Going viral on the Facebook! Interactions between candidates and followers on Facebook in the campaign of the 2014 Hungarian general elections

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Introduction
At least since Barack Obama won the 2008 presidential election it is widely recognized that social media in general and Facebook in particular is an important tool in modern campaigning. This holds true for other parts of the world as well: a recent comparative study across twelve European countries shows that campaign managers see Facebook as the third most important tool in the professional campaign following TV presence and face-to-face communication (Štětka et al, 2014a). But what makes Facebook so important in campaigns? Most politicians are followed by just a very small part of voters (Vaccari – Nielsen, 2013). Communication with them can be useful for example in community building or organizing supporters, but it doesn’t make Facebook an effective campaign tool since politicians are just “preaching to the converted” (Norris, 2003). However, through their followers’ reactions politicians’ messages can reach many voters. In this aspect, the politicians are not preaching to the converted, but “preaching through the converted” (Vissers, 2009). On Facebook the audience of the politician’s communication is neither bounded nor completely fluid: it is double. The small, relative bounded audience’s activity level determines the volume of the audience that politicians reach through their followers.

Thus, the nature of the effective political communication on Facebook may differ from the mediated political communication. The latter’s primary aim is to affect citizens’ participation, their political acts, and especially their voting. Their political engagement, like their communication about politics, has been less important because of its small-scale character. Social media has extended the reach of citizens’ engagement and their communication about politics can make political contents more salient on Facebook. Thus, the goal of effective political communication on Facebook is to affect to the citizens’ engagement. More engagement can trigger contents to be more visible.

But what kind of political content can mostly trigger reactions from the politicians’ followers on Facebook? This study addresses this question through examining the Facebook posts of the candidates from the single-member districts of the Hungarian general elections in 2014. The data contains all Facebook post of three of the most voted-for candidates from all Budapest single-member districts. The unit of analysis is the individual Facebook post and the dependent variables are likes, comments and shares. The independent variables are the structural (text, picture, video etc.) and the substantial (content, emotional tone etc) characteristics of the post controlling for politicians popularity score on Facebook. I hypothesize that the most successful triggers of reactions will be the contents fitting to the interactive and personalized nature of the Facebook.
In the first section the study argues for the importance of interaction in the social media communication. Then it traces the methods, the variables and the hypothesis. After presenting the results the article finishes with some concluding remarks.

**Online political communication and interactivity**

Interactivity is a highly under defined concept (McMillan, 2002) and different approaches use it in different ways. This study applies a minimalist definition: interaction is communicative link between politicians and citizens which consist of at least one action and a reaction. Other definitions consider the action taker’s subsequent reaction to prior reaction as a condition of interaction (Rafaeli, 1988). However, online communication is characterized by many-to-many conversation where distinct acts of interactions occur in front of different audiences (see later) thus this condition seems to be too restrictive.

Interactivity has always been a core topic in the research of online politics, even if it was defined and examined in different ways by various approaches. However, it has been mainly driven by the normative ideal of the democratic renewal. The gap between political elites and voters has widened throughout the western world in the past decades which was characterized by decreasing voter turnout, declining political trust and growing political alienation (see, Gray – Caul, 2000; Pharr et al, 2000; Norris, 2011). Many scholars hoped that the internet would be the “magic elixir” which would solve the problem of modern democracies (Stromer – Galley, 2000) among others by facilitating a more direct way of communication between politicians and citizens. This notion is based on the normative concept of “deliberative” (see, Elster, 1998) or “strong” democracy (Barber, 1984) both of which assume participative and communicative citizenry and responsive politicians. Empirical evidence however, has contradicted this expectation: the internet has not facilitated more interaction between voters and politicians. Politicians have used the internet mainly for top-down communication in an information-centric way (Davis, 1999; Kamarck, 1999; Stromer-Galley, 2000; Jackson – Lilleker, 2009; Lilleker – Koc-Michalska, 2013 etc.). This approach seems to apply mainly the strong interaction concept. The interactive features of the politicians’ sites usually only serve to project a ‘façade’ of interactivity (Baker – Stromer-Galley, 2004). They are not used as tools of substantive interaction between politicians and citizens, as politicians ignore the reactions from their voters. These devices are just the “architecture of participation” (Jackson – Lilleker, 2009), or “merely a spectacle of interactivity” (Stromer-Galley, 2013: 5) without actually facilitating genuine interaction between politicians and their electorate. The reasons for politicians’ avoidance of interactivity are well-known: lack of resources, fear of the loss of control over the message and chance of ambiguity (Stromer – Galley, 2000; Jackson, 2003). Empirical findings show that politicians shape their communication strategy to serve their own political interest of being elected rather than some normative ideal. In this sense it is “politics as usual” (Margolis – Resnick, 2000). But is it politics as usual if we go beyond the normative claims?

