

# Hungarian MPs' response propensity to emails<sup>1</sup>

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## **ABSTRACT**

Within the framework of our empirical research, we have sent an email to every member of the Hungarian Parliament. We wanted to know how many representatives would answer our letter within a one-week period. As a next step, we listed the answerers, the composition of parliamentary groups, gender, age and the way of how the representatives got into the National Assembly in the election (from single-member districts or from party list). On the basis of this, we could outline the profile of the responding representative. The typical answers came from women who are members of the opposition, and who are between the ages of 30–39. The least responses came from the members of the governing coalition. As a final point we concluded that Hungarian representatives do not differ significantly from their colleagues in the Western countries.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The interactions between politics and the media have been in the centre of the scientific interest of the political communication research for long. There have been instances that researchers sought to determine the quality of a democracy through the characteristics of the interactions. In not so recent times there have been scientific works which have generated such debate (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Meanwhile, the third player in political communication, the citizens have begun to have a walk-on role in political communication. They are considered to suffer generally from persuasive, influential and manipulative techniques. The attitude of the political communication researches towards the citizens' is changing with the emergence of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). The civic activity in the political process – not just during elections – and the institutional responses to those are just being integrated into the literature, as well as the researches on the new media.

The new wave of researchers has appeared in political and communication science in the past two decades, who have highlighted the involvement of citizens in the democratic process. Their studies suggest that new forms of civic dialogue are born in front of our eyes, which fundamentally changes the well-known forms of the public sphere (Barber, 2003; Bohman, 1996; Chambers, 2009; Cohen, 1996; Dryzek, 2002; Moy & Gastil, 2006). The scientific interest focuses on the interactivity and explores the internet rather than mobile forms of communications. From the initial characteristics of the users of technology, starting from the 35-year-old men in the nineties the focus has shifted to the more diverse demographic groups of today. The traditional pressure groups are able to mobilize their members at lower costs or to contact the political organizations using emails, viral videos, websites, etc. (Margolis & Moreno, 2009, pp. 32–37). However, not only the traditional pressure

groups, but individual citizens, as well, can interact with their representatives or officials of the government much easier (Bimber, 2003). The analysis of the relationship between the citizens and the politics has gained great popularity with Barack Obama, after the 2008 election campaign. The presidential election in the United States has become very fashionable since, unlike in previous campaigns, the Obama campaign staff used the new ICTs consciously to organise civilians (see Libert & Faulk, 2009; Merkovity, 2009). It is expected that the case studies from the “Arab Spring” will follow similar path, with the difference that compared to 2008, the civilians were the initiators. We can speak about heightened political atmosphere in both cases. While in the Obama campaign the elections, in the “Arab Spring” the disgruntled civilians, whose word did not want to be heard by the political leadership, caused the unusual forms of social actions. However, the question arises, what about the normal days when politics and the citizens are living they everyday lives? Should we expect that politicians will hear the voice of civilians? Do the new ICTs promote the interaction? First, we have to examine the role of new ICTs in political communication from a closer perspective and must understand the term of interaction to answer these questions.

## **THE NEW ICTs AND THE INTERACTION**

The importance of information and communication technologies can be approached from positive and negative perspectives, as well. With regard to our research, we are dealing with the positive possibilities only. Thierry Vedel wrote that the new ICT tools enable people with similar interests to interact with each other regardless of their physical and social barriers. First, thanks to the internet, minorities can share common values and identity and they can increase their importance at the global level. Second, if these people form into groups, they can easily share ideas in order to formulate their own programme and decide how they will implement it. Regular email messages and forums can provide the institutionalized forms of dialogue. Third, the ICT tools, such as organised email campaigns, can be used to influence decision makers (Vedel, 2003, pp. 43–44). Vedel is taking three potentially positive possibilities of the new ICTs into account. He assumes that the people gain force to their political interests through co-operation. Accepting the existence of homo politicus, it should be noted that the twentieth century was accompanied with the fading of ideologies and with the crisis of liberal identity resulted diffuse “secularization”. This went together with other phenomena, such as dissatisfaction, revulsion against politics, denial of the old forms of political activities (e.g. decrease in participants’ willingness to vote), which result is traditionally described as the run of the people to individualism. Researchers make this determination especially about younger generations (Mazzoleni, 2000, pp. 326). Therefore, the starting point for this research had to be turned in the direction of the individuals, we gave space to the individual and unique issues, so we were able to give back the individuals who are interacting and communicating with politics in an artificial way. By this we have arrived to the question of interaction.

