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Discovered and Undiscovered Fields of Digital Politics:
Mapping Online Political Communication and Online
News Media Literature in Hungary

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Abstract

The article reviews the main theoretical and empirical contributions about digital news media and online political communication in Hungary. Our knowledge synthesis focuses on three specific subfields: citizens, media platforms, and political actors. Representatives of sociology, political communication studies, psychology, and linguistics have responded to the challenges of the internet over the past two decades, which has resulted in truly interdisciplinary accounts of the different aspects of digitalization in Hungary. In terms of methodology, both normative and descriptive approaches have been applied, mostly with single case-study methods. Based on an extensive review of the literature, we assess that since the early 2000s the internet has become the key subject of political communication studies, and that it has erased the boundaries between online and offline spaces. We conclude, however, that despite the richness of the literature on the internet and politics, only a limited number of studies have researched citizens' activity and provided longitudinal analyses.

Keywords: digitalization, internet, politics, social media, Hungary

1 Introduction

This article identifies the key issues and trends in online political communication in Hungary over the past two decades by combining the approach of literature review and topic review. Several knowledge-synthesis reviews have attempted to summarize all pertinent studies related to the specific topic of the internet and politics (e.g. Jungherr, 2016; Skoric et al., 2016), but country-focused overviews are rare. As some edited volumes suggest (e.g. Aalberg et al., 2017; Eibl & Gregor, 2019), country-specific work makes a substantial contribution to the literature. The latter highlights regional or contextual information and improves the understanding of the consistencies and inconsistencies in diverse evidence. This study adds to this area of scholarship with a view to improving the visibility of country-focused topic reviews in the field of web-based political communication.

On the one hand, it is our aim to provide an up-to-date and comprehensive audit of the scientific literature on the digitalization of campaign communication, news media, and citizen interaction in Hungary. The paper is designed to meet a key goal: to introduce the most important findings of the literature about the internet and politics in Hungary for the non-Hungarian speaking academic community. A review of international literature is beyond our scope, and we concentrate only on those articles and books which deal with Hungary. On the other hand, we pinpoint country specificities in relation to web-based politics, such as the early advance of free online news media, and the extensive use of Facebook since 2010. Beside the particular characteristics associated with Hungary, we also identify gaps in research evidence that will help define future scientific agendas.

Therefore, our article might be especially useful to those scholars who consider Hungary to be a relevant case for comparative work. In other words, this review provides information that may justify the selection of this country for their academic projects.

First, as part of the introduction, we depict the key figures and the main trends related to the internet and social media in Hungary. We then discuss online political communication by focusing on three key agents of interaction: citizens, news media, and political actors. In the concluding session, underexplored and missing pieces of knowledge are presented that suggest new avenues for further research.

1.1 The context: key figures regarding internet penetration and social media use in Hungary

In Hungary, computer and internet penetration have steadily risen in the past two decades. The proportion of individuals who can access the internet at home via any type of device and connection increased from 7 per cent (in 2000) to 81 per cent (in 2017). These figures have always located Hungary in the cluster of low penetration countries in the EU28 (Tardos, 2002; Csepele & Prazsák, 2010). Although the level of internet penetration in Hungary (81 per cent) is still below the mean level of EU member countries, the lag is rather modest, and it is not far from covering the whole population (see Figure 1).

Now social media, especially Facebook, however, play a major role in online activities in Hungary. As Figure 2 shows, use of Facebook is above the EU mean (54 per cent). Additionally, YouTube is also very popular (72 per cent) while the level of Twitter penetration (15 per cent) is one of the lowest in Europe.¹

¹ Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital%20News%20Report%202017%20web_0.pdf