Strong normative expectations may obscure ongoing processes of changes in politics in general and political communication in particular. This raises the question of whether one can analyze this interactivity beyond the normative claims by taking for granted the strategic use of politicians’ communication? A promising move in this direction came through adapting the dialogic theory from the field of public relations (Taylor – Kent, 2004; Sweetser – Lariscy, 2008; Zhang – Seltzer, 2010; Seltzer – Zhang, 2010; Lynch – Hogan, 2012). This theory deemed the active, quality, symmetric and two-way dialogic communication between the organization and its public important in the
relationship building and maintenance process. (Lynch – Hogan, 2012). By applying this approach to the field of online political communication it is possible to look at the interactions between politicians and citizens as a form of strategic communication which maintains the relationship between them and keeps voters satisfied with politicians (Zhang – Seltzer, 2010; Seltzer – Zhang, 2011). However, most politicians can only reach a small portion of the electorate through online direct communication as few voters follow politicians’ Facebook pages (Nielsen – Vaccari, 2012) or read their websites (Gibson – McAllister, 2011). The continuous maintenance of the dialogic relationship with this small, likely partisan (Vissers, 2009) segment of voters requires expansive resources from politicians and their staff which is generally one of the important reasons of their avoiding online interactions with voters (Stromer-Galley, 2000). This reality makes it hard to justify the strategic use of interactivity based on the dialogic theory, especially during the campaign trail when one of the main objectives is reaching the floating and disengaged voters.

**Mediated message – two-step flow of political communication**

This study suggests another theoretical background to analyze the interactions between politicians and voters taking into account the fact that politician want to be elected. In this approach the interaction disseminates the politicians’ message to the wider public. The two-step flow of communication approach was developed to explain the media’s effect. It argued that the wider population is mostly influenced by local opinion leaders and that the effect of mass media mainly reaches them through their highly interested and attentive peers (Lazarsfeld et al, 1944). The theory has been applied to online politics as well. Pippa Norris and John Curtice argued that it would be premature to declare that Internet has had limited effects on politics because of citizens’ modest online political activity. They show that the small segments of voters who use politicians’ websites are more likely to talk to others about politics during election time. It means they likely facilitate the dissemination of the information they get from the websites (Norris – Curtice, 2007). Vissers found that the Belgian campaign managers consider the main function of political websites to be two-step flow information dissemination. These websites can facilitate the offline mobilization of the visitors’ social networks (Vissers, 2009).

This approach isn’t concerned with the interactions between politicians and voters as their research was confined to the information-centric web 1.0.: voters obtain information from the website which is disseminated widely by their offline conversations about politics with their peers. However, on Facebook the transmission of the message to the voters’ social network is a consequence of interactions between voters and politician. The politicians’ posts can reach the wider public through the citizens’ public reactions. More and more people get political news and information from Facebook mostly mediated to them by their friends. A political message delivered in this fashion may have a bigger persuasive effect because of positive bias towards the credibility of the source. Scholars argue that source credibility depends on three features: character, knowledge, goodwill (see: Householder – LaMarre, 2014). Personal familiarity with sources may increase the perceived credibility of information. The character and knowledge of the source is well-known to the user, and more importantly when the user perceives the source as having no special or personal interests behind her utterances it becomes easier to believe that the source actually and honestly thinks what she says or shares. Of course perceived credibility varies. Not all Facebook friends are perceived in

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1 48% of web users in US, see: Pew Research Center, October 2014. Unfortunately as far as I know there is no similar data from Hungary
the same manner. However, users mostly see their closest friends’ posts in their News Feed thanks to the special selection algorithm of Facebook. A recent 61-million-person experiment shows that Facebook users’ political behavior is significantly affected by the public Facebook activity of their strong ties (Bond et al, 2012).

So, according to this approach, the politicians’ aim can be to reach their direct followers’ social networks including floating and disengaged voters. Politicians’ messages can reach and persuade these voters through mediation of their own friends. It means that affecting followers’ communication, inducing reactions, creating interaction can become a strategic goal of political communication on Facebook.

**Reaction and interaction on Facebook**

But what does interaction on Facebook actually mean? It is difficult to apply conventional interactivity concepts on Facebook. These are used in a context where the participants and the audience of the interaction are bounded whereas the participants of the Facebook interaction perform themselves in front of different audiences. A Facebook user creates her own egonetwork mostly based on her offline relationships (boyd – Elisson, 2008:211) which is intrinsically the user’ personalized communication context. This is the fixed audience of her public communication, the member of her egonetwork may see all her public utterances, react to these and their communication can also be seen and reacted to by the user. Communicating and reacting publicly, are the inherent characteristics and intrinsic components of social media in general and Facebook in particular (Marwick – boyd, 2014). Furthermore, interaction seems to be the condition of existence on Facebook because of its selection algorithm. Put simply this means that users can only be seen by their friends if their posts could induce reactions from them and they mostly see that friend’s posts whose posts they often react to.