The concept of interaction is rather a confusing term in the environment the new ICTs, because it may also refer to more than one phenomenon. It can represent the interaction between humans and computers, but it can also mean cooperation of computers with each other through software, hardware and networks, as well (Stromer-Galley, 2004, pp. 391). Therefore it is necessary to define the meaning of interaction. This can be done from the perspective of the medium, where the question is whether the medium is able to provide interactive experience for the users? Kiouisis

(2002) thought that in order to be interactive, the medium must include (1) two-way communication where (2) the roles of the message sender and receiver are equal and commutable, (3) the speed of communication should be in or at least close to real-time, and include (4) third-order dependency, which is in control by a third party (e.g. supplier). The conditions of the definition are inelastic for interactions, because the concept of “real-time” ignores the human factor, a phenomenon which can be explained with an example when it is expected that we get feedback from the receiver, but it is certain that there will be no immediate feedback (e.g. official email to the manager of the local supermarket). Following this logic, the email cannot be classified among interactive media in any case, because days or weeks can go by between the sent mail and its response. Thus, by Kiousis’s definition of interactive medium, the email is not considered to be interactive, but it carries the possibility of interactivity.

McMillan (2002) gives a user oriented interpretation of interaction. She distinguished three forms: user-to-system, user-to-user and user-to-document interactivity. The first assumes a one-way communication, where users can only download or click. User-to-user interactivity means versatile communication, such interactivity takes place on the internet forums. This type of communication can be unidirectional or bidirectional, depending on what is the initiator’s purpose of the interaction. The user-to-document communication can be observed at blogs, where the user can convert the document with commentary, thus becoming active co-author. In the past, several researchers came to the conclusion that the political system prefers user-to-system interaction, because it helps to improve the flow of information. But they are trying to avoid the user-to-user and user-to-document interactivity, because they can prevail the unexpected consequences with the citizens (Tedesco, 2007; Trammell et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2005). Meanwhile, the citizens like the forms of interaction beyond user-to-system kind of communications. Stromer-Galley and Foot (2002) concluded that people like to receive response from the politicians and it could result in the positive assessment of the politicians.

## **Hypothesis and research questions**

Before we go any further we should introduce some basic knowledge about the Hungarian National Assembly.

The Hungarian Parliament has 386 members. At the time of the research two seats were empty, because one representative of the governing party was elected to the Constitutional Jury and one died. 176 representatives came from single-seat constituencies and 210 seats were distributed by proportional representation. The last elections to the National Assembly were held in 2010. The largest parliamentary group is owned by the Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union with 224 MPs. The Fidesz is in coalition with the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), it has 37 MPs. The three opposition parties are the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) with 48, the Jobbik – Movement for a Better Hungary with 46 and LMP – Politics Can Be Different with 15 representatives in the Parliament. There are also 14 MPs, who are independent, but some of these representatives came from the Socialist Party and they act together, like a quasi faction. The Democratic Coalition (DK) has 10 MPs.

The average age of the parliament is 48 years. If we classified this by factions we got a better picture. The 224 members of the Fidesz's parliamentary group put together an average age of 48.7 years, the KDNP's average are 54.2 years. The members of the MSZP are at the average age of 50.8 years, the Jobbik's average 40.9 years while the LMP's is 38.3 years. The Democratic Coalition representatives' average age is 48.4 and finally the four independent representatives have an average of 51.3 years. The difference in gender is one-sided. The vast majority of the Parliament is made up of men. Fidesz has 19 women representatives. The LMP has 5, the Jobbik has 3, and the KDNP, the MSZP and the DK have equally 2 female MPs. One woman takes seat among the independents.

These were the characteristics we took into account when we started our research. The hypothesis was that *the new ICTs and their tools enable user-to-user or user-to-document interactivity, but the politicians only act as if they were willing to interact with the people*. In reality they are avoiding these situations. In order to get the answer to the hypothesis we raised two research questions.

Nowadays the internet means the basis of modern society's communication. Regarding the world of politics, people find parties or candidates who represent themselves on the social networking sites more sympathetic. Sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are popular among the voters, yet at the same time, compared to the overall internet penetration, only a small number of users follow the political news. One can explore a number of different reasons behind politics' partial move to the internet, but one of the most important reasons is that the citizens expect politics to be represented on the internet. At the same time we should not forget that new technologies enable politicians to provide news quickly and flexibly nonstop. Most of the time these pieces of news are like paintings in the galleries: everything for the eyes, nothing for the hands. News posted by the politicians can barely be commented or changed by the users in the original place. It is not surprising that the MPs' communication on social networking sites is closer to user-to-system interactivity than to the other two variants. We took one step back in the research and we decided to investigate one tool before the social networking sites, we chose email for the subject of our research.