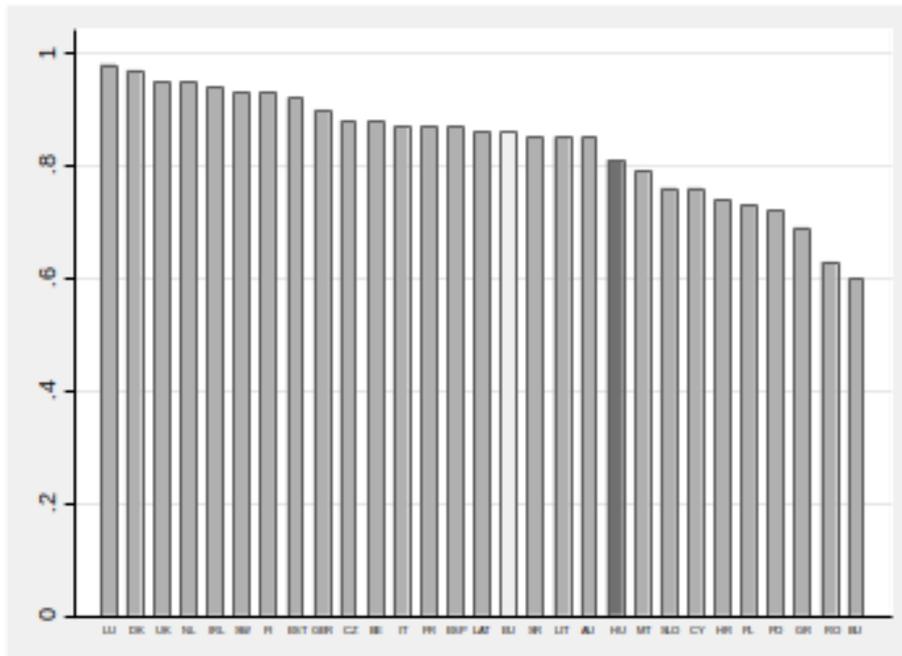


Figure 1: Internet penetration in EU28 countries (*internetworldstat.com, 2017*)

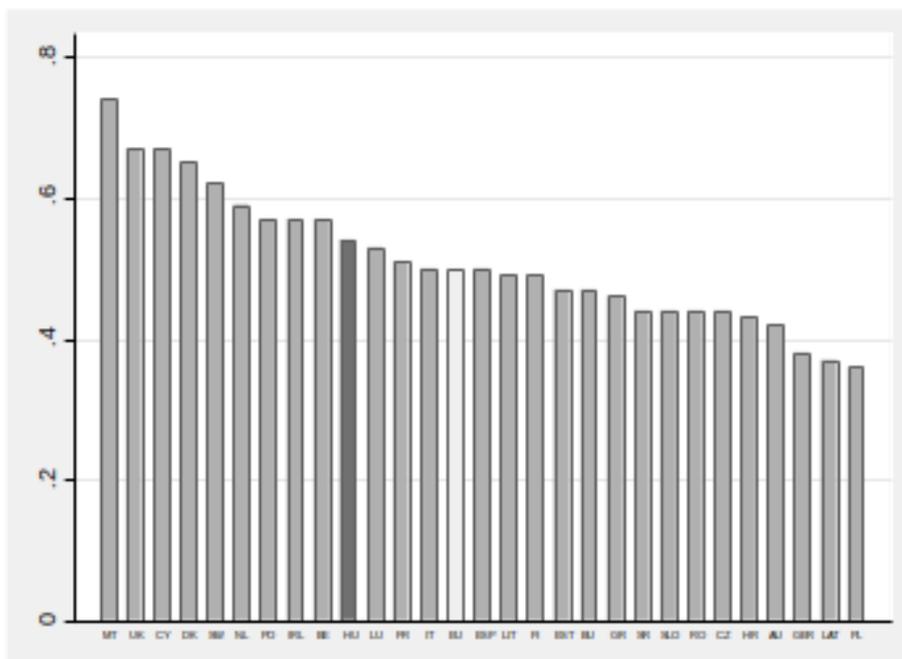


Figure 2: Facebook penetration in EU28 countries (*interworldstat.com, 2017*)

According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, Hungary is second out of twenty-three European countries that were examined in terms of the proportion of respondents (64 per cent) who obtain political information from Facebook (see Figure 3).