Scholars argue that public activity on Facebook is mostly driven by expressive motivations (Zhao et al, 2008; Rosenberg – Egbert, 2011 etc.). The actions, reactions and interactions are devices of self-presentation, identity-construction and – negotiation (Zhou et al, 2008). Political activities are bound up with these expressive motivations as well (Svennson, 2011, Marichal, 2013). Political action on Facebook is a way to express, perform and negotiate the user’s political identity in front of her egonetwork. (Svensson, 2011). The follower’s reactions to the posts of the politician may not be a genuine reaction because they are at the same time an action in front of her egonetwork. It is not obvious that the addressee of the reaction is the politician. So, in the Facebook interaction the line between action and reaction is blurred. It is rather a kind of networked interactivity where the original action – the post – can be the ground of many interactions through the reactions to the original post spawning even more actions and reactions. The reactions open up the original interactive situation in front of new audiences, so the politician that wants to be widely visible aim to expand this networked interactivity as much as possible.

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2 News Feed is the constantly updating list of stories in the middle of user’s home page. News Feed includes status updates, photos, videos, links, app activity and likes from people, Pages and groups that you follow on Facebook (see: https://www.facebook.com/help/327131014036297/). Selection of content appearing in News Feed is based on complicated algorithm which personalizes that by leaning on user’s prior activity (see: https://www.facebook.com/business/news/News-Feed-FYI-A-Window-Into-News-Feed).
Political communication has always required reaction in order to exert influence on the citizens or the political discourse (Kiss, 2014). But until now the reactions of mass media and the elites within it have been what really matters. Citizens’ private reactions in the form of conversations in their private sphere about politics have usually been less important because of their small-scale character which was reinforced by the taboo nature of politics (Eliasoph, 1998). Professionalized political communication has been geared to obtain the desired reactions from mass media by fitting the message into the logic of mass media (see: Mazzoleni – Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008). Social media in general and Facebook with its huge penetration in particular have changed this situation by dramatically expanding the reach of citizens’ causal political conversations and statements. This phenomenon makes the citizens’ reactions another important resource beside media reactivity for political communications. If it is assumed that citizens’ react to politics distinctly than the mass media or political elites then it follows that the nature of the political communication will change to the extent to which online political communication on social media will become more important. This is why identifying the type of content that is most inductive to generating reactions on social media is essential, in order to understand the changing nature of political communications.

Only few recent studies examine the kind of content that can affect followers’ engagement. Larsson (2014) investigates this question in relation to the Facebook pages of Norwegian party leaders during the 2013 campaign and found that critical and the acknowledgment type content was the most popular. Bronstein (2013) examined the rhetorical devices applied and the reactions received to them on the Facebook pages of the two nominees during the 2012 U.S. presidential election. Romney’s content that linked the ethos (the candidate’s personal character or credibility) and the pathos (emotional appeal) received more likes, just as the calls for shares and request for donations did too. In case of Obama contents linked to the logos (use of logic or reason) got more comments.

During the course of this research Gerodimos and Justinussen’s published their study (2014) which also deals with the U.S. 2012 presidential campaign, but only in relation to Obama’s page. Besides looking at the rhetorical devices they also took into account the structural features (videos, pictures etc...) of the posts. They found that the most popular posts contained pictures of the Obama girls or the First Lady. Photos of Obama, however were also highly reacted. Posts using one of the rhetorical devices (ethos, pathos, logos) were liked by followers: content with pathos was the most successful in inducing reactions.

Although these studies make a big contribution to the field it seems this area is highly underexplored. This study aims to discover the factors affecting the followers’ reactions in a context that hasn’t been applied earlier. To explain the posts’ effects their structural features (text, picture, video etc.), their emotional tone (positive, negative), their character (information, mobilization, engagement, personalization, humor), and orientation (local, national, international) are examined. The research’s scope is wider than those of earlier studies’, because the data sets consist of 34 candidates’ posts.