*RQ1: Whether the email means user-to-system or user-to-user interactivity in the world of politics?*

The email is the root of online interactivity. It was expected that at least in the form of emails, MPs would use the user-to-system way of communication. Although we were optimistic, we assumed that we would not get much interaction from the politicians. We were prepared that the user-to-system interactivity would overwhelm the nature of communication.

The second research question referred to those who answered. We wanted to map out those MPs' characteristics, which treat the email as a tool for user-to-user interactivity.

*RQ2: Are there any general characteristics of the MPs who sent response to our email?*

For answering the second research question we investigated the political and demographical characteristics of the MPs. A general assumption was that the older is the representative, the greater is the probability that the politician would dislike the daily use of computer technology. At the same time, the generation of politicians who have low computer literacy is gradually disappearing from the National Assembly. We were expecting the following results: most of the responses would come from the younger politicians and parliamentary factions, like LMP and Jobbik, while the least answers would come from the KDNP. Of course, the formula is not that simple,

because not only the age, but the current power relationship between the parties can influence the outcome. We also expected that the average age of respondents would be lower than the factions' average age. During our research, out of the 384 representatives only 34 were women in the National Assembly. They represent 8.8%, we can conclude that women are under-represented in the parliament, and therefore we expected that the number of female respondents will be proportionately fewer compared to men respondents.

We thought that the number responses from MPs in opposition would be high, because most of them have got into the parliament from proportional lists. They need to prove their work efficiency; hence they would use the user-to-user interactivity. We also expected that the MPs in the governing coalition would give less response because they are in a "safe situation".

## **Research methods**

The research was conducted at the University of Szeged with the MA students of political science and international relations. Each student had 10 to 20 representative, they were responsible for gathering the information on their representatives and for sending the emails to them.

In order to get answers to all the above raised questions, we sent an email to parliamentary representatives (384 MPs). We used their official email address indicated at the site [parlament.hu](http://parlament.hu). We were interested in the percentage of the responding MPs from the current parliament.

The emails were sent between 12 and 17 October 2011 from a Gmail account made for this research ([interaktivitas.kutatas2011@gmail.com](mailto:interaktivitas.kutatas2011@gmail.com) [[interactivity.research2011@gmail.com](mailto:interactivity.research2011@gmail.com)]). We waited one week for the responses. Since we did not send all the emails at the same time, we had to check the deadline in case of every response. One week is a reasonable deadline if we assume that the MPs may receive many requests on one workday. We were aware that we would not get responses right the next day. We also assumed that these letters are going through certain filters (personal assistant, secretary, etc.), so it takes some time for the politicians to meet our letters in person. We did not deal with the mails which were filtered out by spam filters or personal assistants. In several cases the representatives slipped out from our one-week time limit. Those responses were not counted in the research. An interesting addition is that most of these mails came from the politicians' personal assistants. The research had two important elements. First, emails had to be sent to every MP. Second, only answers were acknowledged, we did not calculate with the filtered emails.

When we were writing our mail we paid attention to be short and simple. It was essential in order to reach our goal that the MPs will deal with our mail. We indicated that we are a research team from the University of Szeged and we asked only one question. The question was about the MPs' TV watching habits. The raised question was politically neutral. The question was not intended to influence the outcome of the research with ideological matters. On the other hand, we did not want to be too personal, we did not want to frighten the respondents away. We did not give possible answers to choose from, because we wanted the politicians (or their staff) to write down their response.

The received answers were summarised by parliamentary groups, way of entering into the parliament and demographical factors (primarily age and gender). With these conclusions we could give answers to the research questions raised above.

## RESULTS

In the following sections I present the results of the research process described previously, and the answers for the questions presented above.

We received a total of 106 answers out of the 384 representatives in the specified time interval of one week. This means a 27.6% response propensity. Among the responses we can find not only the direct answers to our request, some of the representatives explained why they refused to respond to our question and some had a negative tone in their emails. However, these responses did not change our attitude to the answers. Our goal was to get answer from the MPs, and we got it, even if it was dismissive or negative. For further analysis of the results it is essential to highlight that the Fidesz-KDNP governing coalition has the two-thirds of parliamentary seats, this element has a significant influence on our results.

