institutions, Schmidt focusses on the implications institutions have for actors as an influential environment, as communicative rules and meaning context of their utterances.

By using discursive institutionalism, political parties themselves can be understood as sets of institutions. Political parties, their rules, structures and practices are thus a result of groups of actors discussing about founding a party and forming according to specific reasonable rules. In practicing the rules and processes, in acting and communicating in accordance with these institutionalised discourses, the party is reproduced permanently by its members and even by actors beyond the borders of the party. Moreover, the party itself can be understood as such a "forum", as described by Schmidt, of formal and informal communicative rules that guide the party members' discourse, which ultimately leads to collective action, i.e. intra-party decisions. Consequently, the separation of the concepts of organisation and institution that is supported by organisational sociology is suspended. Party members perceive the institutional environment *outside* a party in the same way they perceive institutions *inside* the party, which, in the end, are constructed by the party members via discursive interaction as the set of institutions they understand as 'the party'. The party is an institutional environment for the party members, albeit a closer one compared to, e.g., the party system or the media, when it comes to intra-party decisions.

To illustrate this, one can think of party conferences as a more formal institution, party culture as a more subliminal, but nonetheless meaningful institution, hierarchy as institution representing the organisational structure, the need to negotiate with representatives of intra-party interest groups or factions to include them in policy development as an informal institution, and so on. Generally, parties consist of a plethora of institutions that have been established over a long time, sometimes decades ago, sometimes very recently, often copied from other parties, when they proved to be successful. Party institutions reflect the formal and informal organisational structure but also formal and informal organisational practice, perceptions and world views. Simply said, they form 'the party' for the party members.

However, in a more practical sense, one can also find intra-party institutions in party meetings on different levels that follow plenty of formal rules about who can speak to whom, in what order, how long, etc. to bring forward arguments about any given topic and try to convince others of their opinion. Moreover, subtler and more informal meaning context and rules of communication are imaginable, e.g. which arguments make sense in regard to intra-party decisions dependent on formal or informal party structure or party culture. Other examples include normative rules, e.g. not to criticise party leaders too harshly or following the opinion of others who might be able to benefit one's own career. As 'meaning context', these rules influence all communication between party members all the time – even when there is no official meeting taking place and discourse happens in private, sometimes even hidden back room settings. The party provides party members with the context where "their ideas have meaning" and "their discourses have communicative force" (Schmidt 2012, p. 105) in situations long before actual voting-procedures on a decision that transfers their ideas and opinions into collective action. Ultimately, parties are the most important institutional context for intra-party discourse that forms the process of decision making by arguing and struggling over ideas, rather than the outcome of the decision that can be seen after the act of voting during a meeting or conference.

It should not be forgotten, however, that not only party culture or informal, unspoken rules form the institutional context, but also the formal organisational structure of a party that is written down in constitutions, laws and statutes (Scarrow et al. 2017). Among others, the separation into regional branches, an officially elected leadership, a system of party delegates on different federal levels, as well as the establishment of factions and competing interest groups all "affect where discourse matters by establishing who talks to whom about what, where, and when" (Schmidt 2012, p. 106). For example, being elected as a delegate for an annual conference enables a party member to speak directly to other representatives from local branches and the party leadership in an institutional setting that guarantees high attention for the speaker, that may even go beyond the borders of the party. In this way the

formal structure of the party influences discourses by forming an institutional context for the discursive interaction between party members.

The understanding of parties as sets of institutions leaves room for difference between parties. Even though the article at hand takes a more general view on how intra-party decision making is affected by social media, the institutions that account for differences in parties' structures have to be mentioned. They will be important for further case-driven research, as included parties will have to be examined considering their different institutional structure. Scarrow and Webb (2017, p. 7) point at four general structural differences ("structural sub-dimensions"), which provide a good starting point for the description of institutional differences between parties with a special regard to the "location of decision-making within the party" (Scarrow and Webb 2017, p. 7). The first dimension is called "Leadership Autonomy-Restriction" (Scarrow and Webb 2017, p. 7) and describes the set of institutions that determine how much influence the leadership has over its party. Formal and informal party structures as well as practices may influence this dimension, e.g. when a party prefers a strong group leadership instead of a single leader, a strong central office that controls the leadership on behalf of the party members or also internal rules that determine the leadership election can have an impact on the leadership's influence. The second dimension is called "Centralization-Localization" (Scarrow and Webb 2017, p. 7f) and refers to the question how influence is divided between the vertical levels of a party, i.e. between local branches, mid-level branches (e.g. on district level) and the administration and leadership on the national level. The differences between parties can stem from formal institutional arrangements as well as informal structures or practices that have been institutionalised. The third dimension is called "Coordination-Entropy" (Scarrow and Webb 2017, p. 8) and points at the degree of conflict between interest groups inside a party, which can be vertically structured, i.e. on different federal levels, as well as horizontally, i.e. between different factions with different ideologies and policy claims. This dimension has a lot to do with so called party culture, which refers to institutionalised concepts of e.g. leadership, criticism, democracy and loyalty. The fourth dimension is called "Territorial Concentration-Dispersion" (Scarrow and Webb 2017, p. 8) and does not so much refer to a set of institutions, but to the differences between parties because of their different representation in regional areas. The weakness or strength in a specific area might influence intra-party decision making by providing a different context to the decision.

2.2 COLLECTIVE DECISIONS AS DISCURSIVE INTERACTION

In order to understand how SNS impact on intra-party decision making in parties, it is necessary to talk about the process of collective decision making itself. Before elaborating on the question how the process of taking a collective decision can be understood in discursive institutionalism, it needs to be clarified what kind of collective decisions parties make, i.e. what can be the content or substance of

the decision. According to Treibel (2012), there are three types of collective decisions, which are decisions on candidate and leader selection, on policy development and on strategy, which includes decisions on potential coalition partners before elections. In a very similar fashion, Gauja (2017, p. 17) defines the subjects of party reforms as party membership, policy development and candidate and leader selection. As her definition of party reform as “intentional and publicized changes that are made to a party’s structures and practices in order to improve them” comes very close to what can be understood as collective decisions of a party, this article will combine both approaches and talk about collective decisions as decisions on the selection of candidates and leaders, on policy development, on strategy and on the organisational structure itself, which includes questions of membership.

