

Strategic Management of Political Communications--The Communist Party of the Russian Federation Experience

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Abstract: The paper considers the strategic management of political communications at theoretical level and at the level of practical activities. The current experience of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation is in research focus. The authors' aim is to analyze how the party plans and organizes political communications, while the ideological environment has become unfavorable for the Russian communists. For this aim, the authors present in detail media resources of the party and evaluate its communicative activity as well as examine the advanced technologies usage for contacting the target audiences. The most difficulties for Russian communists consist in involving new generations in political dialogue and political interaction following.

1. Introduction

For thirty years, one of the most important consequences of the social transformations in the Russian Federation was the changing position of the Communist Party, former main political actor in the Soviet Union. Nowadays, the communist ideology is being presented to the voters as something unattractive and undemocratic, and in these conditions, the political forces of the communist orientation have to look for new ways to popularize their ideas and master the technology of party and political marketing.

Party and political marketing as a theory and political organizations practices involves the purposeful work of the party on the following directions:

- Production and promotion of the party programs;
- Promotion and distribution of the party cadres;
- Lobbying of the party interests in public authorities;
- Positioning of the party and the party leaders [See: 1; 2; 3].

Strategic planning of the communication system plays a crucial role in solving these problems. Strategic planning is the central element of the system of the society management, including the activities of the political party as a whole and its activity in the media in particular. Generally, parties need to consider several aspects: the main goal of media communication, the main target or

audience of media communication, which media are most important, alternative channels of communication, potential risks of media communications, and so long [4, p. 353].

In our opinion, the basis of the communication management strategy should be the focus on the needs of highly accurately segmented audience. When a specific target audience has been defined, the opportunity to optimize the development of a strategic plan appears; the simplest Harold Lasswell's model of communication gives methodological bases for this work. Thus, it is necessary to plan: 1) types of communication sources (senders); 2) types of messages; 3) types of channels; 4) target effects. Among the effects of the communication system management there are: a) overcoming the negative attitudes towards the party; b) increasing the number of supporters, widening the potential electorate; c) increasing the amount of party members.

The article aims to analyzing the strategic planning and organization of political communications in the current practice of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). Monitoring of this organization's media resources, evaluation of its media activity level and of applying the advanced technologies for interaction with target audiences and potential electorate were used as research methods.

2. CPRF Communication System

For successful functioning in the political arena, the CPRF must adopt the strategic communications planning algorithms described above. For several decades, it has been operating in an aggressive information environment generated not only by competing parties, but also by foreign political forces. Under these circumstances, the party has to give priority to the elimination of negative attitudes, that is, to make corrections in the political image. The image work of the party should be based on the complex of knowledge in the field of advanced political technologies. At the same time, its task is "to overcome prejudices and false stereotypes, while basing on the positive elements in mass consciousness and using reliable, timely and high-quality information" [5, p. 5].

The most vulnerable element of the modern Communist Party image is the citizens' opinion on the party members and supporters. There is an obvious problem of the aging of the members and potential electorate, who has remained committed to the communist ideology since the Soviet era. Age dynamics encourages the CPRF to search for new forms of interaction with the population and to develop measures to improve the perception of those people who join the communists or vote for them. Therefore, in recent years, the communists began to pay special attention to recruiting young citizens and involving new, atypical age categories. So, the agenda of the III Plenum of the CPRF Central Committee (2009) included only one question: "On working with the cadres in contemporary conditions"; the party leadership has officially declared a policy of the youth involvement. In November 2009, the Communist Party was the first to register on the Russian-language RF domain. Since that moment, the system reorganization of the party's communication resources has started.

Let us look at the system. Its structure includes the following components:

- Party media;
- Official and unofficial sites;
- Party social networks;
- Party blogosphere, party resources in common social networks code.

2.1. Party Mainstream Media

The CPRF proves the only Russian party to maintain a relatively developed set of print periodicals. Thus, the communists continue to publish the newspaper "Pravda" that is one of the oldest existing newspapers in the country (since 1912; the official circulation is over 100.000 copies); they publish

the "Political Education" magazine, the "Bulletin of Party Organizational and Personnel Work" almanac and a big number of newspapers in regional branches. For example, regional party branches publish "The Say of Communist" in the Belgorod Region, "Podmoskovny Pravda" in the Moscow Region, and "Soviet Yaroslavl" in the Yaroslavl Region. Also almost monthly "Pravda" newsletter appears. Each single-page edition has up to 1 million copies which contain selected articles of the "Pravda" newspaper. It is distributed free of charge in different regions of the country thanks to the activists of the Communist Party and its youth wing, the Leninist Communist Youth Union. In general, regional party branches, which have close connections with real or potential party supporters, are highly active in their interaction with the population.

The Communist Party solves the problem of attracting the youth audience by accessing to the Internet. As some observers emphasize: "Young people are also at the forefront of new election media innovation and participation" [6, p. 832]. All the above-mentioned party periodicals have network versions. Most commonly they use a form of the content duplication, that is, publications are posted on the site as separate texts; but also visitors have the opportunity to download the entire issue in PDF format. Based on current international experience, experts consider that "parties might equally create issue communities within their website or through the use of Facebook or Twitter that allow more participatory forms of policy development" [7, p. 10]. As the CPRF is interested in intensifying its readership, it is gradually adopting interactive tools. For example, links to "Pravda" articles can be shared through the user account in the five most popular social media: V Kontakte, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Odnoklassniki. Characteristically, on the website of "Pravda" the names of the foreign-language media are presented in Russian transcription.