**Table 1** Response propensity compared to the size of the parliamentary groups

	The number of representatives of each political group	Received responses	Response propensity compared to the size of the parliamentary groups (%)
Fidesz	224	40	17.86%
KDNP	37	9	24.32%
MSZP	48	21	43.75%
DK (independent)	10	4	40%
Jobbik	46	24	52.17%
LMP	15	7	46.67%
Independent	4	1	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>27.6%</b>

If we examine the received responses, the Fidesz-KDNP coalition sent back 49 emails: 40 from the representatives of Fidesz and 9 from KDNP. Their response propensity is 18.7%, while their total share in the National Assembly is 67.96%. If we examine the two parties separately, Fidesz reached 17.86%, while KDNP 24.32%. This result shows us that the larger governing party's willingness to answer to our question was lower than that of the representatives of KDNP, although the average age of KDNP (54.2 years) is the highest in the parliament.

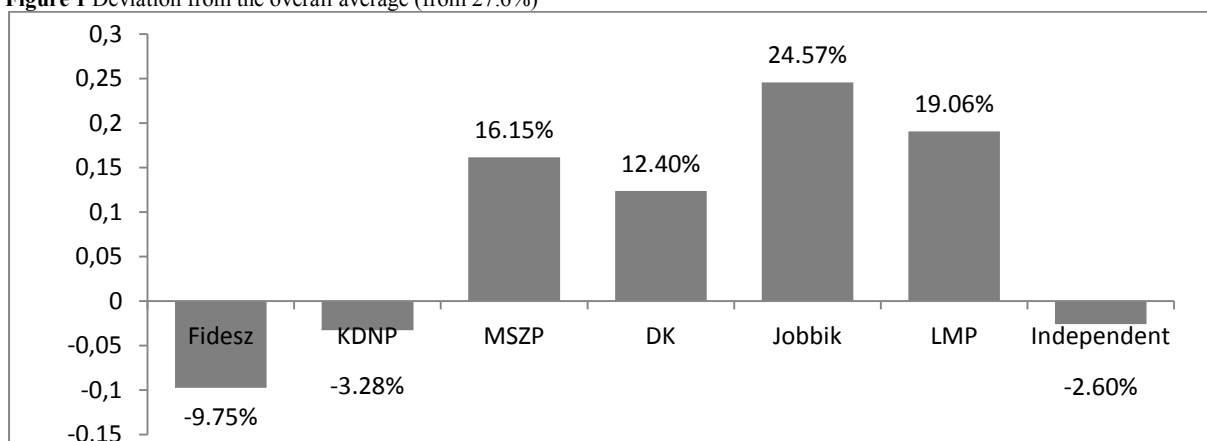
If we calculate these results for the opposition, to the 32.03% of the parliament (123 representatives), we got 57 responses which means 46.3%. This result already shows us that the MPs in opposition show higher standard of response propensity, the number of their responses

reached more than double of the governing coalition. The Jobbik has the best results with a total of 24 responses which mean 52.17%. They are followed by the LMP (46.67%), the Socialist Party (43.75), DK (40%) and the independents (25%). One can see that the Fidesz-KDNP has a negative influence on the outcomes, while the opposition, which is highly underrepresented in the National Assembly, gives high number of responses.

When we compare the received responses to the total number of parliamentary seats, the results are the following: the governing coalition reached the result of a total 12.76%, while the opposition reached 14.84%. These results show us that the differences are not so high if we compare them to the total seats of the parliament, but we should not forget that to reach 12.76% from the two third of the parliament is much easier than from the one third. In this context the opposition's result are much better than the governing coalition's. The possible reason for this result is that the parties in the opposition are forced to find alternative ways to get to the public. The average age of the parliamentary groups also improve the results. The youngest factions belong to the Jobbik's (40.98 years) and the LMP's (38.3 years) parliamentary groups. This also helped the opposition to achieve better results.

