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Political communication of Hungarian parties in social networking platforms

Abstract

In recent years, social media platforms are said to have a major impact on communication and communication technologies. More specifically, popular social networking platforms are increasingly employed in political context. Thus, this study examines the online performance of activities and approaches for political communication between Hungarian political parties and civilians in social networking platforms, video hosting services, as well as microblogging services. In order to examine these connections, the author conducted a web-based quantitate analysis and a semantic sentiment analysis to calculate the efficiency and sentiment of social media posts created by political parties. According to the research results, Hungarian political parties underutilize the inherent communication potential of social networking platforms, especially on YouTube and Twitter.

Keywords

Political communication, social media, social networking, political parties, online political context

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the role of internet-based telecommunication services as a channel of political communication between political parties and citizens is increasingly advancing and developing. As a result of ever-growing internet technology exposure, the communication capabilities of political actors are considerably enhanced in terms of strengthening the information confrontation between political parties during election periods, political processes, and campaigns. In the process of online political communication, social media platforms play an essential role as channels for communication and exchanging content between online users (KAPLAN – HAENLEIN 2010). However, social media platforms include a wide variety of networking sites, such as social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), instant messaging applications (e.g., Viber) and microblogging services (e.g. Twitter), online forums (e.g., Quora), social news aggregation and discussion websites (e.g., Reddit) and other information-disseminating platforms (e.g. YouTube and Instagram) that serve to disseminate information and messages to the public through various technological methods and means (EFFING et al. 2011; KAUN – STIERNSTEDT 2014; VOORVELD 2019).

Social media provides an opportunity for any individual to become the author or creator of political content and enhances the abilities of online users by allowing citizens to play an interactive role in political communication with political parties through mutual reciprocity and dialogue. The use of social media networks in political communication can "restore" civic democracy and engagement (KIM et al. 2013), and can "challenge" the state media monopoly by creating new forms of political interaction and communication processes (SASSER et al. 2014; KALSNES 2016) between political parties and online users. The analysis of the latest results of empirical studies on the use of social networking sites and online communication channels by Hungarian citizens clearly shows that a large percentage of the population actively uses social media platforms. This phenomenon is confirmed by the results of social and political studies: according to the data of the Reuters Institute (NEWMAN et al. 2020), trust in social media news has grown by more than 12 percentage over the last decade, which currently is around 25 percentage of the population.

The transformation of communication technologies has also largely influenced the transformation of traditional mechanisms for the distribution of power in modern states, changing the changing the modes of power relations in the so-called "state-society" system (DREZNER 2009). In such system, this transformation has not only altered the parameters of strategic interaction of various political actors and organizations, but also created "new" non-institutional subjects of political relations. In relation to this thesis, MCQUAIL (1987) highlighted that significant changes

in communication technologies (media and appropriate news production) that are dominant within society determine the operation modes for (state) political systems. Due to their mass audience accessibility – both in a financial and technological sense (SCHMIDT 2018) –, social networks have long become a promising platform for political mobilization, which, in a broad sense, involves an attitude towards action in the form of support, opposition or indifference. In the context of this development an important question arises: How do political parties communicate with the electorate on social media platforms?

OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE PROBLEM

The emergence of social networks as online platforms that ensure the rapid dissemination of information and user interaction on the Internet has been an ongoing process since 1995 (CASTILLA 2003). However, social media platform has really started to gain academic attention in the early 2000's when MySpace experienced exponential growth and Facebook was first launched as a communication tool between college students. Since then, social networks have become an integral part of the lives of millions of people around the globe (AL-DEEN – HENDRICKS 2011; MCCAY-PEET – QUAN-HAASE 2017), have been competing successfully with traditional mass media communication meanings the field of disseminating information and shaping public opinion. This transformation has not escaped the attention of researches around the world, who promptly responded to the emergence of new media, and thus, laid the foundation for studying this phenomenon (VAN DIJCK – POELL 2013; PERRIN 2015; FUCHS 2017; SCHMIDT 2018).

Considering social media as a key factor in the modernization of the media, LIN (2002) highlighted that the Internet as a communication platform and a space where media products exist has successfully provided a potential substitute for traditional media, performing a number of significant functions, such as information dissemination, participatory communication, social and group integration, as well as other recreational activities. This rapid and intensive development of technologies, processes, mechanisms and means of mass communication in the internet space has caused significant changes in the traditional system of socio-political relations, forcing researchers and specialists to re-evaluate classical theories, approaches, methods and models for the implementation of political communication in the increasingly digital information society and media environment.

