

Political Identities Constructed on a Social Network: The Labour Party on Facebook Boards

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with how an (institutional) political identity is constructed on a Social Network (SN) wall, which represents the political identity of the party as designed in digital interactive contexts, and where political image constructions are eventually accepted or negotiated by the digital audience. Like other political parties, the Labour Party resorts to online platforms for official accounts and political message dissemination (Gerbaudo 2014; Boyd 2014) and constructs its (online) identity. Since interaction is seen (Baumann 2000; De Fina 2011) as the most important locus for the production of identities, this study looks at Facebook boards as interactional sites where the Party (the Opening Posts, OPs, Smithson et al. 2011) and the citizens (the threads resulting from comments and replies to OPs) produce political identities in discourse. The discursive constructions (Wodak 1996; Bamberg/ De Fina/Schiffrin 2011) are used by voters to identify with and respond to the political institution, mirroring or rejecting the political group identity. Posts, comments and replies posted in July 2018 on the page of the Labour Party are taken as examples of (group) identity construction and analysed quantitatively and qualitatively (Partington 2003; Reisigl/Wodak 2009), to find discursive practices and to show how group identities are negotiated.

Keywords:

discourse, identity, left-wing, online media, social networks.