If we examine the overall deviation from the average, the following results are obtained:

**Figure 1** Deviation from the overall average (from 27.6%)



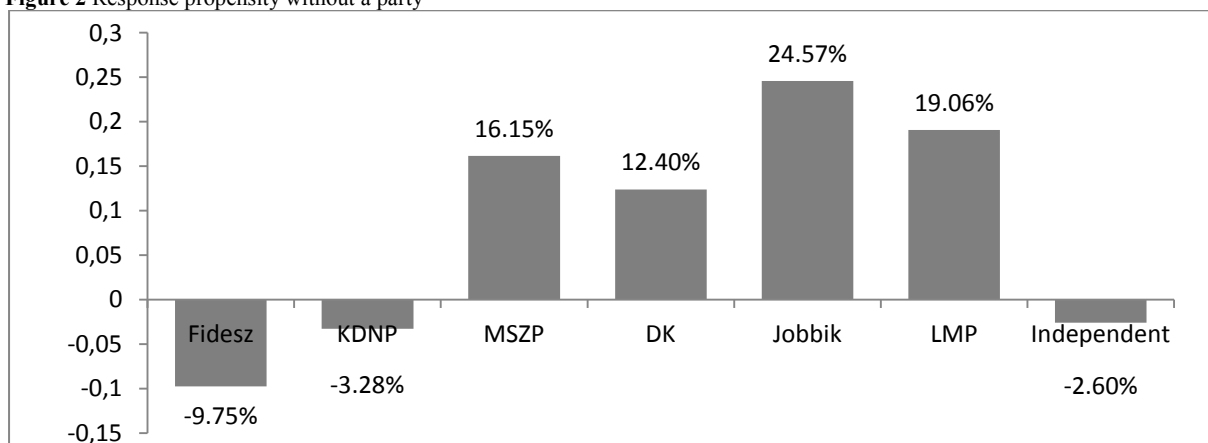
The first figure supports the statement that the governing coalition underachieved in the research. But it also shows that the 4 independent MPs are also bringing down the results, which is rather wired, because the Hungarian election system does not support the independent candidates. In order to be able to start in the elections the candidates need a strong party support or they have to be in touch with the voters, because independent candidates could not get into the parliament through proportional lists. One way to be in touch with the voters is to communicate with them or show the willingness to communicate. Our research could be a good possibility for them to show that they are willing to hear the voice of the voters and they would be good representatives for their constituency.

On the other hand this figure shows that the Jobbik's results are much better than the other opposition parties'. Jobbik and LMP came to the parliament in 2010. It is expected that the Jobbik, as a newcomer, shows high propensity of response, because this is one way to show, they did not

accidentally came to the parliament and they are willing to hear the voice of the voters. According to figure 1, LMP has the second best result. This also shows that they are newcomers, who want to prove to the electorate. However, the results are not surprising, because they used the new information and communication technologies a lot before and during the 2010 election campaign.

A more complex picture emerges when we examine the willingness to reply without a party, because it becomes tangible in which direction did one faction change the outcome of the research, and what would have happened without it. The method is the following: from the total number of representatives we subtracted the number of MPs of one faction, and likewise from the total number of responses the replies sent by one faction were subtracted. The results of the two data enabled us to calculate the final percentage. This finally eliminated the dominance of the governing parties and we got a much more accurate data when we simply divided the total number of representatives with the total number of answers.