It should be noted that since that time social media studies have advanced the current understanding of cyberspace and the Internet. In particular, Hungarian researchers (for example, GAÁL et al. 2015; FEHÉR 2016; KLAUSZ 2016; BÁNYAI et al. 2017) began to actively study have begun to actively study how social networks are embedded not only in the lives of individual citizens, but also in the sphere of public policy. Moreover, more and more studies are being are being published that attempt to reveal the mobilization capabilities of social networks (ENJOLRAS et al. 2012; AUTER – FINE 2018; CLARKE – KOCAK 2018) and their role in the process of active participation of citizens in certain political or social movements (LOPES 2014; KIDD – MCINTOSH 2016). In addition, this research field also includes studies that analyze the use of network resources during specific election campaigns (ENLI – MOE 2013; ENLI 2017). At the same time, it is often emphasized that modern political parties – and political power structures – have

not yet fully evaluated the prospects for using network resources and ignore the interests of the network community, even though there are wide opportunities for recruiting new supporters.

This, in order to attract a high percentage of active supporters (potential voters), it is necessary for a political party to carry out additional work, not limited exclusively to creating text-based posts in one or two social networks. As Fuchs (2017) and Schmidt (2018) emphasize, the Internet does not have any special properties beyond widespread accessibility that ensure the win of a political party during an election. The Internet is not a magical means of achieving electoral victory, but a successful tool if it is subordinated to the changing nature of party competition (Kreiss et al. 2018). Nevertheless, social networks as a tool for mobilizing the electorate have a number of indisputable advantages over traditional means of party communication and campaigning:

1. The efficiency of communication — the ability to instantaneously exchange or share content (messages, opinions, news, etc.) make social networks the most popular sources of political, public, economic and entertainment information (Fehér 2016; Fuchs 2017).

2. The availability of social networks for all political actors and individual citizens equalizes the competition of opposing political forces and provides an effective quality management system (QMS) at their disposal, which is an important factor considering the growing control of traditional media by established parties (Stieglitz – Dang-Xuan 2012; Ellahi – Bokhari 2013).

3. As a result of its openness and flexibility, social networks have a flexible configuration and can expand indefinitely (Kahne – Bowyer 2018), for example, a political party with its own online platform has the ability to recruit a potentially unlimited number of supporters.

4. Through the phenomenon of "network power" (Castells 2009), which means that any link can act not only as a transmitter, but also as a transformer of information flows, each network actor has opportunities for both social control and public opinion formation.

5. In contrast to traditional media, which does not allow audience interference and user interactivity, as noted by Sennet (2017), social networks create an opportunity for complex, multi-faceted interaction, allowing political parties represented in the network to communicate with potential voters and receive quick feedback.

This list is not exhaustive, but it is sufficient to clearly demonstrate the instrumental importance of social networks in arsenal of modern election campaigning. With the utilization of social media platforms, political parties can appeal to the sentiment and emotions of individual voters, thus, influencing and shaping public opinion of the masses, views, events, and politics as a whole. In other words, social networks have become important part of democracy, providing a convenient platform for modern political parties in the process of contemporary political communication.

To address this problem, we need a deep and comprehensive analysis of the ongoing technological changes in the information and communication sphere in terms of their impact on traditional socio-political processes, we also need to identify new challenges, risks and issues associated with this technological development and the digitalization of political communication

and mass communication. As for the present study, by using indicators such as the number of posts, followers and likes, it is characterized by an attempt to measure the effectiveness of political communication in social media platforms and the importance of using social network resources for mobilizing potential voters by both established and relatively new Hungarian political parties.

Methods

Technical indicators, such as the number of subscribers, likes, reposts and comments, allow political parties to establish a network media logic in political communication and mobilization (Stieglitz – Dang-Xuan 2012). Political mobilization in social networks involves public support for content (messages, videos, image files, posts, etc.) posted by a specific political party (or political actor) on a social media platform. This is explained by the fact that both likes and shares are visible not only to other followers of a social network community, but also to friends and active followers of the individual user, or to followers to other social network communities (Fuchs 2017). As for commenting on news stories or posts in social network platforms, comments have a more pronounced emotional impact — they can express both approval and support or opposition and open resistance to ideas of a political party.