Following discursive institutionalism, the communication² about ideas through discursive interaction leads to collective action (Schmidt 2012, p. 91). Consequently, the process of intra-party decision making is understood as the result of a struggle over ideas between intra-party individuals and groups, about how to respond to perceived outside institutions (sometimes called the ‘institutional environment’) of the party. This step points at the idea that intra-party decisions are ultimately decisions that a party takes to act collectively, i.e. as a collective actor, in an institutional environment and confronted in a system with other individual and collective actors, e.g. other parties, journalists, media organisations, or voters. To illustrate this, one can imagine a party is confronted with an institutional environment that expects the party to be a unified (collective) actor, e.g. during the act of voting for a party. This means that the party needs to be recognised as a unified actor, for instance by having a common manifesto or a person speaking on its behalf, i.e. a party leader. The party members who form the party react to these requirements by taking intra-party decisions. These collective decisions are the results of an internal struggle over ideas and the formation of discourse coalitions that group around different story lines about the right decision to take. Coming back to Hajer’s discourse coalitions, it is clear that before the decision is taken, there can be different story lines about the decision that are built on different discourses, framing the issue with different concepts. Supporters of one or the other story line will try to convince others in order to vote in favour of their desired outcome of the decision. With Hajer’s (1993, p. 47) words, “[s]tory lines are the medium through which actors try to impose their view of reality on others, suggest certain social positions and practices, and criticize alternative social arrangements”.

It is important to notice that there is no determinism for collective action in an institutional setting. In terms of discursive institutionalism, party members are “sentient (thinking and speaking) beings” (Schmidt 2012, p. 91). They are equipped with “background ideational abilities”, i.e. with ideas about how to interpret the world and act according to ideational rules. Moreover, they are equipped with

² Schmidt (2012, p. 91) calls it “deliberation”, which is not supported here.

“foreground discursive abilities”, i.e. the ability to “communicate, argue, and deliberate about taking action collectively to change their institutions” (Schmidt 2012, p. 91). Thus, party members are able to think and speak about their ideas and, furthermore, to reflect about their institutional environment. The understanding of party members in this sense is crucial, as it creates agency through discursive interaction and thereby opens up the possibility for change and innovation that has its origin in the ideas of individuals and not only in the change of structure or environmental institutions. It also creates the possibility for the researcher to reconstruct discourses that led to collective action through interpretative methods (Finlayson 2007, p. 546f).

The institutions that represent the organisational practice of the party guide the party members in a process of taking collective decisions. These institutions are the already mentioned formal structures and practices that are written down in constitutions and statutes as well as informal practices that can (and often do) deviate from the formal ones. Often informal rules supplement formal rules (Korte et al. 2018, p. 36f). They are the closest institutional environment for the party members and normally have a strong impact on their behaviour, even though there are instances when single party members disobey these institutionalised rules after questioning their meaning.

To illustrate this, the example of the German social democrats’ most recent election of a new party leader will be given. In Germany, all collective decisions of a party have to be taken at formal party conferences by majority votes (Korte et al. 2018, p. 47). Informally, however, party leaders are often selected by their predecessors, as it is commonly done in almost all parties with exception of the Green Party (Korte et al. 2018, p. 121ff). In February 2018, however, the social democratic mayor of the city of Flensburg surprisingly announced her candidacy for the party leadership of the social democratic party against the designated new party leader Andrea Nahles, who had been selected by her predecessor Martin Schulz.³ Even before, a coalition of party members demanded an opening of the election of the party leadership to all party members and thereby challenged the informal practice of handing over the leadership from one party leader to the next one, that existed for decades. Interestingly, the coalition of party members brought forward the argument that this new procedure should be part of the general party reform that had been announced by the party leadership after the national election that had been lost. Through the media, they tried to foster discursive interaction with other party members and encourage support. Speaking with discursive institutionalism, they tried to connect the concept of party leadership election by all party members with the discourse on party reform and thereby aimed at changing the intra-party institution of leadership election altogether.

³ Deutsche Welle 2018: SPD mayor Simone Lange challenges Andrea Nahles for party leadership, available online: <https://www.dw.com/en/spd-mayor-simone-lange-challenges-andrea-nahles-for-party-leadership/a-42560452>.

Even though they failed with their claims, the example shows impressively how party members reflect on party institutions that may even have a long tradition and sometimes conclude that they have to be challenged. In order to do so, they form discourse coalitions and reframe concepts, like the changed mode of leadership election in the social democratic party.

3 DISCURSIVE DOMINANCE OF PARTY LEADERS

To get an idea of how patterns of collective decision making might actually change through an increased usage of SNS, it is necessary to show how party leaders currently have a dominant position inside parties when it comes to promoting their ideas and story lines about issues, as well as gaining support for their discourse coalition. The reason for this can be found in the specific institutional arrangements of formal and informal structures, as well as institutionalised practices inside parties. This chapter will act as a bridge between, on the one hand, the conceptualisation of parties as institutional environment for party members, collective decisions as results of discursive interactions and the formation of discourse coalitions and, on the other hand, the impact of an increased usage of SNS on intra-party discourses.

There are three factors that cement the party leadership's dominance in intra-party communication and promotion of story lines. First, the professionalisation of party headquarters by various parties in recent years has led to the possibility for the party leadership to communicate their ideas and story lines to all party members in a top-down way (Korte et al. 2018, 90; 91; 97). By having the possibility of sending letters or e-mails to all party members, adding content to the party's website, party magazines and official social media channels, the party leadership controls instruments of top-down communication and therefore has powerful tools to set the intra-party agenda of topics, persuade other party members of their ideas and persuade them to join their discourse coalition on different intra-party decisions. Second, the almost exclusive access of the party leadership to the mass media reinforces the outreach of their opinions and ideas to a broad audience that also includes the members of their own party, who often learn about positions of their leadership via the mass media (Korte and Fröhlich 2009, p. 101). Third, the control over agendas of party conferences determines from the very beginning which topics will be included or excluded in discussions on intra-party decisions at the conference and are thus an effective instrument of party leaders to promote their own causes. Moreover, there are some less visible, but nevertheless favouring institutions, e.g. hierarchy and loyalty, that help the party leadership persuading their fellow party members to accept their interpretations of reality and follow their opinions on intra-party decisions.