**Figure 2** Response propensity without a party

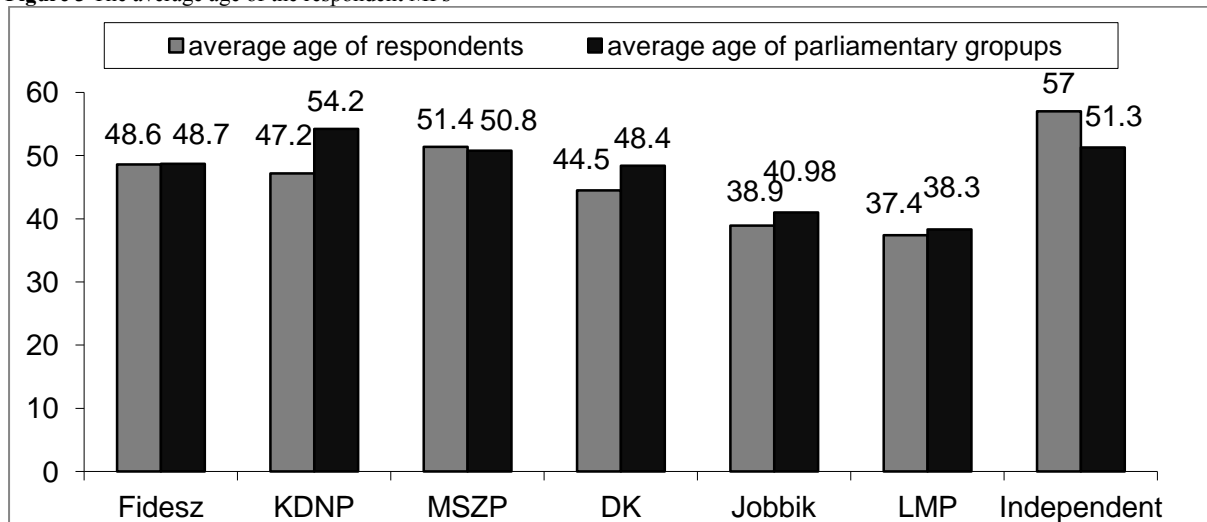


The second figure shows that the real underachiever in the research is the largest governing party, the Fidesz. Without the Fidesz there would be 160 MPs in the National Assembly and we would have got 66 answers. The response propensity would have been 41.25%, namely two fifth of the parliament would have answered to our email. The other parties would have been close to the average. We can state that from the two governing parties the biggest, Fidesz is that the one who reduces the final outcome. In this summary the Jobbik's and the MSZP's results are the best, because without them the propensity would be lower. It shows that the Socialist Party's result is not the worst "among the best".

If we examine the average age of the parliamentary groups and the average age of the respondent MPs we get the following results:



**Figure 3** The average age of the respondent MPs

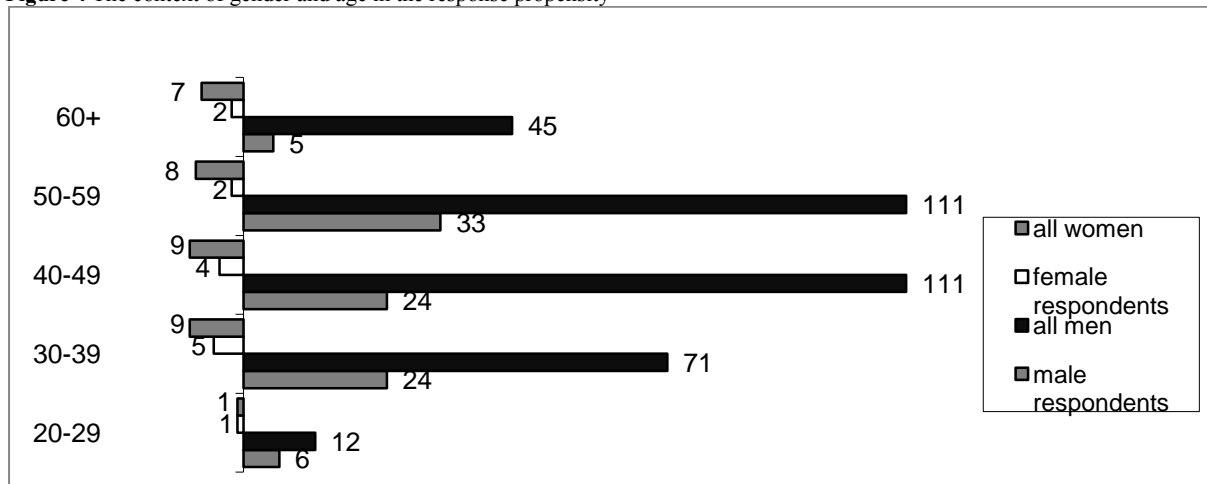


The parliamentary group of Fidesz shows no difference regarding the average age of the faction and the respondents. From independent MPs we received only one answer, so the word “average” is false, because we are speaking only about one MP, therefore their result is unintelligible. As expected, the respondents of KDNP, DK, Jobbik and LMP are younger as their parliamentary group. The biggest difference is in the result of Christian Democratic People’s Party. During the realisation of the research the KDNP had the eldest faction in the Hungarian parliament. But the average age of their respondents was younger with 7 years. This confirms our expectation that the respondent MPs will be those from the younger generation of the MPs. Only the result of the Socialist Party does not fit to the others. MSZP is the only parliamentary group whose faction is younger than their respondents’ average age. Among the possible answers to this phenomenon could be that MSZP had the most professional website from 2002 to 2006. Representatives and hundreds of activists had access to the mszp.hu website (Merkovity, 2011, pp. 215–216). Their computer literacy has been very high from a long time; hence the MSZP’s result is not surprising.