In order to assess the effectiveness of political communication of political parties with voters, the author conducted a web-based (cyber-metric) analysis – from January 2018 to December 2019 – based on the use of the automated online, real-time media monitoring and analytical system, Socialbakers, and the public application programming interfaces (APIs) of social media companies. The empirical object of the study included 2.3 million social networking and social media accounts:

- social networking sites (Facebook),
- microblogging services (Twitter),
- instant messaging applications (Viber),
- online video-sharing platform (YouTube),
- other online media platforms (Reddit, Instagram).

The study was carried out taking into account such factors as the use of a complete database, an automated text sentiment analysis, social media tagging, filtering out "informational noise", the speed of obtaining information and identifying the key performance indicators – KPIs (an aggregated set of qualitative indicators, in this study, "likes", shares, comments and mentions, for the evaluation of the effectiveness of information messages in order to determine the coverage of information in terms of the activities of political parties and the effectiveness of online party activity (the ratio between posts and user-generated comments), as well as its weight in social networks) on social media (Gräve 2019).

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Following the above mentioned procedure, according to the results of the web-based analysis, the following table shows such factors as the number and sentiment of social media posts about the activities of political parties created by the general public, as well as the aggregated key performance indicators of political parties (*Table 1*). It should be noted that the dataset used consists of data of only eight Hungarian political parties, namely Hungarian Civic Alliance (*Magyar Polgári Szövetség*, Fidesz), Movement for a Better Hungary (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*, Jobbik), Our Homeland Movement (*Mi Hazánk Mozgalom*, Mozgalom), Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), Democratic Coalition (*Demokratikus Koalíció*, DK), Dialogue for Hungary (*Párbeszéd Magyarországért*, PM), Momentum Movement (*Momentum Mozgalom*, Momentum) and Hungary's Green Party (*Magyarország Zöld Pártja*, LMP), as these political parties have had the opportunity to run candidates in various national elections or the 2019 European parliamentary election, and remained influential forces and politically relevant after the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary election.

TABLE 1. *The number and sentiment of social media posts by individual users and the aggregated key performance indicators (KPIs) of political parties between January 2018 and December 2019.*

| Political party	Social media posts (in thousands)			KPI Index
	Total	**Positive**	**Negative**	
Fidesz	247.14	4.51	56.11	0.51
Jobbik	383.95	3.18	70.88	0.68
Mi Hazánk	18.78	0.41	6.79	0.02
MSZP	178.91	3.45	47.71	0.14
DK	243.95	4.90	38.19	0.16
PM	88.44	1.61	20.08	0.05
Momentum	56.58	0.47	10.44	0.03
LMP	21.06	0.38	4.48	0.02
Total	1238.81	18.91	254.69	—

Own editing, data source: SOCIALBAKERS 2021 and public APIs[1]

According to *Table 1*, in particular, it is noticeable that during the investigation period (from January 2018 to December 2019), user-generated social media platforms were primarily dominated by the political activities of Jobbik (383.95 thousand posts), presumably in part due to their unusually high level of party activity on Facebook, and Fidesz (247.14 thousand posts), for the most part having a negative sentiment (in this respect, Fidesz leads with 70.88 thousand posts and Jobbik with 56.11 thousand posts). All factors considered, the radical right-wing party Jobbik took the lead in this period, with the result of 0.68, according to the aggregated key performance indicators.

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[1] The author conducted a semantic sentiment analysis by computing the sentiment of social media posts using a set of datasets, including SOCIALBAKERS (2021), and social media data extracted from various application programming interfaces (APIs) provided by FACEBOOK FOR DEVELOPERS (2021a, 2021b) for INSTAGRAM AND FACEBOOK, GOOGLE DEVELOPERS (2021) for YOUTUBE, and TWITTER DEVELOPER (2021) for Twitter.

In order to compare the changes in the number of messages about party activities, the author identified the dynamics of information flow concerning the activities of political parties in social media platforms. The use of technological and social networking resources helps us to visualize changes in the dynamics of information flow from political communication to online presence. Therefore, it should be noted that *Figure 1* shows that the tendency of intensification of online political communication does increase not only during election campaigns, for example, we can detect a peak of activities in April 2018 – during the month of the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary election –, and in May 2019 – during the month of the 2019 European Parliament election –, as these are the periods for which political parties and actors are the most active, but we also see a peak of activities in other periods as well, for example, in December 2019, when the protests against the so-called "slave law" began. After the above-mentioned elections and social phenomena, the intensity level of information flow had constantly decreased. The reason for this is that their heightened social interest had decreased, and political parties had spent less resources for targeted advertising and political campaigns. Specifically, the data for the far-right party Mi Hazánk must be interpreted differently from others. The dynamics of information flow concerning their political activities show a high level of intensity as the party has not officially existed before June 2018.

