

THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE NATIONAL-BOLSHEVIK ORGANIZATION: A WEB-BASED ANALYSIS

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—Abstract —

The paper investigates the use of music on behalf of the Russian National-Bolshevik organization as captured through an analysis of its Webpage.

The starting point of the analysis is Eyerman and Jamison's (1998) definition of music as central element in the construction of social movements' meanings and in the making and organizing of their collective identity. Moreover, as pointed out by Zuev (2010), the Internet represents an expressive equipment used by the organizations for the successful presentation of the self, allowing the construction of an attractive public profile and assuring them a permanent performance visible to the audience.

Through a Web analysis of the music content and links and their positioning in the internal structure of the group's Webpage, the paper provides insights into the political communication style of the National Bolsheviks and, more specifically, on the contribution of music to their online self-presentation.

Key Words: *National-Bolsheviks, Internet, Music, SMOs self-presentation and identity*

JEL Classification: Z

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of the World Wide Web has pervaded and affected almost all the aspects of modern life, included social movements and organizations. In particular, as pinpointed by Wall, the medium has allowed movement and non-state actors to communicate and connect with each other also transnationally, thus challenging the power of the state and the market (Kahn and Kellner,2004 in Wall,2007:262).

For the scholar, even if we still have little understanding of how the process works, the Internet enables new movement identities (Ibd. 259).

For Diani, rather than creating new identities and ties, the Computer-mediated communication can strengthen and reinforced already existing ones. In fact, by enhancing the rate of exchange between geographically very distant activists and organizations, new technologies may contribute in converting “dispersed communities of sympathizers into virtual communities with a slightly higher degree of interaction”, thus strengthening their solidarity (Diani,2001:123).

In line with Diani, according to Hsu (2003) the Internet provides groups, which experience repression in mainstream media, with a channel through which they can articulate their voice. This phenomenon applies particularly in the case of nationalist movements which tend to be characterized by social segregation and dispersion, since the Internet is able to reconnect all the widespread groups through virtual networks.

Another opportunity offered by online environment to groups and activities is the organization and coordination of offline activities such as campaigns, rallies, and fundraising (Chadwick, 2007: 287). Emails, chats, discussion-forums, and instant messages provide the citizens with new possibilities of discussion and foster a less hierarchical and more consensual and participatory forms of communication and engagement in movements and organizations.

Yet, despite the cornucopia of studies devoted to the issue, Wedig has recently pointed out how researches on political organizations and the Internet tend to describe the proper or improper use of the medium on behalf of the latter rather than examining how they interact with the it, i.e., “how the medium functions within and facilitates the activities of the groups” (Wedig,2007:51).

Therefore, the following article takes the challenge issued by Wedig and investigates the use of the Internet on behalf of the National-Bolshevik organization. In particular, it is concerned with the ways in which the organization interacts and uses the medium to promote its music and music activities.

The paper opens with a general introduction on the role of music in the life of social movements and organizations which, together with an outline of the use and significance of the Internet in the Russian case and in the organization object of this study, provides the theoretical and methodological background for the analysis. Afterwards, a Web analysis of the Internet Page of the National

Bolshevik organization is conducted: the focus of the examination will be on the music content and link here presented.

On the whole, the paper sheds new light on the complex intertwining between music and the Internet characterizing the National Bolshevik and, more specifically, on the ways in which music takes part and contributes to the online self-presentation of the group.

2. ON THE ROLE OF MUSIC

2.1. Music in social movements and organizations

Talking about the role of music in the social movements of the 1960s, Eyerman and Jamison conceive movements' identity in terms of a "collective structure of feeling" and stress the central contribution of music in its making and organizing (Eyerman and Jamison,1998:166). In their opinion, music plays a part in the cognitive praxis of the movement and contributes in "supplying actors with the source of meanings and identities out of which they collectively construct social action and interaction" (Ibd.:162). According to Eyerman, music is able to provide a first psychological and social contact with the group. In particular, "recordings make possible participation without apparent commitment, especially when they are easily available on the Internet, either downloaded directly or purchased through mail order" (Eyerman,2002:450). For the scholar, this represents a first step which can lead to more contact and a more committed participation.

Similarly, Roscigno, Danaher and Summers-Effler (2002) affirm that music and its emotional and cognitive impacts can be fundamental in the construction of social movement's culture and collective identity. According to the scholars three components are fundamental in the social movement culture: a sense of group identity, an alternative frame of cause and effect and a sense of group political efficacy; as they state, music lyrics may have an impact to all the dimensions above mentioned (Roscigno, Danaher and Summers-Effler,2002:145-146).