Party members who are not part of the party leadership did not have good opportunities to reach out to their fellow party members on a large scale so far, in order to promote different story lines about intra-party decisions. Exceptions might be delegates at party conferences who are allowed to speak publicly and under observation of the mass media about their positions. In sum, a top-down model of interpretation of topics and agenda setting capacities prevailed in political parties so far. Because of a so called mediatisation of political parties (Donges 2008), i.e. an adaption of organisational structures to a specific mass media logic (e.g. personalisation), party leadership gains influence over external and internal communication (Korte and Fröhlich 2009, p. 169f) and uses this privilege to strongly steer the party's decisions in accordance with their ideas. How and why this might change through an increased usage of SNS will be elaborated on in the following chapter.

4 SNS AS INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR ONLINE DISCOURSE

In order to understand the influence of SNS on political parties and their internal communication processes, it is necessary to specify SNS, their features and how they change (political) communication processes. To make it clear: the increased usage of SNS does not mean that traditional patterns of intra-party communication have disappeared completely. However, new patterns evolve rapidly and have already turned the media system into a hybrid media system, where old and new media exist at the same time and where we witness ongoing media convergence (Chadwick 2013). In what way SNS have effects on intra-party discourses by opening up new possibilities for information and communication will be elaborated on in this chapter.

First, the social media logic will be examined more closely by drawing on four principles by van Dijck and Poell (2013). Understanding the interplay of human agency and technology on SNS is crucial to understand new possibilities and limits of online communication, that will also affect discourses between party members by affecting who talks to whom about what and when. The new abundance of communication possibilities also makes it necessary to reflect on who can gain attention for their causes. In a second step, it will be explained how and why the usage of SNS changes opportunities for collective action. This will be important to understand how the usage of SNS by party members can change collective action inside parties and in relation to intra-party decision-making, which might eventually lead to new formations of discourse coalitions. Third, a special focus will be placed on the topic of agenda setting in political parties. Agenda setting capabilities can have a big influence on discourses by determining which content is included and which content is excluded in intra-party discussions on decisions. Finally, some limits of the new opportunities of online communication will be mentioned.

4.1 WHAT ARE SNS? FOUR PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA LOGIC

To understand what SNS are and what impact on practices and institutions they can have, van Dijck and Poell (2013, p. 3) describe a specific “social media logic”. The article at hand will use this concept as a starting point to elaborate on “what happens when social media logic meets other institutional logics outside the context of social media platforms” (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 11), in this case institutional logics of political parties and their internal discourses.

A suitable definition of social media, that will be used for social network sites as well, is provided by van Dijck and Poell (2013, p. 5) who draw on Kaplan and Haenlein (2011): SNS can be understood as “group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” As examples for SNS platforms Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are mentioned. As social media logic, van Dijck and Poell (2013, p. 5) define “the processes, principles, and practices through which these platforms process information, news, and communication, and more generally, how they channel social traffic”. The logic of social media is therefore decisive for the shape of discourses that are carried out on them. There are four distinct principles of a social media logic: programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 3).

Programmability contains two sides, a technological programming and a user-generated programming side (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 5f). The technological programming side refers to the fact that the platform operator shapes social interaction on the platform by shaping the technological possibilities of interaction via code and algorithms. Examples would be limiting the length of a message on Twitter to 280 characters (formerly 140 characters) or providing features like ‘liking’ or ‘retweeting’. Some more invisible, but nonetheless highly relevant technological programming features are, for example the ‘decision’ of algorithms about which content will be shown to which user. The technological side therefore co-determines how party members can interact on SNS and shapes online discourses decisively. Furthermore, and very importantly, it can change rapidly when the platform operator decides to do so and thereby gives the platform operator some power over online discourses. The user-generated programming side refers to, on the one hand, the adding of content by users, and, on the other hand, to usage practices of users who might “resist coded instructions” (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 6) and use the platform in other ways than foreseen by the operator. Hate speech or the organisation of criminal acts would be examples of user-generated programming practices that were not intended by the platform operator. Other examples include “sharing” or “liking” of content on a large scale to influence its assessment by algorithms. Sometimes these usage forms are followed by changes on the technological programming side to prevent them.

With regard to party members using SNS, this means that users can relatively easily add content and communicate with other party members, independently of time and place. However, the technological programming side of the platform always interferes in online discourse according to an intransparent logic. Party members could invent strategies to “push” their statements by manipulating the technological programming side, i.e. through extensive liking and sharing of content. They should, however, never forget that their discursive interactions are mediated to a certain extent by algorithms that are beyond their control, which brings some incalculable elements into the online discourse. Moreover, the platform provider could change the technological environment abruptly and thereby undermine a party member’s discursive efforts.

The second principle of the social media logic is called popularity (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 6f). It refers to the mechanisms by which single actors can become popular and influential on SNS and might even gain power over agendas. Popularity is highly relevant for intra-party discourse, as single party members could use these mechanisms to shape the discourse on a specific decision to a hitherto unknown extent. As already mentioned when talking about technological programming, each SNS has its own algorithms that interfere in user-interaction on the SNS. Algorithms, for instance, determine which user-generated content is valued higher than others, and which users are supposed to be more important than others. The algorithm mostly relies on quantitative, aggregated measures of “likes”, “shares” and numbers of “followers” or “friends” to make its assessments, which are, however, widely not transparent to the public. The consequence of this technological upgrading of users and content is mostly a higher visibility among other users and therefore influences discourses on the platforms by increasing their range. Similar to programming, popularity is the effect of a mixture of technological and user-made inferences: Users can “push” content and other users by liking, sharing and following, which is then taken up by algorithms and processed to upgrade or downgrade it further by applying certain coded criteria. This multiplication effect can also be used by party members to influence online discourses in various ways. It is imaginable that groups of party members “push” certain topics or users by liking, sharing, etc. or, that single party members build up big networks of “followers” over longer times and use them in decisive moments to make an impact on intra-party discourses by disseminating messages on their cause. Popularity on SNS can also spill over to traditional mass media, as journalists connect with popular politicians on SNS and increasingly report on the most popular topics or actors on SNS (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 7f). In this way, party actors can gain attention of the mass media and reach out to bigger audiences, who would have not been able to achieve this according to traditional mass media logics. On the downside, popularity of certain story lines or discourses could decrease because of an algorithmic evaluation that rates the content as unimportant in relation to other content. These processes are beyond control of the party members.