FIGURE 1. *Dynamics of information flow concerning party activities in social media platforms between January 2018 and December 2019.*
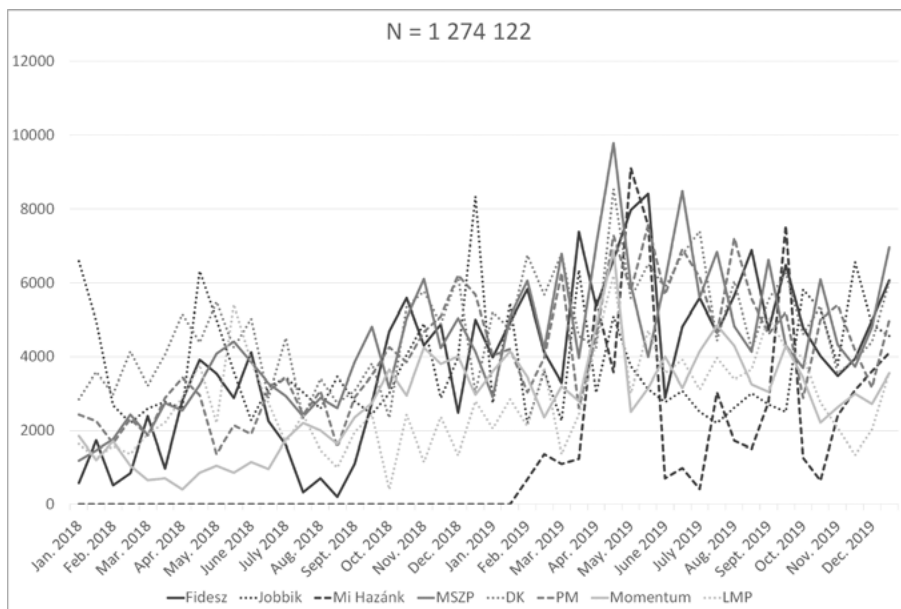
Own editing, data source: SOCIALBAKERS 2021 and public APIs[2]

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[2]   The author computed the information flow in social networks using a set of datasets, including Socialbakers (2021), and the social media data extracted from various application programming interfaces (APIs) provided by Facebook For Developers (2021a, 2021b) for Instagram and Facebook, google Developers (2021) for Youtube, Twitter Developer for Twitter, rakuten Viber Developers (2021) for Viber, and other social media platforms (reddit 2021).

If we turn to the analysis of microblogging services, we can see that a microblog as a channel for online political communication allows creating a mutual dialogue between party representatives and citizens without "intermediaries" (WATERS et al. 2010; SHULTZ 2013). While then an American undergraduate student, Jack Dorsey, one of the earliest pioneers and founders of microblogging, has founded Twitter in 2006, which was one of the first microblogging site based on internet information, blogging approaches and social networking resources (LIU et al. 2012). The definition of "microblog" – like most computer terms – is borrowed from the English language, and is an abbreviation of "micro" and "weblog", which means "a blog in the form of a short message for anyone to read, sent especially from a mobile phone" (CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY 2021). In short, a microblog is a separate online page or site with open or limited access. This type of internet resources is characterized by a public nature and involves the engagement of a third-party entity (an online user or reader) who has the ability to create posts and communicate with the author (a microblogger or in this case, a political actor). In general, conversation occurs through comments ("tweets") or responses ("retweets", shares, etc.) to microblog entries and articles published by the author, providing feedback.