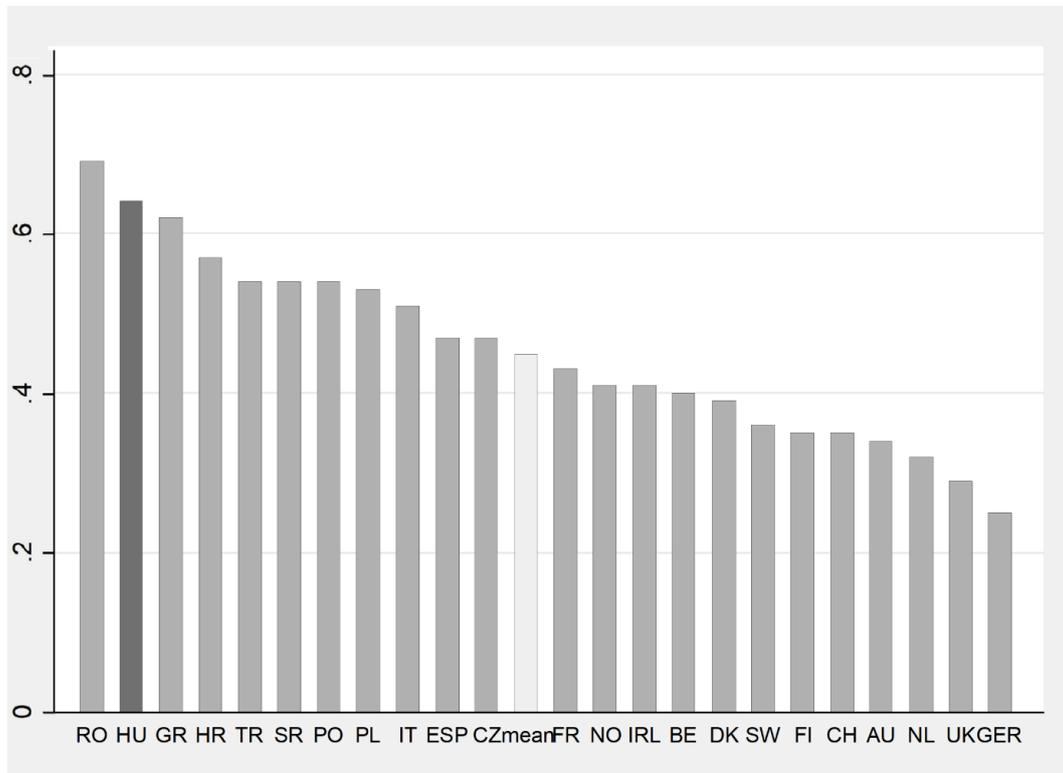


Figure 3: Proportion of respondents who use Facebook for news (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2017)

However, this is not tendency without precedent; online political information was important in Hungary well before the emergence of social media. In comparative research on the 2004 EP election, Lusoli (2005) demonstrated that the proportion of citizens who use the internet as a political information source was the second highest in Hungary amongst EU25 countries. While these results indicate that internet and social media are more important as political information sources in Hungary than in other countries, the most recent data suggest that TV, radio, online news sites, and offline political conversations are still more important in relation to how citizens gather political information than social media. In this regard, an age gap is identifiable: for those under 30 years of age, Facebook has been identified as the second most important news platform next to TV (Table 1). As for university students, Facebook is the most important information source for politics, and political content hosted here can reach politically less interested peers (Bene, 2019). However, while numerous citizens use Facebook as an information resource, only a minority engage in disseminating political information on this platform. Eighty per cent of respondents never share political content on Facebook.

	TV	Radio	daily news-papers	Facebook	Websites	offline conversations	N
population (mean)	6.61	4.08	2.90	3.24	3.59	4.05	1990
under 30 (mean)	5.59	3.59	2.35	4.70	4.66	4.05	366

Table 1. What role do the following information resources play in your political information consumption? (0-10 scale) (Source: First wave of the survey of 'Participation, Representation, Partisanship. Hungarian Election Study 2018' [NKFI-6, K-119603], December 2017 – January 2018)

2 Citizens, social media, and political communication

The literature has primarily focused on the issues of the digital divide and its relationship with social capital. Significant divisions in Hungarian society along the traditional dimensions of social inequality (education, income, age, and domicile) in terms of both penetration of the internet (Galács & Molnár, 2003; Galács & Ságvári, 2008) and usage patterns (Csepli & Prazsák, 2010; Nagy, 2008) have been reported. As for social capital, research has found that a strong connection exists between social capital and internet usage (Albert et al., 2008; Molnár, 2004; Csüllög, 2012). However, these issues have mostly been addressed in the context of Web 1.0.