**Methods and hypothesis**

A data has been collected from the campaign of the Hungarian general elections in 2014. During campaigns both politicians and voters are more active which makes such periods especially suitable to examine which content types resonate most with voters, out of the huge amount of “offered” posts. Hungary is a less examined case in relation to Facebook political communication (but see: Merkovity, 2014). Even though a recent comparative research shows that Hungarian campaign
managers rated the direct and new communication modes of campaign the second highest out of 12 European countries (Štětka et al, 2014a).³

Hungary has close to 10 million citizens, and 4.6 million Facebook users. It has a party-centered political system (Papp, 2013: 50-61), and the political culture is highly polarized (Körösényi, 2013). The electoral system is a mixed one: 106 representatives are elected from single-member districts in a one round system and 93 representatives are elected from the national party lists. This study focuses on solely the candidates from single-member districts. The party-centered nature of the system prevails in the single-member district as well (Papp, 2013)

The unit of analysis is the individual post from candidates. All of the selected candidates’ Facebook posts from the last two weeks of the campaign (from 23th of March to the election day, 6th of April) were coded. From the Budapest single-member districts⁴ the three most voted for candidates were selected. Those that had Facebook pages were coded. Candidates’ personal profiles were deemed as being private, and thus were ignored. The data consist of 1099 Facebook posts from 34 candidates⁵. Data was recorded only by the author.⁶ Independent variables were elements of the individual posts and users’ reactions to these were used as dependent variables. Negative binomial regression analysis was applied as dependent variables are count data and it is overdispersed.

**Dependent variables**

**Like:** That is the simplest form of reaction on Facebook as it requires only one click. It is not known what ‘liking’ something means exactly but it may not be far from the truth if one understands it as a kind of agreement with the content of post. The ‘like’ may be seen by the member of user’s egonetworks on their News Feed or Ticker⁷. From the aspect of politicians the users’ ‘liking’ has the important virtue that the message is disseminated without adding individual contribution from users beyond their standardized agreement. It is basically a one-off interaction mode insofar as it is assumed that the ‘like’ is rarely withdrawn and then renewed again. The ‘like’ doesn’t open up a new interaction channel, but widen the existing one by expanding the visibility and reactability to non-followers. However the non-followers’ possibility to react, does not necessarily mean that they do.

Social media incorporates some unspoken social norms (Marwick – boyd, 2014) that determine which forms of actions count as appropriate. Further investigation is needed to see how appropriate interacting with not-followed users or page’s contents.

**Comment:** It enables more self-presentation. Under the post the user can express her opinion about the content or the author of that and interact with other users. The comment may be seen by the member of user’s egonetwork on their News Feed or Ticker so it makes the original post visible and ‘reactable’ to non-followers. It doesn’t open up a new interaction channel outside the original post but does within the post: the comment under the post can be commented and ‘liked’ by the

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³ It has to note that they has rated the mediated and traditional mode of campaigning more higher score; in that Hungary has got the highest average score out of 12 countries.

⁴ The study aims to examine the three most voted candidates from all single-member districts from the country but in this phase of the research only the Budapest districts’ candidates have been recorded.

⁵ 30 candidates have not Facebook profile out of 54 candidates.

⁶ Krippendorff’s alpha intracoder reliability was measured in 10% sample of the dataset (109 posts). Alpha value of structural features = .95; of emotional tone = .87; of character variables = .91; of orientation variables = .82. These values are considered to be high. (Hayes – Krippendorff, 2007)

⁷ Ticker is a tool on Facebook which shows user’s friends activity in real time.
audience that it reaches, including the users’ own friends. In the aspect of information dissemination a big virtue of the comment function is that it can be done repeatedly. Every single comment raises the chances of visibility, so a heated debate between users under the post can be useful in respect of information dissemination. However, it is not a neutral transmitter, the users express their own opinions concerning the post and the author. Štětka and his colleagues examined the comments on Czech party pages and found that even if positive comments with the ‘home’ party were dominant – on all but one page – there was still a large amount of negative comments present (Štětka et al, 2014b). Politicians are able to delate comments and ban users from their pages but this claims additional resources and may entail harmful consequences. The deletion of comments may induce the author of that particular comment to make other incensed comments or express her opinion more stressful way in her own page.

**Share**: Content sharing opens up new interaction channels for the post in the user’s own egonetwork. Shared content can be liked, commented and shared by new audiences in a new ‘space’. Additionally, detaching the post from its original context, which is visible to a broad unknown audience, members of egonetwork can express their opinions in a more familiar context when interacting with shared posts since these are only seen by their own and the sharer’s egonetworks. Sharing is the most important device of virality. By opening new interaction channels the message can reach not just those users’ egonetworks who directly react to the post, but may potentially acquire a much larger scope through chains of sharing. However, similarly the comment, this is not a neutral tool of transmission. The users may open up new interaction channels in such a way that they attach their own opinion to the original post. Furthermore, sharing is a repeatable form of reaction however it can be assumed that this occurs rarely. For mobilization purpose repeated sharing would be conceivable but politicians likely serve sufficient shareable contents in campaign terms which make it unnecessary to share the same post several times.