TABLE 2. *Analysis of the number and sentiment of user-generated posts (tweets or shares) pertaining to the activities of political parties in Twitter microblogging service between January 2018 and December 2019 (in thousands).*

Political party	Joined	Followers	Tweets and shares by users		
			Total	Positive	Negative
Fidesz[3]	September 2014	4.10	8.83	0.16	2.00
Jobbik	Augustus 2009	7.91	13.92	0.12	2.57
Mi Hazánk	June 2019	1.19	0.66	0.03	0.35
MSZP	September 2010	11.89	6.91	0.13	2.23
DK[4]	—	—	6.09	0.01	0.46
PM[4]	—	—	2.58	0.11	1.38
Momentum	February 2017	3.57	1.46	0.02	0.48
LMP	April 2009	10.10	0.55	0.01	0.18
Total	—	38.76	40.99	0.59	9.74

Own editing, data source: SOCIALBAKERS 2021 and TWITTER DEVELOPER 2021[5].

According to the results of the web-based analysis (*Table 2*), the number and sentiment of user-generated tweets and/or shares pertaining to the activities of political actors can be

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[3] The official Twitter account of Fidesz was created as a channel for the Fidesz-KDNP delegation to the European Parliament.

[4] DK and PM do not have an official Twitter account.

[5]   The author conducted a semantic sentiment analysis by computing the sentiment of "tweets" (together with "retweets" and shares), using a set of datasets, including SOCIALBAKERS (2021), and the social media data social media data extracted from the application programming interface (API) provided by TWITTER DEVELOPER (2021) for Twitter.

determined as follows: MSZP was the most popular Hungarian parliamentary party on Twitter with the followers of approximately of 11.9 thousand users. On the other hand, individual users have posted the highest number of tweets and shares with negative sentiment about the right-wing populist party Jobbik and the governing party Fidesz, meaning respectively 2.57 thousand and 2 thousand of the examined user-generated tweets, retweets and shares have had a negative sentiment in the analysis period.

TABLE 3. *Analysis of the activities of political parties in YouTube video hosting service.*

Political party	Channel name	Date created	Videos (in thousands)	Subscribers (in thousands)	Total views (in millions)
Fidesz	Fidesz	December 2015	3.15	8.46	2.66
Jobbik	Jobbik Magyaror-szágért Mozgalom (Movement for a Better Hungary)	March 2009	5.50	22.10	23.21
Mi Hazánk	Mi Hazánk Moz-galom (Our Home-land Movement)	July 2018	0.54	18.10	4.34
MSZP	Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party)	Septem-ber 2010	7.48	3.85	5.90
DK	Demokratikus Ko-alíció (Democratic Coalition)	October 2011	3.30	4.40	3.29
PM	Párbeszéd Magyar-országért (Dialogue for Hungary)	February 2013	0.33	1.42	1.15
Momentum	MomenTube	December 2016	0.24	12.70	8.54
LMP	LMP - Magyaror-szág Zöld Pártja (LMP – Hungary's Green Party)	October 2008	4.56	9.50	8.83
Total	—	—	24.32	49.73	45.04

Source: own editing, data source: YOUTUBE 2021

More specifically, *Table 2* demonstrates that on the moderately marginal sites of microblogging services (in this analysis, on Twitter), there is a relatively small number of tweets and shares by individual users, and they appeared more predominantly with a negative sentiment (9.74 thousand tweets and shares). In this regard, it can be assumed that Hungarian users and representatives of political parties do not fully use this channel of political communication, giving preference to social networking sites, such as Facebook. Hence, online video-sharing platforms and services should be taken into consideration while analyzing social media as a channel

of political communication. One cannot fail to recognize the popularity of the video hosting service, YouTube, which has more than 2 billion monthly users. Currently, all parliamentary parties have YouTube channels, as shown in the *Table 3*.

As can be seen from *Table 3*, it may be noted that overall, Jobbik was by far the most popular Hungarian political party on the video hosting service, YouTube. More precisely, 22.1 thousand people have subscribed to their official channel, and to date, their total number of views exceed 23.21 million. Taking the number of subscribers into account, in second place was the far-right political party Mi Hazánk with 18.10 thousand subscribers. Their channel has gained an unusually high number of subscribers in over 2 years on YouTube, considering that their total number of views is only 4.34 million. On the other hand, MSZP was the most active political party on YouTube, they have released approximately 7.48 thousand public videos in slightly over a decade. However, the data in *Table 3* shows that despite the popularity of YouTube, Hungarian political parties have not made full use of the inherent potential of this internet service, which is confirmed by the relatively small number of subscribers and views of party channels in comparison with the overall coverage of European or Canadian political parties (for example, Vesnic-Alujevic – Van Bauwel 2014; Raby et al. 2017).

