Sharing is Caring!

Investigating the Most Unexpectedly Successful Posts on Politicians' Facebook Pages During

2014 General Election Campaign in Hungary

Marton Bene

Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Corvinus University of Budapest

Author Note

Marton Bene (MA) is a junior research fellow at the Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian

Academy of Sciences and Ph.D. student at the Department of Political Science, Corvinus

University of Budapest

Correspondence should be sent to Marton Bene, Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian

Academy of Sciences, 1014 Budapest, Országház u. 30. Email: bene.marton@tk.mta.hu

Abstract

The study qualitatively investigates the most unexpectedly successful 25 posts during Hungarian general election campaign in 2014. These are posts whose numbers of shares were much higher than average numbers of shares of their posters' posts. The study addresses the question of what kind of contents can get viral and how it happens. First, it investigates the most specific and common features of the contents of these posts. Second, the way they were shared and the effects they could evoke within personal networks are examined. Results show the prominence of negativity, undistorted message transmission and low reactivity level to the shares.

Keywords: virality, Facebook, political communication, campaign, negativity, reactivity, Hungary, viralization

During the last decades the term of sharing has become a "crucial concept in contemporary culture and society" (John, 2013:179). Its popularity is stemming from social media where object of 'share' has increasingly obscured and extended to anything and now it is a sort of cultural imperatives well beyond online world (John, 2013). 'Share your moment!', 'Share your life!', 'Share your world!' or even 'Share yourself!' – these are calls we are flooded with from everywhere.

In this context, politics is also becoming a 'shared experience'. Social media, most notably Facebook plays an increasingly important role in political orientation and information of voters, especially among less politically involved segments of them. Politics can be widely visible and interactable, i.e. viral, on Facebook through sharing. Sharing is operating by citizens' communication which takes place within their personal network. Consequently, politics aiming to virality should target these 'conversations' and be injected into them. When it comes to political campaign on Facebook, achieving virality is especially important. Politicians' messages can reach wider segments of voters only if they are shared. Previous research showed that most candidates are hardly followed (see, Vaccari – Nielsen, 2013), thus they are strongly in need of getting viral.

Nonetheless, we hardly know about political virality and specifically even less about virality of candidates' campaign communication. In a recent work I investigated which post elements are conducive to a post being shared on a database containing more than 7000 Facebook posts of 183 SMD candidates during Hungarian general election campaign in 2014 (Bene, 2016a). While these results offered a general picture about operating of political sharing in campaign context, outliers had to be excluded from the quantitative analysis in order to obtain undistorted results. However, these outliers are posts which were shared in unexpectedly great amount. To understand virality it is very important to take these extremely

successful posts into account as virality is mostly about extraordinariness. While these posts are extreme cases in terms of number of shares, as for virality they are the most typical cases.

In this research these typical cases of virality, the most unexpectedly successful 25 posts during Hungarian general election campaign in 2014 are qualitatively investigated. These are posts whose numbers of shares were much higher than average numbers of shares of their posters' posts. The study addresses the question of what kind of contents can get viral and how it happens. As for content, I do explore whether there is any more or less common or particularly specific features of these unexpectedly successful posts and the appearance of these features are distinctly analyzed. For this, these posts are contrasted with posts from total sample containing 7294 posts.

If we hardly know anything about content aspect of virality, we know even less about how viral posts are shared by users. Another novelty of this work that it investigates how these unexpectedly successful contents are shared and what happened with the posts after being disconnected from their original context, the politicians' pages. All publicly available shares of these posts (1822 shares) are analyzed regarding the way they were shared and reactions they got from users' Facebook friends.

This approach offers a complex and comprehensive picture about virality during political campaigns, supplementing the general results of previous quantitative work. The findings reinforced the dominant role of negativity in political virality and give a fine-grained analysis of how this negativity is used in these viral contents. Surprisingly, it turns out that shares are mostly without individual contributions and even when some short text is added to the shared content, they are never contradict the original messages. Reactivity of these shares are extremely low, friends of the users who share posts are seemingly ignore these political contents. Finally, the research demonstrates the important roles played by highly followed

pages and accounts which are able to boost the virality of candidates' contents. In the first part

of the paper I draw up the theoretical background followed by presenting data and methods.