As a third principle of social media logic, van Dijck and Poell (2013, p. 8) mention “connectivity”. Connectivity refers to a “socio-technical affordance of networked platforms to connect content to user activities and advertisers”. The term socio-technical refers to the observation that connectivity is not only dependent on user actions like “following” other users or content, but is also influenced by technology, e.g. algorithms that make suggestions which users to follow, e.g. by listing “people you may know” according to certain criteria. Moreover, algorithms might group people together invisibly and show them certain content in different ways than it does to other users, e.g. for advertising purposes. What is highly relevant about this regarding political parties and their institutions, is that connectivity is established without regard to geographical boundaries, which until now structure parties as institutions strongly. It allows “the formation of strategic alliances or communities through users' initiative” and “allow[s] individuals to create their own customized social networks and communities” (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 8). Thereby, it opens up new possibilities for the formation of discourse coalitions inside parties, that would have been much harder to form outside of SNS. What has been observed in research on protest movements might apply to discourses in political parties as well: Collective action mixes with so called “connective action” (Bennett and Segerberg 2012, p. 748), i.e. the fact that strong group ties that were needed for collective action in the past, are partially replaced by “large-scale, fluid social networks”, which “can operate importantly through the organizational processes of social media, and their logic does not require strong organizational control or the symbolic construction of a united ‘we’”. Played out in political parties, connectivity could have a huge impact on the formation of online discourse coalitions and, consequently, on intra-party decisions. This will be elaborated on further in the next chapter.

The fourth principle of social media logic is datafication (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 9ff). Datafication is defined as “ability of networked platforms to render into data many aspects of the world that have never been quantified before: not just demographic or profiling data yielded by customers in (online) surveys [...], even relationships (friends, likes, trends) are datafied via Facebook or Twitter” (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 9). What is important to know about datafication with regard to social relations on SNS, is that SNS use metadata of user interaction to create so called real-time analytics, which pretend to objectively analyse “indicators of trending topics, keywords, sentiments, public viewpoints, or frequently shared and liked items” (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 9). The platform operator makes available data that is suggested to be objectively and neutrally collected, e.g. sentiments of groups of people about certain issues. However, it has to be noted that the platforms’ gathering mechanisms preconfigure data in specific ways and manipulate opinions by collecting data and making it available in real-time: “platforms claim they can track instantaneous movements of individual user behavior, aggregate these data, analyze them, and subsequently translate the results into valuable information about individuals, groups, or society at large” (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 10). There is a danger of

misperception of the impact of topics, keywords, sentiments and so forth, that are brought forward by individuals or groups because of real-time analytics by the platforms. Expressions of datafication, like real-time analytics, might also affect discourse between party members when they are interpreted as objective data about opinions or sentiments by the party members themselves. It is also imaginable that party members, e.g. the party leadership, use real-time analytics provided by the platforms as seemingly 'objective' data that underlines their arguments in a certain discourse without making clear that "social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn, are never neutral channels for data transmission" (van Dijck and Poell 2013, p. 10). Datafication is a process going far beyond social media and the examples presented here. Even though it cannot be assessed in full detail at this point, it is nevertheless highly relevant for the study of discourses on social media platforms.

The four principles of social media logic show how the usage of SNS by party members could impact discourses on intra-party decisions by upgrading ideas via technological programming by the platform operator or user inference, by enabling users to become widely popular and building extensive networks of followers and new discourse coalitions that can be reached out to in a relatively easy way, and by manipulating perceptions of what topics, keywords or sentiments are popular through seemingly objective real-time analytics. In the next chapter, the already touched-upon new possibility for connecting with others and building communities will be assessed in more detail. New ways of collective action might follow, which have been called "connective action" (Bennett and Segerberg 2012) and which have the potential to be a powerful instrument to build new discourse coalitions.

4.2 CHANGING OPPORTUNITIES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION THROUGH SNS

Following the claim by Bimber (2017, p. 7), digital technology is conceptualised as context that enhances possibilities for information and communication for actors and thereby lowers the barriers for collective action. This does not mean, however, that collective action will follow inevitably. The related question why party members act and participate in collective action will not be treated extensively in this article. In line with discursive institutionalism, it is assumed that discursive interaction can lead to collective action. However, as discursive institutionalism remains silent on the question how collective action exactly comes about, it is helpful to add Bimber's (2017) thoughts to get an idea of how collective action can be understood generally and how the opportunities for collective action change through the hybrid media system (Chadwick 2013) and the usage of SNS. What will be left out, however, is an answer to the question what causes action on the individual level, i.e. who will act at what time. These questions are subject to ongoing research that will not be dealt with here in detail.