While the political consequences of citizens' online activity is a prominent topic in the international research field (see Boulianne, 2009; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Skoric et al., 2016) the topic has received little scholarly attention in Hungary. The empirical findings discussed above show that the internet and social media play an important role in political information consumption, while the political effect of consuming online news is highly underexplored. Amongst the few examples, Dányi and Altorjai (2003) have investigated what factors affect the 'e-democratic attitude' – which refers to the belief that the internet enables citizens to participate in politics. It has been observed that it is the use of internet as an information source that shapes this attitude. Fourteen years after this study, it was demonstrated that the political attitudes of individuals who gather political information from Facebook are significantly shaped by their peers who actively express their opinions on this platform (Bene, 2017a). The political perceptions of those who actively search for politics on Facebook are in line with those of individuals who actively engage in political information dissemination on this platform. Consequently, the appropriation of Facebook for political information-seeking purposes strengthens the political influence of the minority of peers who are politically active on social media.

In line with international research findings (e.g. Bakshy et al., 2015; Barnidge, 2017; Beam et al., 2018; Heatherly et al., 2017), it has also been shown that the patterns of political information consumption on social media are fairly heterogeneous. Polyák and his colleagues (2019) found that cross-cutting exposure is a rather common experience on Facebook, and the majority of users are not frustrated by seeing political content they disagree with. Janky and his colleagues (2019) also demonstrated that information consumption is more heterogeneous on Facebook than when people obtain their political information from professional media outlets or offline conversations. Interestingly, the same study also

showed that on Facebook cross-cutting exposure is more typical for right-wing voters than left-wing users (Janky et al., 2019). It is not only Facebook that is able to cut across partisan lines: Matuszewski and Szabó (2019) demonstrated that Twitter networks also show intense political heterogeneity. These findings are especially important in Hungary, as the level of cross-cutting exposure was found to be extremely low in comparison with other European countries before the emergence of social media (see Angelusz & Tardos, 2009; Castro et al., 2018).

Concerning internet-based discourses, Kiss and his colleagues systematically monitored citizens' online political communication. Nasty remarks, ad hominem argumentation, and a lack of a respectful tone dominated online exchanges, although some elements of rational and logical reasoning were also present on these platforms (Kiss & Boda, 2005). More importantly, online conversations have been found to be autonomous in relation to the choice of topics (i.e. independent of mass media agendas) (Szabó & Kiss, 2005). Furthermore, this political communication facilitates the manifestation of latent social conflict by providing an impersonal space where members of social groups can publicly express and discuss their grievances against other social groups (Bene, 2013). However, it is not only the object of these conversations that matters, but also the subjects themselves. The large segment of people who actively discuss political issues online are political opinion leaders in offline contexts and can develop their persuasive abilities and find new information and arguments during online debates (Bene, 2014).

While studies have emerged about Facebook, our knowledge about political conversations on social media in Hungary is still limited. One promising leap forward has been made by a research project involving psychologists and linguistics. Public comments written in response to political posts on Facebook were investigated using novel socio-psychological measures. Data suggest that comments associated with sentiments of communitarian thinking were more frequent during the campaign period for the general election of 2014 (Miháltz et al. 2015).

The effects of digital media usage on political behavior are an under-examined topic. Kende and her colleagues (2016) applied a psychological approach to investigate the effects of the usage of social media on offline collective action among university students. They claim that it is not the usage of social media in itself that is positively related to participation in collective action, but a special form of it: the use of social media for social affirmation. The latter occurs when students actively express their identities on social media. Nemeslaki and his colleagues (2016) addressed the rather practical issue of online voting and its effects on attitudes toward voting. The opportunity for online voting increases the level of intention to participate, but this is mediated by the level of trust in the internet, ease-of-use, and performance expectancy about online voting systems.

3 News media, internet, and social media platforms

The first websites with professional news content appeared in the late 1990s in Hungary (Szabó, 2008), and the scholarly community responded to the challenge of the digitalization of media in the early years of 2000. The specificity of the Hungarian case is that pioneering online news portals were established independently and separately from preexisting publishing houses. The established press entered the online world only later.

The first wave of studies saw the impact of the internet on traditional media as a battle between new and old forms of communication. Building on the branch of international literature which argued that new technologies seemed to threaten to put an end to journalism and do away with traditional journalistic roles (Harper, 1996; Morris & Ogan, 1996; Schultz, 2000; Deuze, 2001; Klotz, 2003: 31–34), the internet was discussed as one of the main contributors to the crisis of journalism and the decline in the readership of the written press. Initially, conceptual and normative reflections dominated the disputes about the topic, and it was mostly techno-optimistic approaches to the internet that were introduced. As for such optimistic accounts, scholarly speculation included the scenario that the internet would transform political communication with its decentralized, accessible, and endless flow of interaction. Grass-roots initiatives and professionals outside of the big media corporations were seen as the winners of the technological turn (Dessewffy, 2002; Dányi et al. 2004: 19; Szabó & Mihályffy, 2009: 94). However, the realist approach drew attention to the role of elites in the diffusion of new technologies, suggesting that news corporations would be likely to capitalize on using the internet in Hungary as well (Kiss, 2004). Interestingly enough, no significant techno-pessimistic voices were represented in the scholarly discussion: little concern was raised about the quality of web-based news production or about the polarizing effects of online self-segregation.