Next, I discuss the findings and finish the article with some concluding remarks.

Theoretical Background

Growing Significance of Facebook on Political Communication

During the last few years Facebook has become one of the most important political

information resources for voters. In the USA the 44% of adult population get news at least

sometimes from Facebook, which is the 66% of all Facebook users (Pew Research, 2016a). In

Hungary, Facebook penetration is lower (46%) than in USA (67%), but almost the third of

voter population are informed about politics by Facebook at least sometimes (31%) which is

the 69% of all Facebook users[1]. However, for example among Hungarian university students

Facebook has become the top political information resource, as half of them regularly and a

further third sometimes are informed about politics by it (Bene, 2016b).

A special feature of Facebook as an information resource that it can easily reach the

politically uninterested segments of the voters who otherwise manage to avoid political

information in current high-choice media environment. The dominance of accidental exposure

on Facebook is well supported by the Pew Research data which shows that 62% of Facebook

users who get news come across those contents when they are doing other things on the site

(Pew Research, 2016a), but high degree of accidental exposure was found in Italy, Great

Britain and Germany as well (Valeriani – Vaccari, 2015). Furthermore, Valeriani and Vaccari

showed that accident exposure to political information can also influence political behavior;

moreover this effect was stronger on voters with low political interest (Valeriani – Vaccari,

2015).

The effectiveness of political information on Facebook is further increased by the fact that it is usually transmitted by personal acquaintances, i.e. Facebook friends (see, Pew Research, 2016b). Some research demonstrated that social cues in and social transmission of message could induce its pervasive power (Bond et al, 2012; Messing – Westwood, 2014; Turcotte et al, 2015). In addition, political information on Facebook appears in a basically non-political, highly personalized context where political predisposition and reflexes may be less activated. Wojczieszak and Mutz showed that political conversations in non-political context are more tolerant towards political disagreement (Wojczieszak – Mutz, 2009). To sum up, political information on Facebook does not only inform a huge amount of voters, but strong evidences demonstrated its effectiveness because of the accidental exposure, peer transmission and non-political context (see, Bene, 2016b).

'Viralization' of Politics on Facebook

These features have appreciated the significance of Facebook in political communication. In past, the primary way of reaching voters was to fit to media logic(s) (see the mediatization approach in politics, e.g. Strömbäck, 2008). Now, voters can be reached through social media platforms as well by fitting to their logics.

Facebook is based on sharing. Users create communication networks, including mostly their offline acquaintances (see, boyd, 2014), which are kept alive by the activity of sharing. Users can be experienced by members of their network only if they share, and they see and may interact with the shares of these members. Share is basically the soul of these communication networks and can literally be anything: a moment, an experience, an opinion, public information, others' contents, links etc.

The distribution logic of network media is virality (Klinger – Svensson, 2015). The term is coming from marketing and defined as 'network-enhanced word-of-mouth' (Jurveston

– Darper, 1997; see, Nahon et al, 2011). This definition well captures the original dual meaning of sharing, namely an act of communication as well as an act of distribution which meanings were collapsed in the context of social media (see, John, 2013). Getting viral on Facebook broadly speaking means being shared in many different communication networks.[2] The more people share a content, i.e. use it within their ongoing communication with the members of their networks, the more extended reach and influence it can achieve. On social media there are no stable audiences as in case of mass media, but there is an information abundance where countless contents from a wide spectrum of topics and creators compete for the attention and being shared (Klinger – Svensson, 2015). Contents have to create their own audience by being viral and injected in many communication networks. However, number of shares are generally unevenly distributed (see, Klinger – Svensson, 2015). Only a few contents enjoy a disproportionately huge attention and are shared within huge number of personal networks, while most contents get hardly any or even no shares at all. The term of virality captures this extraordinariness and the term of viral content refer to extremely shared contents.