In line with Bimber (2017, p. 8f) it can be stated that collective action in the digital era is no longer necessarily dependent on bureaucratic structures, e.g. the accumulation of resources, the creation of collective identity or agenda setting by organisations. Instead, it is assumed that collective action can be prompted by either organisational (i.e. institutional) requests, or social interaction or can even be initiated individually and entrepreneurially (Bimber 2017, p. 11ff). This is consistent with Schmidt's (2012, p. 91ff) "sentient" (thinking and speaking) actor model and her idea of discursive interaction within institutions. Bimber (2017, p. 9) underlines that in the age of media hybridity and the usage of SNS, there are "expanded opportunities to act" for individuals, "formal organization need not precede collective action" and there are "more opportunities for initiating action [...] than in the context of mass media". He points at Bennett and Segerberg (2012) theory of 'connective action' that comprises promising new assumptions for collective action theory with "a spectrum of structural arrangements from traditional brokering by formal organizations to ad hoc, viral networks". Bimber's (2017, p. 10) crucial point is, however, the assumption that "information and communication underlie identity building, framing, coordination, persuasion", which have been traditionally presented as being prerequisites for collective action. The organisation of collective action is thus an arrangement of political communication, or in Bimber's words, "who has what information and who can communicate with whom" (Bimber 2017, p. 10). Consequentially, he sums up the major change emanating from the changing media environment in line with Bennett and Segerberg: "In the mass media context, these arrangements reflected relatively high costs of communication and information, which are best born by organizations. Lowered costs of information and communication in the digital media context permit a variety of structures for accomplishing that set of functions: formal organizations; networks comprising individuals and organizations; informal, adaptive organizational structures; and individual action" (Bimber 2017, p. 10; Bennett and Segerberg 2012). This is exactly the reason why intra-party decision making could change through the usage of SNS by party members. The focus on information and communication also make its ideas compatible with discourse analytical approaches that can be used to study the formation of collective action through online communication.

4.3 OLD AND NEW DYNAMICS OF AGENDA SETTING IN POLITICAL PARTIES

In addition to the social media logic of SNS' platforms and new ways of collective action that can be initiated without a strong organisational background, new ways of agenda setting on SNS are a third aspect that can change intra-party discourses on collective decisions decisively. Especially the aspect of decreased control over internal communication channels by the party leadership will be explained. As SNS can serve as instruments for agenda setting by every party member who manages to make use of the social media logic, the traditional control over issues by the party leadership is challenged, which could alter parties' institutions of collective decision making decisively. First, agenda setting will be

defined, and traditional ways of intra-party agenda setting will be described. Second, new ways of agenda setting will be introduced and their impact on intra-party decision making will be assessed.

Pfetsch et al. (2016, p. 45) define political agenda building, which is called agenda setting in this contribution, as “the influence of media and public agendas on issues and the policy priorities of political elites”. However, the definition will be slightly modified for the purpose of this article, as it is not the mass media agenda or the public agenda whose influences on policy priorities are of primary interest here. Discourses about intra-party decisions are not always perceived as highly relevant topics to the mass media or the public. Instead, issues brought forward by groups of party members are focussed here. Agenda setting therefore refers to the influence of intra-party individual members’ or interest groups’ agenda on issues and the policy priorities of the party. Policy priorities of the party, in turn, are the issues that are chosen for collective decisions, e.g. on party conferences. Among them can be propositions for new policies, the claim for leadership exchange or claims for a reform of organisational rules, e.g. membership rules.

Regarding intra-party decisions, agenda setting matters in a sense that it can produce new discourses or change old discourses on internal decisions through the introduction of new story lines or new concepts in intra-party discourses. Traditionally, agenda setting of parties has been party leaders’ exclusive sphere of action via the mass media, via internal communication channels like the party’s website or mailing lists or letters to party members or via decisions on official agendas for party conferences. As Pfetsch et al. (2016, p. 47) stress, the “initiation of an issue is highly dependent on whether it finds supporters and political entrepreneurs who advocate it and take the risk to push it into public attention”. With regard to intra-party decisions, it is not mainly public attention but attention of other party members that is sought, as they will be the ones that collectively take decisions through different institutions of a party. However, finding a group of supporters among the party’s members is nevertheless crucial. After initiating an issue, i.e. bringing it up, the issue has to be specified by translating it into political demands – in case of party decisions it has to be translated into specific positions on the decision to take, i.e. a claim for action. After that, the phase of expansion is crucial (Pfetsch et al. 2016, p. 47). During this phase, new concepts and story lines are linked with old ones and are sought to be expanded to other supporter groups (discourse coalitions) in order to institutionalise the discourse.

Traditionally, it was sufficient for party leaders to spread their ideas through mass media and the party’s internal communication channels, to gain some support of loyal party members that have trust in their elected leadership. The process of agenda setting worked rather smoothly for the party leadership, as there were no challenging story lines about issues by other intra-party interest groups that could gain the same attention and the same range of influence, as those groups did not have the

means to spread their ideas and concepts on certain issues to a large group of party members. The party leadership had the advantage of controlling the most important instruments for internal communication to party members, especially the access to mass media.

However, agenda setting capacities might be redistributed through an increased SNS-usage. Nonetheless, old agenda setting dynamics are still in place, but might be complemented with new dynamics on SNS. These new dynamics can be described as, first, an abundance of issues that can be spread through an unlimited number of channels by an unlimited number of actors, second, disappeared gatekeepers (mainly journalists), who formerly filtered issues according to their own agenda (Henn et al. 2016, p. 17), and third, independence of material resources (Pfetsch et al. 2016, p. 50). Consequentially, party members have a new chance of bringing up alternative story lines and concepts that challenge the agenda that has formerly been controlled to a large extent by the party leadership. If party members and intra-party interest groups use the social media logic well, they have a chance to influence the intra-party agenda of issues to their advantage and thereby influence the party's traditional hierarchy. SNS can be used to build networks and coalitions that might turn into discourse coalitions as well, like it has been mentioned in connection with the connectivity logic of SNS. A crucial point in this regard is that "coalition building [...] is an important prerequisite of agenda building [and] under the conditions of online communication the forming of coalitions has become much easier thanks to the opportunity structures of network communication" (Pfetsch et al. 2016, p. 54). Even if other channels remain important for influencing discourse about decisions, e.g. party conferences and media reception, SNS can be used by party members as a starting point to build coalitions and mobilise for issues.

Pfetsch et al. (2016, p. 50) add that "the mobilizing actor does not need a material basis any more, but may appear as a virtual organization or anonymous network that only exists for the purpose of providing a virtual platform for campaigns". It can also be used as a testing ground for new story lines and concepts that will later be transferred into traditional arenas of intra-party discourse like party meetings. Online issue networks can be build up more easily than their offline counterparts and can later have an impact as an already established discourse coalition, that may not only include party members, but also other actors like journalists or representatives of NGOs (Pfetsch et al. 2016, p. 51).