Turning to the analysis of social networks (in the form of mentions), it should noted that their functional purpose is primarily is to inform and mobilize online users in order to unite them into communities and groups based on shared social interests, including the opportunity for supporting or opposing a particular political party (Klausz 2016; Perrin 2015). The advantages of this approach of political communication include wide audience coverage, rapid information dissemination, direct interaction with political actors and candidates through mutual dialogue through dialogue, the ability to discuss socio-political issues, as the dissemination of information about upcoming and past party events. Therefore, the Internet has created online network communities united by common social interests and horizontal communication links that allow users to overcome the barriers of political hierarchy and subordination (Stieglitz – Dang-Xuan 2012; Enli – Skogerbø 2013).

According to a study by NRC (Klenovszki 2019), as of 2018, 73 percent of Hungarians (between the age of 15 and 69) were using at least one social media platform daily, and 84 percent of the same demographic group were using at least one social media platform once a month. Statista (Medve 2020) data show that, over the last years, Facebook (5.4 million users), YouTube (5.1. million users), Viber (2.9. million users), Instagram (2.1 million users) have been the most popular social media platforms in Hungary. At the same time, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest are currently the fastest-growing social media platforms in Hungary. Based on the above statistics, Facebook accounts for about 55.3 percentage of Hungary's population, YouTube accounts for nearly 52.2 percentage of Hungary's population, and Instagram accounts for approximately 21.5 percentage of Hungary's population.

Based on the results of the web-based analysis, the author of this paper reveals the aggregated number of references (online posts, messages, articles, reports etc.) by individual users with regard to political party activities and electioneering exercises in social media platforms between January 2018 and December 2019 (*Table 4*). This data clearly shows that there are significantly more users on Facebook than other social media platforms, and thus, Hungarian political parties and actors concentrate considerably more effort into Facebook communication

strategies. Additionally, as the opposition parties could only make limited use of traditional campaign channels, they deliberately rely on social media platforms.

TABLE 4. *Analysis of the number of mentions by individual users with regard to party activities in social networks between Jan 2018 and December 2019 (in thousands).*

Political party	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Other	Overall
Fidesz	254.80	10.32	2.05	21.59	288.76
Jobbik	392.88	16.19	3.84	33.54	446.45
Mi Hazánk	24.40	0.93	0.23	1.01	26.57
MSZP	162.13	6.91	1.66	8.27	178.97
DK	263.45	7.12	1.97	12.49	285.03
PM	93.35	3.00	0.81	5.68	102.84
Momentum	73.45	2.07	0.65	3.87	80.04
LMP	18.90	0.55	0.14	1.48	21.07
Total	1283.36	47.08	11.36	87.93	1429.71

Own editing, data source: SOCIALBAKERS 2021 and public APIs[6]

Overall, Table 4 also shows that the largest number of mentions of political parties has been observed in the social networks, Facebook (with the total number of mentions of 1.28 million) and Twitter (with the total number of mentions of 47.08 thousand). Interestingly and unexpectedly, despite the fact YouTube was the second most popular social networking platform among Hungarian population aged 18 years and older, the users of Twitter, which was relatively unpopular among the demographic groups within the total population of Hungary, have generated considerably more content about political activities in the form of mentions. In social networks, the most frequently mentioned political parties were Jobbik (with the total number of mentions of 446.45 thousand) and Fidesz (with the total number of mentions of 288.76 thousand). These parties have been the most popular in the social media platform, Facebook (Jobbik with 392.88 thousand mentions and Fidesz with 254.8 thousand mentions). The social-liberal DK was the third most popular party with the total number of mentions of 285.03 thousand (most frequently in Facebook with 263.45 thousand mentions). And finally, MSZP was the fourth most often mentioned party with the total number of mentions of 178.97 thousand (most frequently in Facebook with 162.13 thousand mentions).

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6   The author computed the number mentions in social networks using a set of datasets, including Socialbakers (2021), and the social media data extracted from various application programming interfaces (APIs) provided by Facebook For Developers (2021a, 2021b) for Instagram and Facebook, google Developers (2021) for Youtube, TWITTER DEVELOPER (2021) for Twitter, Rakuten Viber Developers for Viber, and other online media platforms (reddit 2021).