**Independent variables**

Independent variables are the elements of individual posts. These elements are grouped into four sets: structural features, emotional tones, character and orientation. The novelty of this operationalization is that posts are not pushed into exclusively one category or another. All variables are treated as possible elements of posts. Posts are coded according to whether they contain any of these elements or not. Thus, for example, a post can be coded as both positive and negative if it contains both criticism towards an opponent and tells of some success of the candidates. Besides textual content pictures and videos not exceeding 3 minutes in length were also coded.

**Structural features**: The appearance of the individual post can bear on the range of reactions. Gerodimos and Justinussen have taken into account the structure of post and found that posts with videos, interestingly, had a statistically significant negative correlation with the number of likes, comments and shares (Gerodimos – Justinussen, 2014: 13). This result signals the importance of considering the posts’ features. Individual post is coded according by whether it contains text, pictures, videos, memes\(^8\), or emoticons. However, as these features may not turn up separately, it seems to be sensible to examining them together. A new categorical variable was created from variables of text, picture and video which measure whether these features appear alone or along

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\(^8\) Meme was defined as picture with text on it but was excluded official campaign materials (where party or candidate’ name appear on it).
with other feature. Given the highly visual nature of Facebook it is assumed that posts with pictures will be more liked and shared while posts with containing only text will be generally less liked and shared. At the same time it is expected that textual content will be more likely commented. I also expect that memes will be likely shared by followers.

H1.1: Posts with picture will be more liked and shared
H1.2: Posts with only text will be less liked and shared
H1.3: Posts with textual content will be more commented
H1.4: Memes will be more shared

Emotional tone: Several studies have drawn attention to the dominance and popularity of the emotion-filled messages in the social network sites. In the 2012 U.S. campaign both Romney and Obama operated principally through emotive message, eminently positive ones (Bronstein, 2013). This is not surprising considering that other studies found that the emotion-filled messages spread most quickly on social network sites (Berger – Milkman, 2010; Stieglitz – Dang Xuan, 2013; Wu et al, 2011). Individual post is coded according to its emotional elements: positive or negative. A post has a positive tone if it contains one of the following elements: applause; honor; reporting about success; reporting about inaugurations. A post has a negative tone if it contains one of the following elements: critique; attack; expressing pity. Both positive and negative tones are dichotomous variables, so if a post contains neither of these elements it is given a ‘zero’ value in both variables. However, a post may have ‘one’ value in both variables if it contains both positive and negative elements. The tone was coded just in case of political content, non-political (personalized) content was ignored. Based on previous research it is assumed that emotional-filled posts will be more reacted to. Although prior findings highlighted the role of positive emotions in virality, negativity may also greatly effect reactivity as negative news elicit stronger and more sustained psychophysiological reactions from humans (Soroka – McAdams, 2015). Given the conflicting nature of politics as well as the high degree of political cynicism and polarization in Hungary negativity is also expected to have an effect on reactivity.

H2: Emotional-filled posts will be more reacted.

Character variables

- Information: information is the standard form of web 1.0 political communication (Tedesco, 2004; Taylor – Kent, 2004) and studies found that it remains dominant in the web 2.0 environment as well (Lilleker – Koc-Michalska, 2013). This study coded whether the individual post conveyed information. Posts qualified to do so by containing one of following elements: account for the candidate’s acts or public utterances; opinions; pledge; presenting earlier accomplishments; general information which is not connected directly to the candidate; upcoming event without call for participation. As information transmission is not fitted to the interactive nature of web 2.0 in general and Facebook in particular, it is assumed

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9 Category of this variable: (1) contains neither text nor picture nor video (2) only text (3) only picture (4) only video (5) text + picture (6) text + video. There were no posts that contains both video and picture.
that post containing information elements will be less reacted to, especially in relation to likes and shares.

- **Personalization:** One of the important characteristics of social network sites is that attention is directed toward the candidate rather than their parties (Enli – Skogerbo, 2013). In addition, the followed politician’s posts appear in the flow of everyday content by the user’s friends in the news feed. So politician’s posts have to struggle for the attention and reaction not with other political contents but with the everyday contents of the user’s friend. This “contest” may incline the politician to perform more like an everyday human than a politician. Politician’s personality may thus come to the forefront of attention. A post is coded as personalized if it contains one of the following elements: presenting the candidate’s family or a member of the family; presenting personal interests (music, sport etc.); disclosure about the candidate’s person beyond politics; expression of local patriotic sentiment. It is assumed that personalized contents will induce more reactions, especially more likes, because of reasons mentioned above.

- **Mobilization:** This is associated with the community organization aspect of online political communication. In this kind of communication the politician asks followers for offline action. A post is coded as mobilizing if it contains one the following elements: ask for voting; ask for participation in an offline event; ask for donating money; sharing campaign material. This character type also relates to an aspect of online political communication that is not really fit to the nature of social media because of thinking in a bounded audience, thus it is assumed to induce less reactions.