Related to agenda setting is the concept of "agenda diffusion" (Weimann and Brosius 2016, p. 31f) that points at the possibility of sharing content on SNS, e.g. Twitter. Considering the fact, that "retweeted messages reach vast audiences" (Weimann and Brosius 2016, p. 32), the reinforcement of concepts or story lines concerning intra-party decisions might no longer be dependent on party institutions that allow party members to reach out to high numbers of fellow party members. Formerly, reaching a wide audience required having a high position in the party hierarchy or being allowed to speak at party

conferences. Agenda diffusion can enable every party member to reach out to large audiences by building a large virtual network and sharing content with it. However, there are several preconditions to this, e.g. a high connectedness between the party members or a strong argument that persuades others and cannot be trumped by the party leadership. Consequently, some limits of online communication need to be explained.

4.4 LIMITS OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION

After assessing new possibilities for individual party members and intra-party interest groups to gain influence over intra-party discourses through SNS, some limitations to these new opportunities have to be mentioned. Among them are the competition for attention on SNS, technological boundaries, the phenomenon of issues going “viral” and then dissolving quickly and the strong persistence of traditional party institutions that limit SNS’ influence on decision-making processes. Even though they cannot be explained here in detail, they should be kept in mind when assessing the impact of SNS on intra-party discourses.

First, together with the new abundance of issues comes the race for attention for one’s own ideas. Understanding the social media logic (van Dijck and Poell 2013) and using it in the right way can make a difference when aiming at the formation of a new discourse coalition. Second, technological boundaries and interference of algorithms are to be considered. It remains intransparent so far, how algorithms select single topics or actors and multiply their popularity, so they will stand out visibly among the flood of information on SNS. Third, the phenomenon of issues going “viral” needs to be studied in greater detail, to understand the preconditions of topics travelling from limited interest groups to a larger number of party members. As Pfetsch et al. (2016, p. 50) mention, the high flexibility regarding the initiation [of issues] has two sides: Collective action “can [evolve] rather spontaneously, but can also dissolve rather quickly”. Jungherr (2014, p. 239) mentions a logic specific to political expression on the internet” that has to be considered. On SNS, seemingly ‘less important’ topics can gain higher attention when they include a high “excitement potential and humor of the content” (Henn et al. 2016, p. 17). Moreover, even when a discourse reaches institutionalisation among a high number of party members on SNS, there are still strong intra-party institutions that may prevent it from being transferred into a collective decision during the act of voting at a party conference. Being loyal to the party leadership, even when the leadership promotes a different discourse than the one that might be strongly backed by a high number of party members, is only one example for such an institution.

5 IMPACT OF THE USAGE OF SNS BY PARTY MEMBERS ON INTRA-PARTY DECISION MAKING

The usage of SNS is changing the way that intra-party actors and groups engage in arguing with each other and carry out their struggle over ideas, which is the crucial point of interest when studying discourses according to Hajer (2002, p. 63). After elaborating on social media logic, collective action and agenda setting, it can be summed up that the usage of SNS by party members impacts on intra-party decision-making in four different ways.

First, party members can communicate with each other directly, instantly and independently of time and place. Even though there has been a similar development after the increased usage of e-mail, SNS make it even easier and, moreover, publicly visible when party members engage in discursive interaction. Posting messages on SNS and finding fellow party members of different party branches is straightforward. This is an ultimate precondition for engaging in discursive interaction and building of discourse coalitions.

Second, individual party members can become popular on SNS, independently of their position in the traditional party hierarchy. An online career complements the traditional offline career inside parties with different criteria for success. By connecting with as many people as possible and by gaining “likes” and “shares” for their messages, the SNS’ algorithm multiplies the range of their messages and shows it as “important” to other users on SNS. Other party members will perceive those highlighted messages as being important and could get interested in connecting with this person of high online popularity. Contrasting the party’s traditional institutions, party members do not need to climb the ladder of intra-party hierarchy for many years any more, in order to reach a position that enables them to be heard by others. Party members can use their ‘online popularity’ to build discourse coalitions of fellow party members who join their cause of promoting certain ideas, concepts or story lines on issues of intra-party importance. Even journalists, NGOs and other non-party actors might get interested in party members with a high online popularity, value their ideas and story lines higher and maybe even take them to the agendas of their own sphere, like the mass media. It has already been shown that topics can travel from Twitter to the mass media agenda (Parmelee 2013).

Third, collective action by groups of party members is not dependent on organisational structures, material resources and traditional party institutions any more. Discourse coalitions formerly gathered either around story lines of party leaders with exclusive access to the mass media and who controlled the party’s internal communication instruments or around influential intra-party interest groups, e.g. factions who used their own organisational resources to carry out meetings, build up group-identities

and persuade their members to act as multipliers in their own local branches. These patterns are increasingly complemented by new ways of “connective action” (Bennett and Segerberg 2012) that might be used by party members, who use SNS to form discourse coalitions by promoting their cause online and independently of the party’s institutional arrangements and organisational structures. Party leadership as well as faction leaders and other influential intra-party interest groups might lose their influence on the intra-party agenda to a certain extent.

Fourth, intra-party gatekeepers for ideas and story lines disappear. Party members in leading positions formerly acted as gatekeepers for the range of ideas, concepts and story lines. Through the institution that prescribes the election of party delegates for different organisational levels of the party, it was made sure that the promotion of ideas and story lines ended for individual party members at the borders of their local branch or district, as they could not participate in meetings of higher levels that have an own agenda determined by the delegates that participate in those meetings. The rise of alternative ideas from the lower end of the party hierarchy to discussions at the national level is no longer impossible, as discourse coalitions can be built online and then be transferred to party meetings and conferences at all different levels of the party hierarchy by members of the discourse coalition who take part in those meetings. The initiation of ideas and story lines becomes decentralised in the party hierarchy.

6 CONCLUSION

The article aimed at explaining conceptually how the usage of SNS by party members impacts on intra-party decision-making of political parties by impacting on intra-party discourses. After conceptualising parties as sets of institutions that form the institutional environment for party members, different aspects of changing communication and collective action were discussed.