We can also calculate which was the largest age group regarding response willingness. In this comparison the Fidesz achieved the best result with those between the ages of 50–59; their success rate is 21.13%. The KDNP’s age group between 30–39 years achieved 75.00%, the MSZP’s same age group and those over 60 achieved 50.00%, and the result of the Democratic Coalition is the same, as well. The Jobbik’s 20–29 age group reached 83.33%. However, this contradicts the result of LMP, which, as the “youngest” faction, with the age group of 40–49 years, reached 66.67%. All things considered, the younger generation preferred to respond to our email. This section confirms our assumption that the younger generation will be more likely to respond and to use email as a user-to-user interactivity tool.

We can get a more accurate picture of the responses if we analyse the distribution of age and gender. The relevant data is presented in the figure below:

**Figure 4** The context of gender and age in the response propensity



Since the number of female MPs is very low in the National Assembly and men are known to be more open to the new technologies, we expected that the response propensity of the male respondents will be higher. This hypothesis was false; the female respondents' performance was much higher than that of the males. Only 26.29% of the respondents were men, while the proportion of women respondents is 41.18%. This is really striking if we compare the results of the age group over 60. 29% of the females, while 11% of the males sent back their responses. It means that even in the most "ICT sceptic" generation the female respondents were overrepresented. But this is true for the other generations, as well. In the age group of 20–29 100%, 30–39 56% and 40–49 44% of the women MPs answered to the email. Only in the age group of 50–59 was the proportion of the female respondents lower than the male ones: 25% to 30%.

Women's higher willingness to reply per age group is confirmed. The bigger governing party has the largest proportion (33.33%) in that age group from 30 to 39 year old women. Only 18.75% of males responded from the same age group of Fidesz. Since all the women responded from the MSZP's parliamentary group, their propensity of response is 100%.

These results bring us back to the research questions. The short responses will be the following: (RQ1) *Whether the email means user-to-system or user-to-user interactivity in the world of politics?*

If we stick to Kiouisis' theory about the interaction the email is rather a user-to-system tool in the hand of the Hungarian MPs. This is indicated by the fact that only a little bit more than the quarter of representatives sent response to our mail.

We can find some weak characteristics of the MPs, if we investigate the second research question: (RQ2) *Are there any general characteristics of the MPs who sent response to our email?*

When we were examining the age groups, it was obvious that the older generation did not confine itself to the use of the internet. The female respondents were more active than the male members of the parliament. The two newcomer party, Jobbik and LMP have performed as expected. Both factions were active in sending responses. We also saw that the members of the opposition has higher response propensity than the representatives of the governing coalition. It is true that the

smaller coalition partner, the KDNP brought results close to the average, but they also underperformed in the research.

Generalizing the results, we can state that the greatest chance to get a response from a Hungarian MP is, when we write an email to a female representative from the opposition and from the age group of 30 to 39 years. The least likely to answer our mail is a male representative, who is in the governing party and is more than 60 years old.

## **DISCUSSION**

27.6% of the Hungarian MPs have responded to the emails sent during the research. Is that proportion low? Or can we say that it is high? Answering this question is a hard task. It is obvious, that there have been a progress compared to the 15% result measured by Ferenc Kumin in his similar research 8 years ago (Kumin, 2003). The dynamics of this difference shows that the proportion of the responders have grown with 1.5% per each year, which means that every year 6 new MPs joined the group of responders. Along this logic, another 14.5 years would be necessary to say that half of the Parliament responds to such inquiries. In this perspective, the 27.6% is a really low proportion. However, in this case we have neglected the fact that the next Parliament is expected to be smaller than the present one, and we have not taken into consideration that new members might enter the Parliament after the next elections. Furthermore, this calculation ignores that there have already been two elections since 2003, where the majority of the MPs had been changed. This questions the yearly growth in the number of the responders; one should speak about a cyclic, 4-year period growth instead.

Another approach to the question is given by the fact that 18.6% of the Hungarian households has submitted the 2011 census questionnaire online (HSCO, 2011). In this case we can see that the MPs have done really well. However, the comparison here, as well, is misleading, since the data of the Statistical Office refers to the Hungarian households, not to the population. We must not forget that in case of online submission it is possible that it was “only” one family member who filled the questionnaires for the other family members, as well. Furthermore, participation in the census was compulsory, while our emails sent in the research only offered the possibility of participation. The above data shows that the judgement of the results is only a matter of attitude.