The centrality of music in the life of the National Bolsheviks' organization was also confirmed in the course of the field research personally conducted in St. Petersburg during the summer and autumn 2010.

The National Bolsheviks (also called NazBols) represent the most known and important oppositional group in contemporary Russia. As stated in their program approved in 2003, the essence of National-Bolshevism is an all-consuming love

for Russia and an hatred for its enemies. The group aims at a revolutionary transformation of the country, based on the ideals of masculinity, collectivism and devotion to the own duties, which will lead to its breakthrough into the world.

When interviewed on the role of music in his organization, the Nazbols' leader in St. Petersburg Andrei Dmitriev points out that his group was initially born as a subculture grounded on music and style which only during the 2000s started engaging politically. Avangarde and rock musicians as Egor Letov and Sergey Kuriokhim are cited as cross-father and co-founders of the organization. Today, according to Dmitriev, music and politics are significantly intertwined and provide the group with a non-conformist life style (Pierobon,2011:18).

Several artists are representative of the ideology and mission of his group: besides Letov and Kuriokhin, Messer fuer Frau Mueller, Grazhdanskaya Oborona, Soyuz Sozdaiushih, Paranoia are listened by the Nazbols' leader. These musicians, described by him as non-conformist and not that popular in mainstream media, have contributed to the development of a peculiar music genre called "Nazbol rock" (Ibid.23).

3. THE INTERNET IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

Although nowadays only a small number of Russians have access to the Internet, the Net is perceived by political elites and organizations as a central medium for the political life and culture in contemporary Russia. In particular, as noted by Semetko and Krasnoboka with regard to the political role of the Internet in societies in transition as the Russian and Ukrainian ones, the Internet represents a precious resource for moving away from old-fashioned political forces (and forms) and for the development of new political parties (Semetko and Krasnoboka,2003:81-82).

Talking about the importance of the Internet in contemporary Russia, Lonkila (2008) highlights that it represents the only communication channel for political engagement available to oppositional groups whose opportunity to access traditional media is significantly decreasing.

While describing the political communication style of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration, Zuev (2010) draws an interesting parallel between the process of self-presentation discussed by Goffman (1991) and the use of Internet on behalf of youth organizations in contemporary Russia. More specifically, in his opinion the Internet can be conceived as an expressive equipment used by the

organizations for the successful presentation of the self, by allowing the organizations to build up an attractive public profile and assuring them a permanent performance visible to the audience (Zuev, 2010: 274).

In line with Lonkila, the St.Petersburgian NazBols' leader confirms the existence of a controversial relationship between traditional media and oppositional organizations in contemporary Russia. Dmitriev describes the issue in terms of a "Block" on television and radio affecting his group: i.e., when the media report about the actions of the National-bolsheviks, they label them as extremist and fascist. Nonetheless, in his opinion this "media-block" has irrelevant consequences for the visibility of his organization since nowadays young people do not watch and rely on television but, rather, tend to collect information directly through the Internet which is by him conceptualized as a "free" land.

Worthy of note are also Dmitriev's words on the importance of the Internet for the affiliation of new members: whereas in the 1990s people got in contact with the Nazbols and their activities basically by reading the newspaper Limonka, nowadays they are more likely to socialize and affiliate with the group through the Internet.

4. METHOD

As noted by Weare and Wan-Ying, the rise of the World Wide Web conceived by them as a global, decentralized network of hyperlinked multimedia objects, has opened new realm of analytic research and led to the development of new empirical techniques (Weare and Wan-Ying,2000:272). In fact, although content analysis is the established methodology for the study of the "objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the content of communication" (Baran, 2002: 410), researching new communication technologies necessitates the development and adoption of new methods of analysis.

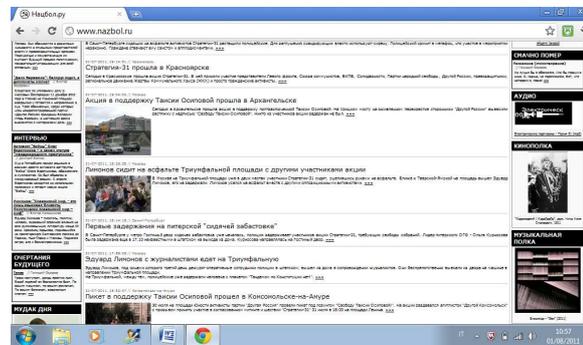
In line with Weare and Wan-Yang, according to Herring, the need of a methodologically plural paradigm is registered, able to take into account content of various kinds present on the WebPages, included texts, themes, features, links, and exchanges (Ibd.248).