It could be shown how SNS follow a specific social media logic that opens up, but also limits specific ways of how to influence discourses via SNS. Party members encounter new possibilities for reaching out to other party members independently of time and place, for increasing popularity of their ideas or even themselves, and for building up networks that may eventually be turned into discourse coalitions. However, the social media logic also entails that there is a dependency on the technological design of platforms that has a heavy influence on how discourses are perceived by users of SNS. Moreover, it was shown how opportunities for collective action change through new models of “connective action” that do not require the same organisational structures as prerequisites for collective action as before. With regard to agenda setting, various developments could be shown that

open up new opportunities for 'ordinary' party members to become agenda setters and gain power over discourses.

In sum, it could be shown how complex and at the same time far-reaching the changes in intra-party decision making will be, if party members discuss intra-party decisions on SNS. New possibilities of direct communication, online popularity and online careers that complement traditional intra-party careers and hierarchy, new forms of collective action and the disappearance of gatekeepers of intra-party discourses stand out as main changes to the intra-party discourses that ultimately influence intra-party decision making. Further conceptual research could investigate how power relations change through the usage of SNS and how traditional patterns of intra-party democracy might change accordingly. However, only empirical research will show how much of these developments turn out to have an impact and how big this impact will be. The potential should not be underestimated, as political parties and their organisational form could be affected to a hitherto unknown extent.

7 PUBLICATION BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bennett, W. Lance; Segerberg, Alexandra (2012): The Logic of Connective Action. Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. In *Information, Communication & Society* 15 (5), pp. 739–768. DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661.

Berge, Benjamin von dem; Poguntke, Thomas (2017): Varieties of Intra-Party Democracy. Conceptualization and Index Construction. In Susan E. Scarrow, Paul Webb, Thomas Poguntke (Eds.): *Organizing political parties. Representation, participation, and power*. First edition. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press (Organizing political parties), pp. 136–157.

Billig, Michael (1987): *Arguing and thinking. A rhetorical approach to social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr (European monographs in social psychology).

Bimber, Bruce (2017): Three Prompts for Collective Action in the Context of Digital Media. In *Political Communication* 34 (1), pp. 6–20. DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2016.1223772.

Borz, Gabriela; Janda, Kenneth (2018): "Contemporary trends in party organization: Revisiting intra-party democracy". In *Party Politics*, 135406881875460. DOI: 10.1177/1354068818754605.

Chadwick, Andrew (2013): *The hybrid media system. Politics and power*. New York: Oxford University Press (Oxford studies in digital politics). Available online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001>.

Chadwick, Andrew; Stromer-Galley, Jennifer (2016): Digital Media, Power, and Democracy in Parties and Election Campaigns. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 21 (3), pp. 283–293. DOI: 10.1177/1940161216646731.

Dommett, Katharine (2018): Roadblocks to interactive digital adoption? Elite perspectives of party practices in the United Kingdom. In *Party Politics* (Article first published online: February 27, 2018), 1–11. DOI: 10.1177/1354068818761196.

Donges, Patrick (2008): Medialisierung politischer Organisationen. Parteien in der Mediengesellschaft. Zugl.: Zürich, Univ., Philos. Fak., Habil.-Schr., 2007. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften / GWV Fachverlage GmbH. Available online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90942-4>.

Donges, Patrick; Jarren, Otfried (2017): Politische Kommunikation in der Mediengesellschaft. Eine Einführung. 4. Auflage. Wiesbaden: Springer VS (Studienbücher zur Kommunikations- und Medienwissenschaft). Available online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-16572-7>.

Finlayson, Alan (2007): From Beliefs to Arguments. Interpretive Methodology and Rhetorical Political Analysis. In *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9, pp. 545–563. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-856x.2007.00269.x.

Gauja, Anika (2017): Party reform. The causes, challenges, and consequences of organizational change. First edition. Oxford, New York, NY: Oxford University Press (Comparative politics).

Gerl, Katharina; Marschall, Stefan; Wilker, Nadja (2018): Does the Internet Encourage Political Participation? Use of an Online Platform by Members of a German Political Party. In *Policy & Internet* 10 (1), pp. 87–118. DOI: 10.1002/poi3.149.

Gibson, Rachel; Greffet, Fabienne; Cantijoch, Marta (2017): Friend or Foe? Digital Technologies and the Changing Nature of Party Membership. In *Political Communication* 34 (1), pp. 89–111. DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2016.1221011.

Grunden, Timo (2009): Politikberatung im Innenhof der Macht. 1. Aufl. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften / GWV Fachverlage GmbH Wiesbaden (Studien der NRW School of Governance).

Hajer, Maarten (2002): discourse analysis and the study of policy making. In *Eur Polit Sci* 2 (1), pp. 61–65. DOI: 10.1057/eps.2002.49.

Hajer, Maarten A. (1993): Discourse Coalitions and the Institutionalization of Practice: The Case of Acid Rain in Britain. In Frank Fischer, John Forester (Eds.): *The Argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, pp. 43–76.

Henn, Philipp; Jandura, Olaf; Vowe, Gerhard (2016): The Traditional Paradigm of Political Communication Research Reconstructed. In Gerhard Vowe, Philipp Henn (Eds.): *Political*

communication in the online world. Theoretical approaches and research designs. New York, London: Routledge (Routledge research in political communication, 13), pp. 11–25.

Jun, Uwe; Höhne, Benjamin (Eds.) (2010): Parteien als fragmentierte Organisationen. Erfolgsbedingungen und Veränderungsprozesse. Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Wissenschaft; Jahrestagung des Arbeitskreises Parteienforschung der Deutschen Vereinigung für Politische Wissenschaft. Opladen: Budrich (Parteien in Theorie und Empirie, 1).

Jungherr, Andreas (2014): The Logic of Political Coverage on Twitter. Temporal Dynamics and Content. In *J Commun* 64 (2), pp. 239–259. DOI: 10.1111/jcom.12087.

Jungherr, Andreas (2016): Four Functions of Digital Tools in Election Campaigns. In *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 21 (3), pp. 358–377. DOI: 10.1177/1940161216642597.