Another question is whether we could have reached a higher number of responders? Of course, we could have. For instance, if we have not used a free mailing system, but the official system of a university or any other organisation, we could have expected more answers. Our email address can be recognised as spam or a data-fishing tool. On the other hand, the number of responses could have been less, if we had not introduced ourselves as members of a university research team, but sign the emails with our own names, that are unfamiliar for the MPs. However, we think that we managed to find the midway by introducing ourselves as researchers, which did not influenced the MPs inclination to respond.

Regarding the hypothesis the new ICTs and their tools do enable user-to-user or user-to-document interactivity, but in fact the politicians are avoiding these situations. With reflection to these results it is worth to examine the role of the new ICTs and interaction presented briefly in the introduction.

In reality, the new ICTs – especially the email – provide people with a possibility of keeping contact. The institutional side of the Hungarian political culture still prefers the traditional ways of communication. At least, this could be inferred from the data showing that more than two third of the MPs have not responded within one week. The situation is much better if we consider and examine only those MPs, who have sent their reply. Out of the 106 responses there were 5 negative and only 4 evasive answers, which indicates that those who accepted the possibilities of the new ICTs, are not only utilizing them for their own benefit (gaining information), but they are willing to share the information. Considering our research, this willingness is materialised in the answers they have sent to us. This gives us hope for a better future, since as it has already been predicted the willingness to answer is likely to grow. However, the picture is more layered if interactivity is involved in the research.

## **CONCLUSION**

During our research, we considered the email to be alternative medium on the basis of Kiousis' theory. Yet, for doing this, we had to maximize the deadline for receiving answers in seven days. One week still carries the cyclic nature of our everyday lives, for example the addressee cannot read his/her mails immediately for some other daily tasks, there can be technical errors, and other mails might be considered to be more important, etc. The other three criteria are basically fulfilled by the email, the bidirectional characteristic has been given, the roles of the sender and the receiver might have been mixed, and the communication contained third order dependency, the exchange of the mail was realized with the cooperation of more actors. After clarifying this, on the basis of McMillan's user based interactivity theory we can get the impression that the majority of the MPs are devoted to the user-to-system interactivity. This result is not surprising, previous researches also show that the social web usage of the Hungarian parliamentary parties – there are some exceptions, of course – are still in its infancy (Balogh, 2011). It is characterized by limited content and sharing. As a side trail of our research we have collected the personal websites of the MPs. As a result we can conclude that more than 230 MPs have a personal webpage of some type.<sup>2</sup> This is a large number, but we must not forget that personal websites are suitable for unidirectional communication, which further strengthens the user-to-system interactivity. The MPs' social web usage – according to McMillan this would be a user-to-user interactivity – shows that it does not strengthen the bidirectional practice of communication, but the unidirectional ones (e.g. own websites) hided in the forms of web 2.0. Our research is also placed here. On the basis of the number of the received answers we have come to the conclusion that the majority of the MPs rather prefer the user-to-system than the user-to-user communication, even if it happens in such a closed channel as the email.

Our conclusion is that the most of the MPs are using email addresses to demonstrate their openness to the new ICTs, but they do not actually use them to keep in daily contact with their voters. This is proved by the number of responses received and the preference of unidirectional practice of communication. The responding representatives are the small minority, who represent the other side of the truth. They show us what should be the preferred way of communication between the member of the parliament and the voter.

From another perspective, the research is in line with the results of the international examinations. Just as their foreign mates, the Hungarian MPs are also keen on avoiding the unexpected and awkward consequences of the bi-or multidirectional communication by preferring the forms of user-to-system communication. According to Trammell et al. (2006), the user-to-user communication is more likely to be used during the campaign periods to present what happens in the background. However, this statement can neither be confirmed, nor opposed with regard to the Hungarian situation, since 2011 was not an election year. So we can only say that on the basis of the Hungarian MPs' willingness to respond to emails, one cannot explore significant differences in interactivity compared to foreign politicians.

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## **KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

Political communication: Role of communication in the political process.

Interactivity: On new ICTs it has three forms: user-to-system, user-to-user and user-to-document interactivity.

Interaction: It can represent the interaction between humans and computers, or cooperation of computers with each other.

Hungary: Country in Central-East Europe, member of the European Union.

MPs: Members of parliament, in democracies they are usually directly elected by the people.

Response propensity: For instance, the willingness of someone to answer our question.

Parties: A single entity of people who share the same ideology or vision, which is usually expressed in a party program.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, technical background for the MPs of the Fidesz faction is provided by fidesz.hu. Therefore, in many cases the own website of the MP is formulated as follows: name\_of\_the\_MP.fidesz.hu.