The second wave of research provided data-driven reflections about online platforms and their role in the media environment in Hungary. Conforming to the business-as-usual type of arguments (Margolis & Resnick; Boczkowski, 2004; Bressers, 2006), such empirical evidence moderated the claim of revolutionary change in news media by demonstrating that television was, and still is, the primary source of political information amongst voters.² The convergence of online and offline news media appeared as the main paradigm, leading to the production of case studies and comparative examinations of political coverage, user-generated content, digital journalism, and news consumption in the international literature (Achtenhagen & Raviola, 2009; Chao-Chen, 2013; Doudaki & Spyridou, 2013) – and Hungarian studies likewise confirmed these claims (Polyák, 2002; Kumin, 2004; Csigó, 2009; Szabó & Mihályffy, 2009; Koltai, 2010; Aczél et al., 2015).

Research on news media portals highlighted the fact that political topics and elections have been heavily covered on the internet in Hungary as well. On the one hand, such coverage has included following the agendas of parties and regularly reporting about campaign events; on the other hand the agenda-setting capacity of the portals has also been demonstrated (Szabó, 2010; Szabó, 2011). Three distinctive elements of this coverage have been revealed: first, online news has tended to focus on polling data and almost exclusively reported on candidates instead of policy programs (Szabó, 2010; 2011). Second, laypeople's experiences with campaigns have been actively presented with the involve-

² A médiafogyasztás jellemzői és a hírműsorok általános megítélése Magyarországon (The characteristics of media consumption and the general opinion of news bulletins in Hungary), National Radio and Television Commission (Országos Rádió és Televízió Testület, ORTT), January 2007, p. 10. See http://ortt.hu/elemlzesek/21/1175188490mediafogyasztas_jellemzoi_20070329.pdf; Mapping digital media: Hungary (country report). A report by the Open Society Foundation. 2012. p. 17. See <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/mapping-digital-media-hungary-20120216.pdf>; A politikai tájékozódás forrásai Magyarországon. A médiastruktúra átalakulása előtti és az utána következő állapot (The sources of political information in Hungary. The situation before and after the changes in the media structure), see http://mertek.eu/sites/default/files/reports/hirfogyasztas2016_0.pdf.

ment of user-generated content related to politics (videos, photos, text messages from the readership) (Szabó, 2008). Third, stylistic features have been studied as typical elements of online portals. Most of the news items were written with reference to the personal experience and values of the journalists, with no claims to objectivity (Szabó, 2008; Szabó & Kiss, 2012). This is especially true of publications by radical-right outlets (e.g. *kuruc.info*, and *hunhir.hu*), which have been particularly important for the radical-right parties and movements, since the latter have limited access to mainstream media (Róna, 2016: 52).

The second wave of studies confirmed that traditional media outlets (except for television), especially printed press products, have lost their audiences, while the number of visitors to websites has steadily increased (Bodoky, 2007; Szabó, 2008). However, explanations for this tendency vary (the global financial and economic crisis, freely available web-based news, an apolitical or apathetic audience). As the number of internet users increased, so did the size of audiences for online platforms. Between 2005 and 2011, the top online news sources about politics tripled their average number of visitors.³ Notwithstanding the fact that television channels should be considered the main source of political information of voters,⁴ experts assessed online media portals as being significant competitors of traditional outlets (Popescu et al., 2012: 37). Mostly due to the fragmented media environment (incl. online news portals), audience selection and the gatekeeping efforts of journalist have become equally important when talking about politics in Hungary (Merkovity, 2012: 134–137).