- **Engagement:** This study records solicitations for Facebook actions as a distinct category. In this case the politician asks followers for likes, comments or shares. The politician may think of followers not as a bounded community which has to be mobilized, but as a resource which can extend the reach of the message. Another possible motivation of asking for reactions comes from dialogic theory: interaction can strengthen the relationship between politician and follower. Engagement content is coded if the post contains either ask for like or comment or sharing. It is assumed that such attention from the politicians’ side will be successful and result in more reactions.

- **Humor:** Humor as a tool of political communication in the social media has been given less attention. Given that Facebook is principally a space of leisure and entertainment (see: Papacharissi – Mendelson, 2011) it can be assumed that humor has a strong interactive value there. Humorous content offers an easy connection opportunity for the users as it isn’t risky for their impression management, moreover being funny is generally deemed as a positive trait. The relation between humor and politics has already been examined in other contexts and studies found that participation in a humorous TV-show increases the popularity of the politician (Baum, 2005). Humor can also act as a “gate” for serious political content (Xenos – Becker, 2009) and draw attention to certain problems (Nielsen, 1990). Gerodimos and Justinussen also coded humorous content and their results show that humor was the most liked rhetorical device but this outcome wasn’t discussed in their text. Operationalization of humor is not an easy task but it can be supposed that a coder familiar with Hungarian context can identify which contents are intended to be humorous. Only the clear, explicit

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10 It is not usual in Hungary, but cannot be excluded (see: LMP in 2009 European Parliament Election)
humor was coded, discreet irony or mock was ignored. It is assumed that humor will induce more reactions, especially likes and shares.

H 3.1: Information posts will be less reacted, especially in relation to like and share
H 3.2: Personalized contents will induce more reactions, especially more likes
H 3.3: Mobilization posts will induce less reaction
H 3.4: Engagement post will induce more reactions
H 3.5: Humorous posts will induce more reactions

Orientation variables: Local orientation or/and national orientation: Given the election context and single-member districts, the orientation of post in terms of discussing local or national issues may be relevant. Followers may react in different ways to local or national issues. As a post can concern both local and national issue, the study treats these variables as elements as well. Originally there was a third element as well: the international orientation, but as it was almost invisible (only 7 cases out of 1099 posts) it has been excluded from the analysis. In the Hungarian context, the campaign is usually highly national-focused despite the significance of single-member districts in the electoral system. Thus it is assumed that national-focused posts will be more reacted to.

H 4: National-focused posts will be more reacted to

Control variables: Two control variables were involved in the analysis. One of them is an additional structural variable, the “highlighted content”. Facebook offers the opportunity to make a post highlighted that is to make it more visible on one’s page. The other control variable is a politician-level variable which aims to control for the Facebook popularity of politicians. Its best measure would be the number of followers but because of this study’s retrospective character this data is not available from the examined period. Another possible method would be the average activity (like, comment and share) on politicians’ pages during the examined period but given the unbalanced proportion of types of reactions (more likes as comments or shares) this variable would be biased towards controlling one dependent variable to a larger extent than others. Thus this study uses a weighted average activity score as a control variables in which all types of dependent variables matter to the same extent.\(^{11}\)

\[^{11}\] The formula of weighted average popularity is \( \bar{x} = \frac{1}{x_{w}+100} + \frac{1}{y_{w}+100} + \frac{1}{z_{w}+100} \), where \( \bar{x} \) is average like, \( \bar{y} \) is average comment and \( \bar{z} \) is average share, and \( x_{w} = \frac{\bar{x}}{1/\bar{x}+\bar{y}+\bar{z}} \), \( y_{w} = \frac{\bar{y}}{1/\bar{x}+\bar{y}+\bar{z}} \), \( z_{w} = \frac{\bar{z}}{1/\bar{x}+\bar{y}+\bar{z}} \) are the weights belong to them.
## Findings