The media segment is not limited to periodicals. In 2010-ies, in Russia, political parties began actively exploring the audiovisual environment. The reason is that only Federal and regional TV channels can cover the entire audience in which the leading political actors are interested. Therefore, until recently, the issue of ensuring equal access of political parties to the airtime of the biggest national TV broadcasters was acute. Information about United Russia (Yedinaya Rossiya), the parliamentary majority party, unreasonably dominates the airwaves. The Communist Party has been the most critical of this persistent imbalance, and it is this party that has developed a strategy of dialogue with its television audience through adopting the Internet broadcasting technologies. Currently, the party has two TV channels: "CPRF-TV" (established in 2007 as an Internet TV channel, now converted into a channel on YouTube video hosting) and "Red Line" TV channel (established in 2013 as a 24-hour Internet TV channel, now included in the packages of digital TV for broadcasting throughout Russia).

In the radio segment, the party is less active, but there is also a positive dynamic, primarily at the regional level. Thus, the communist radio station "Local Time" carries out Internet broadcasting in Voronezh. Besides, a partnership project exists, namely the interregional radio channel "Radio Newspaper 'The Say'" which gravitates towards the communist ideology.

2.2. Party Network Resources

The party has an official website kprf.ru. All regional branches have their own websites linked to the central resource. The structure of the main site is much more complete and functional than the structures of regional ones. The main site is characterized with a high quality design; there are versions in English and Spanish. A great advantage is the integration of information on the party members' accounts in social networks. Thus, in the special tab "Personal Pages" one can see the whole structure of the organization, personnel, information about prominent party members (communist deputies in the State Duma, the first persons of regional committees, members of the Central Committee, etc.), as well as a direct link to personal websites or accounts in social networks.

One of the main shortcomings of the Communist Party official website is the lack of feedback services, such as commenting on articles or FAQ section, although there are e-mail addresses to contact the site administration, search service and special option for downloading a receipt for donations in favor of the party.

The CPRF is one of the parties which reputation is very closely connected with the image of the party leader, so the information on Gennady Zyuganov, the current leader, is very extensively presented. There is also a good deal of information on Pavel Grudinin, a Communist Party candidate for the presidential elections of 2018. Grudinin is a person who was unknown to the general public before the presidential elections. His nomination may be regarded as the party's attempt to offer a younger leader who can significantly expand the social base of the party. Many communications specialists consider that for thirty years of political career, Zyuganov has exhausted the limit of Russians' trust and he is no longer able to strengthen the communists' public positions; accordingly, this is the serious image-building lack. Grudinin did not win the presidential race, but the 2018 elections showed that in the future, a younger party leader of an impeccable reputation will significantly improve the party's rating.

The Communist Party does not have any party social networks (although some other parties use this interactive opportunity quite successfully), but the collective blog "Red Councils" is functioning regularly. Regarding to social networks, hosting and services, the CPRF has mastered all the most prominent sites. Party accounts are on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, My World, V Kontakte, and Odnoklassniki; additionally, there is a corresponding channel on YouTube.

2.3. CPRF Creative Innovations in Communications

The Communist Party creative "inventions" include such tabs as the "Anti-Corruption Initiatives" (allows visualizing the data on the party's anti-corruption activities), "People's Initiative" (collection of proposals for the promotion of civil initiatives), "Agitator" (accumulates information on the party's audiovisual, graphic and print campaign materials), and "Mini-football Club of the CPRF". On the last we will tell a little bit more.

Sports projects and events have become effective tools for promoting the image of a political party, an optimal non-political method for achieving political goals, and a way to attract different target groups. Therefore, the Communist Party quite actively uses this communication tool. The most successful sports project of the Russian communists was the mini-football club, which currently occupies a leading position in the amateur mini-football league. The club has its own website, made in the corporate party colors. The high level of design and frequent updating of materials serve the evidences that the project is of great importance for CPRF, first of all, as a tool to promote the image.

3. Conclusions

The modern Russian Communist Party has developed a certain strategy for the communication system management, especially in terms of planning the channels types. The CPRF is seeking to intensify the development of the Internet resources and audio-visual channels of communication, offers fruitful innovations, and generally, tries to build the tactics in accordance with the perspective scientific and methodical recommendations. However, the cumulative practical results do not confirm the effectiveness of the efforts made. In a political reality, the party's rating is coming down, on the last parliamentary elections (2016), the CPRF has got only 42 mandates, against 92 in 2011. Of course, the reasons lie not only in the communicative sphere. Nevertheless, corrections are needed here as well. If the party proclaims the rejuvenation of members and electorate, this goal requires more attention to the publications in content and arrangement for attracting the younger

generations' interest. The systematic work is necessary to overcome negative stereotypes concerning the party ideology and its top officials' image.

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