The third wave of studies claimed that online media had become fully integrated into the mainstream news process (Tófalvy, 2017). Researchers of the third wave include a group of international academics who have emphasized that the public sphere today is highly fragmented into different but interconnected spaces for public communication, media platforms, audiences, and agendas (Blumler, 2013; Dubois & Blank, 2018). Nowadays, the public sphere is argued to be an ecosystem with multiple discussion fora, in which consumers' choice of news and other selection processes shape the dynamics of political communication (Thorson & Wells, 2016; Van Aelst et al., 2017). Such evaluations are supported by a study on Hungary that demonstrates that web-based portals are considered a reliable source of political information by traditional media outlets as well (Szabó & Bene, 2016). A recent analysis pays particular attention to the political connections of the owners of internet-based and traditional media, which factor has been evaluated as an indicator of political control over the media in Hungary.⁵ It is confirmed that strong governmental and economic pressures challenge the editorial freedom of the digital press, but that the online sphere is still plural, with a wide range of news portals/blogs. It is safe to say that the vast majority of the online news portals in Hungary have an identifiable sympathy or antipathy towards former and current governments, and politically like-minded media outlets and audiences tend to cluster. However, the phenomenon of cross-readership is

³ Mapping digital media: Hungary. A Report by the Open Society Foundation. <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/mapping-digital-media-hungary-20120216.pdf>

⁴ A politikai tájékozódás forrásai Magyarországon. A médiastruktúra átalakulása előtti és az utána következő állapot (The sources of political information in Hungary. The situation before and after the changes in the media structure), see http://mertek.eu/sites/default/files/reports/hirfogyasztas2016_0.pdf

⁵ Az újságírók sajtószabadságképe 2016-ban (The perceptions of journalists about media freedom in 2017). See http://mertek.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ujsgirok_sajtoszabadsag_2016.pdf

significant, and multiple voices can be heard in digital spaces,⁶ which mitigates concerns about partisan-based selective exposure in Hungary.

The relatively low cost of internet-based content production has facilitated the discursive dissemination of right-wing radicalism. In contrast to the mainstream media, online spaces have facilitated platforms fully controlled by content producers, supporting the breakthrough of the ‘communicative quarantine’ related to right-wing radicals (Norocel et al., 2017).

So far, little knowledge is available about the relationship between social media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram) and news journalism. There is a pressing need to investigate how mainstream media outlets use social media channels to influence news saturation and distribute our news (Ferencz & Rétfalvi, 2011). The effects of such new tools in civil engagement and participation in the flow of political communication also requires testing, as do innovative forms of investigative journalism. Further studies might also include measures of virality and the discursive connectivity between social media and traditional formats of news media. Data-driven analysis of the dissemination of fake news is also crucial. The impact of social media on the daily work of journalists is also amongst the rather under-researched topics in this field in Hungary (for an exception, see Barta, 2018).

4 Politics and Social Media

One of the most widely investigated topics in the Hungarian literature is the use of online tools by political actors. Similarly to international patterns (see Stromer-Galley, 2014), political parties started appearing online in 1996, and by the time of the national election of 1998 all parliamentary parties owned webpages (Dányi, 2002). At this time, however, the phenomenon did not trigger political science research, and scholars turned their attention to online politics only following the general election of 2002. Although scholars reported that parties and politicians’ websites still played a marginal role in the election campaign of 2002 (Dányi & Galács, 2005), this was the first campaign when the political importance of digital technologies was clearly revealed. During the tight electoral competition between the two rounds of elections, citizens actively engaged in creating and spreading political messages through SMS and e-mail. Sükösd and Dányi (2003) showed that mobilization-related content, humorous messages, fake news, and negative campaigning were widely disseminated through the viral chains of digital networks. Before new online tools became widespread, several pieces of research focused on examples of their innovative usage. In the campaign of 2006, the most important innovation in the field of online politics was that the then prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány, started a personal blog that became a crucial communication platform, enjoying significant public and media attention. Ferenc Gyurcsány, who later won the election, employed a highly personal, diary-like style on the blog (Horváth, 2007). In response to this challenge, the leader of the conservative force, Viktor Orbán, started to run a videoblog in 2007 (Kitta, 2011). Social media sites as campaign tools first appeared during the run-up to the election of 2010. The winner of the

⁶ Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017. Hungary, pp. 74–75. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital%20News%20Report%202017%20web_0.pdf?utm_source=digitalnewsreport.org&utm_medium=referral

latter, Fidesz, and its leader Viktor Orbán, reached the most people on Facebook, but the two new parties, Jobbik and LMP, who managed to enter parliament, also strongly relied on social media (Mihályffy et al., 2010). By the time of the election of 2014, social media, especially Facebook, had become established campaign tools (Bene, 2020). A comparative study about the EP election of 2014 found that the evaluation of new media campaign tools reached the second highest value among Hungarian campaign managers of the 12 countries that were examined (Lilleker et al., 2015).