Discussion And Conclusion

Summing up the above discussion, it is worth noting that social networks have high potential as a framework of political communication, and the use of social networks for political purposes is mainly implemented in positive directions: it provides a quick connection of political actors and citizens through the use of social networking platforms and blogs; makes it possible for individual users to express new ideas and post "non-standard" content (Baldwin – Li 2015); acts a means of mobilization; confers the ability to immediately reach the electorate, as well as the ability to analyze and monitor audience engagement and activities; increases the possibility of popularizing any topic, including political content, through "opinion leaders" (Turcotte et al. 2017); establishes new methods for obtaining information and initiating a neutral discussion platform; acts as an indicator for the sentiment of political actors and citizens; displays the emotions of citizens; eliminates geographical, physical, institutional and organizational barriers in the political life of society; ensures the prevention and suppression of criminal activities; serves a as a rapid channel for the population to receive up-to-date information. However, among many other challenges and difficulties, there are also negative trends associated with the use of social networks for political purposes: the formal presence of politicians on social networks; the threat to public and state security; the unregulated spread of misinformation and "fake" news (Shu et al. 2017); the involvement of users in extremist or terrorist organizations; the possible restrictions on freedom of speech.

This study has shown that social networks are now an important channel for communication between citizens and between civil society and political parties. They have a high degree of interaction with parallel political processes. It is worth noting that today social networks are also a kind of indicator of political and public sentiment, through which it is easy to understand which topics are of the greatest concern to political actors or citizens, and which solutions will translate from online discussions to offline actions. Therefore, the use of social media demonstrates that a new mode of communication between political actors and citizens has been established in the last decade, which has a universal characteristic as a potential function of receiving "feedback" (Gurevitch et al. 2009, Wan et al. 2015). The web-based analysis of social networking sites allowed the author to identify a tendency for the predominance of negative sentiment in messages with regard to party activities, as well as an increase in social media activity during election periods.

The development of political communication in social networks has contributed to the transfer of the institution of representation – of political and citizen interests – to the virtual space. This leads to greater participation in a variety of online political actors, ranging from voting and electoral mobilization to protest demonstrations. This is an activity that promotes the interests of civic groups – and ultimately, civic representation – through social media in several ways. First, social networks add a new element to information search and influences the collection and processing of information, for example, about the state of the political environment. Secondly, there is a strong information pressure, exerted indirectly through the organization of information campaigns (for example, by maximizing the spread of information about a social or political issue through views, commenting, sharing, or reposting). Finally, social networks serve as direct pressure through personal communication with a political actor, candidate, or party.

Therefore, the transfer of socio-political relations to social networks has created a new constituent element of political communication. Social networks not only provide the interactivity and connectivity, but also enables actors (political parties, individual users, personal pages, government officials, news feeds, discussion groups, online communities) to create and share any political information or news. We can say that the development of political communication in social networks occurs in two directions. First, this is a duplication of the functions of traditional forms of political communication, for instance, social networks became a major platform for the current agenda-setting process. On the other hand, social networks create parallel, new, modern forms and tools of political communication in cyberspace, which have a wide range of functionalities (STIER et al. 2018). In regard to the functionalities of political communication in social networking platforms, it can be noted that they are "universal" in nature — most often, social networks act as a tool for disseminating or storing information, as well a PR platform or a discussion platform. From this point of view, the (online) communication function seems to be the most important, since social networks in the system of political communication serve as an important means of establishing contact with voters (ENLI – MOE 2013). There are also distinctive cognitive (social networks as an environment for understanding cognition about reality), cultural (social networks as an environment for forming political culture) and informative (social networks as a medium for accumulating and storing political information and political knowledge) functions (PASSY 2001; KHANG et al. 2014; ALLCOTT – GENTZKOW 2017).

As a conclusion, based on the results of the web-based analysis, the author provides the following recommendations to political parties and actors in order to improve the effectiveness of political communication with civilians: (1) political actors should generate open, universally accessible, transparent and high-quality content in various formats (video stream, image files, interactive events, surveys, instant messaging and chat, text-based posts, etc.); (2) political actors should post more detailed reports on party activities on the news feed of pages, communities and groups in social networking sites (3) political actors might use various social media marketing (SMM), internet marketing and IT tools in order to promote posts and messages about party activities in social media platforms; and (4) political actors might analyze and monitor the changes in the levels of activity of target audience and the influence of political posts on this type of activity in social platforms (for example, by analyzing the number and sentiment of messages and posts of online users).

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