Kaplan, Andreas M.; Haenlein, Michael (2011): Two hearts in three-quarter time. How to waltz the social media/viral marketing dance. In *Business Horizons* 54 (3), pp. 253–263. DOI: 10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.006.

Keller, Reiner (2011): Diskursforschung. Eine Einführung für SozialwissenschaftlerInnen. 4. Auflage. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag (Qualitative Sozialforschung, Band 14). Available online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-92085-6>.

Korte, Karl-Rudolf; Fröhlich, Manuel (2009): Politik und Regieren in Deutschland. Strukturen, Prozesse, Entscheidungen. 3. Aufl. Paderborn: UTB GmbH (UTB M). Available online at <http://www.utb-studienbook.de/9783838524368>.

Korte, Karl-Rudolf; Michels, Dennis; Schoofs, Jan; Switek, Niko; Weissenbach, Kristina (2018): Parteiendemokratie in Bewegung. Organisations- und Entscheidungsmuster der deutschen Parteien im Vergleich. Baden-Baden: Nomos (Die politischen Parteien der Bundesrepublik Deutschland).

Lowndes, Vivien; Roberts, Mark (2013): Why institutions matter. The new institutionalism in political science. 1. publ. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (Political analysis).

Murchison, Ashley (2015): Changing Communications? Political Parties and Web 2.0 in the 2011 New Zealand General Election. In Guy Lachapelle, Philippe J. Maarek (Eds.): Political parties in the digital age. The impact of new technologies in politics. Berlin: de Gruyter Oldenbourg (De Gruyter Textbook), pp. 93–110.

Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis; Vaccari, Cristian (2013): Do People “Like” Politicians on Facebook? Not really. Large-Scale Direct Candidate-to-Voter Online Communication as an Outlier Phenomenon. In *International Journal of Communication* 7, pp. 2333–2356. Available online at <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/download/1717/1014>.

Parmelee, John H. (2013): The agenda-building function of political tweets. In *New Media & Society* 16 (3), pp. 434–450. DOI: 10.1177/1461444813487955.

Pfetsch, Barbara; Miltner, Peter; Maier, Daniel (2016): Old and New Dynamics of Agenda Building in a Hybrid Media System. In Gerhard Vowe, Philipp Henn (Eds.): Political communication in the online world. Theoretical approaches and research designs. New York, London: Routledge (Routledge research in political communication, 13), pp. 45–58.

Rahat, Gideon; Shapira, Assaf (2017): An Intra-Party Democracy Index. Theory, Design and A Demonstration. In *Parliam Aff* 70 (1), pp. 84–110. DOI: 10.1093/pa/gsv068.

Reichard, Daniel; Borucki, Isabelle (2015): Mehr als die Replikation organisationaler Offline-Strukturen? Zur internen Vernetzung von Parteien auf Twitter - das Beispiel SPD. In Linda Rescke, Marten Düring, Markus Gamper (Eds.): Knoten und Kanten III. Soziale Netzwerkanalyse in Geschichts- und Politikforschung. Bielefeld: Transcript Verl. (Sozialtheorie), pp. 399–421.

Sarcinelli, Ulrich (2011): Politische Kommunikation in Deutschland. Medien und Politikvermittlung im demokratischen System. 3., erweiterte und überarbeitete Auflage. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. Available online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-93018-3>.

Scarrow, Susan E.; Webb, Paul; Poguntke, Thomas (Eds.) (2017): Organizing political parties. Representation, participation, and power. First edition. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press (Organizing political parties).

Scarrow, Susan E.; Webb, Paul D. (2017): Investigating Party Organization. Structures, Resources, and Representative Strategies. In Susan E. Scarrow, Paul Webb, Thomas Poguntke (Eds.): Organizing political parties. Representation, participation, and power. First edition. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press (Organizing political parties), pp. 1–27.

Schmidt, Vivian A. (2012): Discursive Institutionalism. Scope, Dynamics, and Philosophical Underpinnings. In Frank Fischer, Herbert Gottweis (Eds.): The Argumentative Turn Revisited: Duke University Press, pp. 85–113.

Schmidt, Vivien A. (2010): Taking ideas and discourse seriously. Explaining change through discursive institutionalism as the fourth 'new institutionalism'. In *Eur. Pol. Sci. Rev.* 2 (01), p. 1. DOI: 10.1017/S175577390999021X.

Scott, William Richard; Davis, Gerald F. (2007): Organizations and organizing. Rational, natural and open system perspectives. Upper Saddle River NJ: Pearson Education.

Stier, Sebastian; Bleier, Arnim; Lietz, Haiko; Strohmaier, Markus (2018): Election Campaigning on Social Media. Politicians, Audiences, and the Mediation of Political Communication on Facebook and Twitter. In *Political Communication* 35 (1), pp. 50–74. DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2017.1334728.

Stone, Deborah A. (2002): Policy paradox. The art of political decision making. Rev. ed. New York: Norton.

Treibel, Jan (2012): Was bedeutet innerparteiliche Willensbildung? In Karl-Rudolf Korte, Jan Treibel (Eds.): *Wie entscheiden Parteien? Prozesse innerparteilicher Willensbildung in Deutschland*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, pp. 7–34.

van Dijck, José; Poell, Thomas (2013): Understanding Social Media Logic. In *Media and Communication* 1 (1), pp. 2–14. DOI: 10.12924/mac2013.01010002.

Vowe, Gerhard; Henn, Philipp (Eds.) (2016): Political communication in the online world. Theoretical approaches and research designs. New York, London: Routledge (Routledge research in political communication, 13).

Weimann, Gabriel; Brosius, Hans-Bernd (2016): A New Agenda for Agenda-Setting Research in the Digital Era. In Gerhard Vowe, Philipp Henn (Eds.): *Political communication in the online world. Theoretical approaches and research designs*. New York, London: Routledge (Routledge research in political communication, 13), pp. 26–44.

Wolkenstein, Fabio (2016): Intra-party democracy beyond aggregation. In *Party Politics* 24 (4), pp. 323–334. DOI: 10.1177/1354068816655563.