Studies that attempted to map the political social media sphere showed that politicians' social media activities were rather centralized: first the party, and then leaders opened Facebook pages, then candidates later created Facebook accounts for their constituencies, whilst Twitter penetration has remained fairly low (Kitta, 2011; Balogh, 2011; Merkovity, 2018). In the last couple of years, Facebook use has become normal among politicians. In 2018, almost all candidates from parties with measurable electoral support⁷ had a Facebook page, but only a small minority of them had Instagram accounts, while Twitter penetration remained insignificant (Bene & Farkas, 2018). Turning to an assessment of performance on Facebook, research demonstrates that in 2014 – during the first election when Facebook was intensively used by political actors – left-wing politicians were more successful in terms of triggering reactions (Bene, 2020), but by the time of the 2018 elections Fidesz performed better in some dimensions, such as the number of likes and overall activity. While Viktor Orbán is still the most followed Hungarian politician on Facebook, most politicians who have a large number of followers are members of the opposition (Bene & Farkas, 2018). Having said that, it seems that politicians from different parties follow similar strategies on Facebook, with only minor differences in their social media communication strategies during the 2014 election (Bene, 2020).

Beyond the issue of the adoption of new online tools, several important topics from the international research field have also been addressed. The scholarly literature on digital campaigning has primarily focused on parties' websites. Consistent with international tendencies (e.g. Davis, 1999; Stromer & Galley, 2000; Jackson, 2007) parties' sites are characterized by top-down communication; they are highly informative, but offer limited opportunity for interaction (Kiss & Boda, 2005; Dányi & Galács, 2005; Merkovity, 2011). Vergeer and his colleagues' (2012) comparative work on the EP campaign of 2009 found that Hungarian parties' and candidates' websites barely use social networking features, but they are the most personalized out of the 17 countries involved.

Political websites, however, are not the only spaces where interactions between politicians and citizens can take place. Merkovity (2014) examined Hungarian MPs' propensity to respond to e-mail messages. The study found that 27 per cent of MPs were willing to answer e-mails sent by the researcher, and women and politicians from opposition parties were more likely to reply than men and MPs from government parties.

Recently, social media interactions and virality have received scholarly attention. The distribution logic of social media is virality (Klinger & Svensson, 2015), as political actors can reach a wider population if they can trigger reactions from their followers. Bene (2018) demonstrated that the number of shares on candidates' Facebook posts have a minor but significant effect on the number of personal votes. Koltai and Stevkovics (2018) found that the number of likes on political leaders' and parties' Facebook pages could some-

⁷ Fidesz-KDNP, Jobbik, MSZP-P, DK, LMP, Együtt, Momentum, MKKP (N = 586)

what predict their general popularity. Further, it was found that textual Facebook entries with negative messages and mobilization content are more likely to be liked and shared by followers (Bene, 2017b). Viral posts are characterized by intense negativity and moral critiques of opponents (Bene, 2017c). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that patterns of user engagement are highly similar across political camps: followers of right-wing and left-wing politicians engage with the same types of posts (Bene, 2020). The results show that users share such posts without individual contribution or comment; they do not distort the original messages when they disseminate them (Bene, 2017c).

The equalizing nature of digital campaign tools (see Gibson & McAllister, 2015; Koc-Michalska et al., 2016) has been scrutinized. It was observed that the minor parliamentary parties had more sophisticated websites than the biggest parties (Kiss & Boda, 2005). Moreover, they spent more money on online campaigning than the leading parties (Kiss et al., 2007). Another argument for the equalization potential of the internet comes from the legislative elections in 2010. The year 2010 was the first time since the regime change in Hungary when parties without parliamentary experience managed to enter parliament. Moreover, the radical right party, Jobbik, received nearly 17 per cent of party list votes, but the newly formed green anti-establishment party LMP also passed the electoral threshold. Both parties heavily employed social media during their campaigns (Mihályffy et al., 2011), and attracted and reached more social media supporters than the majority of established parties and politicians (Kitta, 2011). The internet played an important role in the success of Jobbik and research has investigated the online network of radical-right subcultures that have evolved around the latter party (Jesko et al., 2012; Malkovics, 2013).