Following Herring's remark, in the following pages, a Web feature analysis of the music presented on the National-Bolsheviks' Webpage is conducted. Rather than on what is communicated, the focus is on the kind of material and how it is presented (audio, video, text, image, links etc.).

5. NATIONAL-BOLSHEVIKS CASE

As we can see from Figure-1, scrolling the Homepage of the National Bolsheviks' organization, on the right column almost at the bottom of the page two different links with music are displayed: the link “Аудио” (*Audio*) and the link “Музыкальная Полка” (*Music shelf*).

Figure-1: Music content on the Homepage



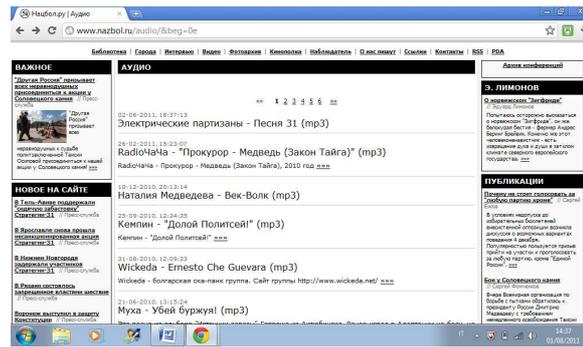
<http://www.nazbol.ru/>

By clicking the link “Audio”, a new page is opened (see Figure-2). Altogether, 106 songs in Mp3 format are listed in the six pages of this section.

For each song, a brief presentation of the track and detailed information on the date of its upload is provided; the last upload goes back to August, 2. 2011. Worth of note is that the upload of songs can be carried out only by the page administrator(s) and not by users and viewers themselves.

By selecting the title of song, another page is displayed where it is possible to listen to the music for free. Together with the upload information, the viewer is here offered the opportunity to express his preferences through the Facebook “Like” bottom.

Figure-2.: The link *Audio*



Source <http://www.nazbol.ru/audio/114.html&beg=0>

Under the second music link “Музыкальная Полка” a variety of music content is presented, included texts, images, songs and links.

On the main page shown in Figure-3., several album releases are advertised: for each release, the image of the CD cover and a short text is provided. The section is quite updated: the last entry deals with a release of 2011.

By clicking the single entry, a new page is displayed. The content of the pages is very diverse and includes information on album releases, interviews with bands and groups, albums and tracks which are available and/or which can be downloaded for free, recording of concerts and live performances, music videos. External links such as the official Webpage of selected bands or pages where music is available for free are also provided.

As in the case of the Audio link, the viewer is allowed to express his preferences through the Facebook “Like” bottom. Moreover, in this case he is also given the possibility to comment the material here presented. For instance, as shown in Figure-4, at the bottom of each page of this section, he is enabled to add comments and comment and be commented by other people.

the supply of external links on bands and music. Text and image, audio and video are all used by the organization for the presentation and promotion of its music, thus fully exploiting the various kinds of content and content modalities that the medium Internet offers.

Thirdly, the online music engagement of the NazBols' organization enhances the recruitment potential of the group.

In fact, as pointed out by Eyerman (2002), the listening of selected recordings, especially when they are easily accessible on the Internet, opens initial psychological and social contact with a wider group. Yet, the Facebook "Like" button together with the possibility of commenting and adding music links and information, represents a way to socialize and get in touch with other people sharing the same music tastes and interests. Besides a first contact with members of the organization, this provides the viewer with a sense of shared music identity which may constitute an important step towards an identification with the group and a more committed participation. Moreover, going back to Diani, these applications also facilitate the communication among dispersed sympathizers of the group, transforming them into virtual *music* community with a slightly higher degree of interaction.

Finally, the online music engagement of the Nazbols' group allows the construction of a virtual relation between the organization and the bands. In fact, external links such as the Bands' Websites are provided which contribute in the creation of virtual networks linking all these agents.

Surely, the nature of this relation deserves further investigation, complementing the Web analysis of the National Bolshevik organization's online music engagement with an analysis of the online political engagement of the selected artists and bands.

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