Table 1: Negative binomial regression estimates for Facebook reactivity of politicians' followers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Like</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Only Text</strong></td>
<td>1.949 (0.450)  **</td>
<td>2.103 (0.487)  **</td>
<td>1.918 (0.574)  *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Only Picture</strong></td>
<td>1.824 (0.421)  ***</td>
<td>1.150 (0.333)</td>
<td>0.238 (0.072)  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Only Video</strong></td>
<td>0.694 (0.255)  *</td>
<td>0.370 (0.201)  #</td>
<td>0.166 (0.051)  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text + Picture</strong></td>
<td>2.751 (0.644)  ***</td>
<td>2.123 (0.482)  ***</td>
<td>0.650 (0.210)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text + Video</strong></td>
<td>1.710 (0.375)  *</td>
<td>1.428 (0.398)</td>
<td>0.799 (0.225)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meme</strong></td>
<td>2.480 (0.575)  ***</td>
<td>1.776 (0.446)  *</td>
<td>1.240 (0.506)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharing</strong></td>
<td>0.915 (0.126)</td>
<td>0.799 (0.136)</td>
<td>0.369 (0.058)  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emoticon</strong></td>
<td>1.344 (0.210)  #</td>
<td>1.668 (0.303)</td>
<td>1.144 (0.248)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td>1.271 (0.145)  *</td>
<td>1.044 (0.163)</td>
<td>1.477 (0.247)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
<td>1.112 (0.124)</td>
<td>2.007 (0.163)  ***</td>
<td>3.318 (0.518)  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information</strong></td>
<td>0.781 (0.130)</td>
<td>0.729 (0.183)</td>
<td>0.757 (0.111)  #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
<td>1.204 (0.267)</td>
<td>1.228 (0.208)</td>
<td>3.228 (1.011)  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mobilization</strong></td>
<td>0.754 (0.134)</td>
<td>0.706 (0.130)  #</td>
<td>1.056 (0.166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal</strong></td>
<td>1.114 (0.194)</td>
<td>1.060 (0.263)</td>
<td>0.460 (0.144)  *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humor</strong></td>
<td>0.915 (0.316)</td>
<td>0.828 (0.624)</td>
<td>2.200 (0.721)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District</strong></td>
<td>0.923 (0.113)</td>
<td>0.973 (0.141)</td>
<td>0.731 (0.161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National</strong></td>
<td>0.996 (0.122)</td>
<td>1.122 (0.164)</td>
<td>1.066 (0.202)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highlighted Content</strong></td>
<td>0.957 (0.165)</td>
<td>0.758 (0.192)</td>
<td>1.069 (0.281)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Popularity</strong></td>
<td>1.084 (0.005)  ***</td>
<td>1.073 (0.006)  ***</td>
<td>1.078 (0.007)  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intercept</strong></td>
<td>3.385 (0.159)  ***</td>
<td>0.690 (0.207)  ***</td>
<td>2.396 (0.241)  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>χ²</strong></td>
<td>1895.324</td>
<td>1076.226</td>
<td>874.939      ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obs.</strong></td>
<td>1099</td>
<td>1099</td>
<td>1099</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values in each cell are measures of incidence rate ratios. Standard errors are in parentheses. Variables of “only text”, “only picture”, “only video”, “text + picture” and “text + video” are belong to the same categorical variables where the reference group is “posts contain neither text nor picture nor video”. Popularity is a continuous variable ranged from 0.11 to 71.02. All other variables are dummies. Standard errors clustered on politicians.

# p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Table 1 shows the results of a negative binomial regression analysis. The first column contains the regression model of followers’ likes, followed by the model of comments then of shares. For ease of interpretation the incidence rate ratios (IRR) are presented in cells of the table. Most variables are dummies and IRR values above 1 mean that posts containing the examined element are more likely to induce the measured reaction than without that element. If a posts IRR value is below 1 that means that the presence of that elements decreases probability of occurrence of that reaction. For the first five variables, which belong to the same categorical variables, the reference situation is that the post contains neither text nor picture nor video.

The first conspicuous finding is that posts’ structure has sizeable explanatory power in all models. While social media is often conceived as a space where visual communication is getting more
important (e.g. Uimonen, 2013), these results shows that textually remains pivotal in case of political contents. Posts containing text without picture or video induced significantly more activity in all types of reactions. Posts containing only pictures are significantly more liked but less shared. Followers like and share posts containing only videos significantly less and they also get fewer comments but the relationship is weaker in the latter case. However, if the post contains text besides video the direction of effect is reversed in case of the like. Posts including both text and pictures are most likely to be liked by followers. These result shows the importance of textuality on Facebook communication. The results concerning memes have to be highlighted as well: although Hungarian politicians rarely use memes in their Facebook communication (40 occurrences out of 1099 posts) these posts get more likes and comments. It is noteworthy that shared content is re-shared significantly less than original content. This shows creating viral content for Facebook is not an easy task.

Besides structure the emotional tone is the other important element in inducing reactions. Interestingly inverse emotions spur different forms of reactions which shows how diverse the examined reaction types are in their nature. Positive emotional tones results in more likes whereas negativity inclines followers to comment and articulate their own opinions. Sharing, which is most important in relation to virality, is strongly connected with both tones but posts filled with negative emotion are more likely to be injected directly into follower’s own egonetworks.