Internet-based campaign tools, especially social media, are important for minor political actors. Bene and Somodi (2018) interviewed minor parties' (LMP, DK, PM, Momentum, Együtt) campaign managers, who unanimously stated that social media is one of their most important campaign tools, and they use it to increase their public visibility through viral posts. However, smaller parties and less well known politicians have fewer followers on social media platforms, and spent less money on online and social media campaigns than more established political actors (Bene & Somodi, 2018). For example, on Facebook, the most important social media platform, the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán soon acquired a large number of followers (Kitta, 2011), and since then no political actor has approached his number of followers (Bene & Farkas, 2018).

Over the last few years, increasing attention has been paid to digital-media-enabled collective action, which is also a much-discussed topic in the international literature (see Bennet & Segerberg, 2014; Bimber, 2017; Karpf, 2016). According to Mátay and Kaposi's analysis (2008), online communication played a major role in the organization of the anti-government protests in 2006. The latter argued that offline collective action was enabled by the revolutionary rhetoric and language developed in the online sphere that facilitated the bridging of ideological gaps between different segments of protest participants. The Facebook-based, horizontal activist network ('One Million for the Freedom of Press in Hungary' movement), which organized a large-scale, offline series of anti-government protests between 2011 and 2012, has been studied by Wilkin and his colleagues (2015). Dessewffy and Nagy (2016) investigated the Facebook-based grassroots migrant solidarity group Migration Aid. The group used social media to organize civic responses to the migration crisis in 2015. It's flexible 'rhizomatic' structure enabled this organization to react

quickly to contextual challenges and to interconnect low- and high-threshold online and offline activities. Another example of citizens' digitally enabled collective action is the anti-billboard campaign of the Hungarian joke party 'Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt' (Hungarian two-tailed dog party) (Nagy, 2016). After the government initiated an anti-migration billboard campaign, several citizens started to transform and abuse the billboards in order to distort their messages. The counter-billboards caricatured the original campaign, and drew strongly upon humor, citizens' co-creation efforts, and crowd-sourcing. This digitally enabled offline action was able to successfully interfere with and modify the government-driven hegemonic public discourse (Nagy, 2016). However, these case studies also show the limitations of digitally enabled collective action: each of these collective activities was successful within a short time period, but this organizational method was not able to promote long-term, sustainable civic action.

5 Conclusion

This article has provided a comprehensive review of online news media and political communication in Hungary. Two main specificities were identified concerning digitalization in Hungary: one is the relatively large amount of academic reflection about the relationship between the internet and democracy in the early years of 2000; the other is the relative lack of data-driven exploration of the political consequences of social media. From the mid-2000s onwards, the field became thoroughly internationalized in terms of the reception of Anglophone-oriented literature. The instrumentalization of the new communication tools by political actors and the convergence of old and new media have been deeply investigated in the Hungarian context. While the digital activities of political parties and developments in online media are amongst the fashionable topics of political communication research, the citizen perspective has only recently been discovered. In terms of methodology, both normative and descriptive approaches have been applied, mainly using single case studies and cross-case comparative methods. Longitudinal analyses are, however, sorely lacking in the assessment of the evolution of digital political communication in Hungary. Critical issues of online polarization, attitudes, and affective polarization in the discussion of politics also remain under-researched in Hungary. In addition, there is a pressing need for comparative analyses in order to help comprehend regional specificities and differences in the perspectives of Central and Eastern European countries.

The digitalization of political communication has created an opportunity for communication scholars to develop new concepts, new methods, and new tools for research. Various challenges are faced by investigators who undertake political communication research. The main theoretical challenge is conducting integrative analysis in political communication studies to overcome the limitations of the classic producer (actor) – content – audience (receiver) types of approaches. While most theories of digital media point to the oscillation between producers and users, textual and visual materials, and originality and repetitive use (Van Dijck, 2009; Bechmann & Lomborg, 2012; Dean, 2018), studies about digital campaigning and online news media still adhere to a linear model. So far, the biggest methodological challenge has been involving the techniques of computational social science. Investigating the digital footprints left behind from politics-related social media activity with the aid of

big data would demand specialized technological knowledge and skills, and this is yet to be accomplished.

We hope that the trajectory of research we have depicted will be helpful in identifying the research gaps and in advancing our knowledge about online politics in Hungary.

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