Surprisingly, posts’ character has less effect on reactivity, especially in case of likes and comments: there is no significant link between them. However, the character significantly affects the number of shares. Contents with call for Facebook activity (engagement) are more likely shared which means followers tend to perform this kind of request. In accordance with the hypothesis humor has a serious virality potential as humorous posts are more shared. Despite this fact Hungarian politicians hardly used humor in their Facebook communication, only 28 posts out of 1099 contained humorous elements. However, it’s striking that personalized content has had no significant effect on the number of likes or comments whereas it was negatively correlated with shares. Followers shared politicians personalized contents with their friends less. This result contradicts both this study’s expectations and existing findings which link social media with growing personalization of politics (Enli – Skogerbo, 2013; Gerodimos – Justinussen, 2014; Kruikemeier et al, 2013). It is also worth mentioning that that informational and mobilization content is less likely to be reacted to, however we should note that these results are not or only weakly significant.

Orientation of posts has no relevancy in relation to reactions. Remarkably that Facebook-offered option of “highlighted content” also has no significant influence on reactivity.
Table 2: Summary of hypothesis and results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1.1: Posts with picture will be more liked and shared</strong></td>
<td>Partially supported. Posts with picture are more liked, but less shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1.2: Posts with only text will be less liked and shared</strong></td>
<td>Failed. Posts with only text are more likely liked and shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1.3: Posts with textual content will be more commented</strong></td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1.4: Memes will be more shared</strong></td>
<td>Failed. Although memes are more likely shared but this result is not significant. However, memes are more likely liked or commented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H2: Emotional-filled posts will be more reacted.</strong></td>
<td>Highly supported. Exceptions: links between positive tone and comments as well as links between negative tones and likes. These are not significant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H 3.1: Information posts will be less reacted, especially in relation to like and share</strong></td>
<td>Mostly failed. Supposed direction of effect seem to be right but these results are not or just weakly significant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H 3.2: Personalized contents will induce more reactions, especially more likes</strong></td>
<td>Failed. In case of likes and comments there are no significant relationships but personalized contents are less likely shared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H 3.3: Mobilization posts will induce less reaction</strong></td>
<td>Mostly failed. In case of likes and shares there are no significant relationships, but there is a weakly significant negative link with comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H 3.4: Engagement post will induce more reactions</strong></td>
<td>Partly supported. Engagement posts induce significantly more shares, but are not more liked or commented on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H 3.5: Humorous posts will induce more reactions</strong></td>
<td>Partly supported. It is true only for shares, but not for likes or comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H 4: National-focused posts will be more reacted to</strong></td>
<td>Failed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions**

This study argued that effective political communication on Facebook can be achieved by interactivity, triggering reactions from voters. However, this kind of reactivity differs from its traditional understanding. Reactivity in the context of this study is simultaneously an action in front of another audience driven by mostly expressive motives of identity, and the wish to offer this act for reactions from members of ones egonetwork. The political relevance of Facebook is gradually growing as it is becoming an important source of political information for an increasing number of voters. However this may change the nature of political communication as trying to induce reactions from citizens is probably different than from media and elites. That is why it is important to understand what kind of content can trigger reaction from citizens.

This study is a move in this direction as it tries to discover some communication forms affecting citizens’ reactions. The results show that the appearance of posts greatly effects reactivity. On Facebook offers ample opportunities for visual communications, but even so textuality remains pivotal. Mixed contents which contain text are also successful in almost all reaction types. Another important finding is the salience of emotion-filled contents as these induce significantly more reactions Negative emotional content proved to be the most viral in terms of shares. The substantive
contents of posts are less important in reactivity. However, our hypothesis has been confirmed concerning the viral potential of humor in political communication on Facebook. Surprisingly personalized contents have not significant affected reactivity except shares which negatively correlate to it.

This research, of course, has several limitations. Firstly, only the first step of virality was examined meaning that we could not trace what happened to content that “left” politicians pages. We could not see what happened in the new interaction channels that emerged out of this process. Another important limitation is that only the quantity of reactions was examined, ignoring the quality. Qualities of reactions are also important in two aspects. First because it matters how posts appear for followers’ Facebook friends. Second it also matters who reacts to a given post, because not all reactions are equally important. From a politician’s point of view, a share by a page that is followed by thousands is more valuable than the share of an ordinary user. Network position is also important because a user in a bridge position linking separated groups of users may be more valuable as a reaction from this user may transmit the message to those who otherwise would not encounter it. The character of user’s egonetwork may also matter. The number of floating voters in one’s egonetwork is far from irrelevant as is the diversity of political opinion. Individual attributes are also relevant like whether the user in question is an opinion leader in her network or not. Whether the user’s peers listen to her opinion in political topics or not. Future studies have to address these questions as well as refine operationalization of contents of post to have a better understanding about factors affecting reactions and thereby the character of changing online political communications.

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