Political communication on social media should also be intended to get viral in order to be effective. Political contents have to break into these share-driven 'conversations' between users and their friends in order to be visible and effective. Content can be successful if users can use it for these conversations with their personal networks. This means that the direct purpose of communication, and thereby its way changes comparing with mass media-centric communication. While the direct purpose of the latter type of communication is to affect mass media communication and thereby the reception and cognitive or affective processes of citizens, the former is intended to make the citizens communicate about its contents and thereby to target their communicative, social nature. It is easy to see that reaching these goals requires different strategies and contents.

Turning to candidates and campaign, the above discussed overview suggests that the most important goal of candidates' Facebook campaign is to get viral. Generally, a campaign can seek two main goals: mobilizing supporters ('get out of the vote' - GOTV) or persuading non-supporters (see, Holbrook – McClurg, 2005). Candidates on Facebook can directly communicate with their followers who are likely to be their supporters. However, for most candidates direct followers is only a very narrow circle of supporters (see, Vaccari – Nielsen, 2013), thus significant gain on the election results from their mobilization on Facebook can hardly be expected. Wider circle of supporters, undecided voters or even voters leaning to opponents can only be reached through getting viral, injecting the message into as many 'conversation network' as possible.

Political virality

Although the question of social media information diffusion has just been recently given scholarly attention, it has been examined in many different fields (see, Zhang – Vos, 2015). Overviewing the field, Zhang and Vos (2015) detected many different aspects of virality these studies concern with such as diffusion mechanism, network characteristics or even the specific features of social network sites (SNS) facilitating information spreading. As for content dimension of virality, considered worthwhile, emotion, entertainment value or positive sentiment, news value and identifiable contents are the identified key characteristics of being shared on SNS platforms.

Regarding political virality, our knowledge is still rather insufficient. Three thin streams of literature are relevant here. The first is some studies which examined the sharing of news articles. In their seminal study, Berger and Milkman examining online articles of New York Times showed that the emotionality, especially positivity significantly affect to get an article into the circle of top e-mailed pieces. In addition, they found that virality is influenced by physiological arousal as well: articles with high-arousal emotions whether positive or

negative trigger more e-mails (Berger – Milkman, 2012). Heinbach and Hinz replicated this study in German context examining online articles of der Spiegel, but expanded their focus on more SNS platforms where articles could be shared. Regarding Facebook, they found that emotions affecting virality on this platform were anger and awe, but emotionality was not significant predictor in itself. However, the detailed investigation explored that positivity could affect sharing on Facebook but in non-linear way: slightly positive contents are conducive to virality but extremely positive articles are not (Heimbach – Hinz, 2016). Bastos focused on topic rather than sentiment of articles on two news sites (New York Times and the Guardian) and showed that there are differences between topics shared by SNS users and highlighted by editors. Editors emphasized economy and sport more highly that these topics were shared on SNS sites, whereas on Facebook arts, entertainment and opinion pieces were popularly shared. Articles from political section were moderately shared showing that political news contents appeared on Facebook mainly on the form of opinion pieces (Bastos, 2015). In a similar study, examining Swedish online newspapers Larsson found identical pattern regarding rare sharing of political news articles on Facebook, and demonstrated the popularity of health and crime issues in Facebook news sharing (Larsson, 2016).

Another stream of literature examines factors affecting retweets of political tweets on Twitter. Twitter is a well-available SNS platforms, thereby a good ground for automatized data collection and conducting large-N content analysis. Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan investigated political tweets during regional elections in two German states in 2011 and found that the more emotion-filled a tweet the more likely it is retweeted. In addition, both positivity and negativity significantly increased probability of retweeting, although the effect size of negativity was slightly greater (Stieglitz – Dang-Xuan, 2012). In a later research, they and their colleagues focused on only influential during another state election in the same year in Germany and showed that emotionality and appraisal of political parties or politicians within

their posts resulted in higher number of retweets (Dang-Xuan et al, 2013). In contrast, Hoang and his colleagues investigating political tweets during 2012 US presidential campaign found that neutral tweets are more likely retweeted. However, they also reported that retweeting behavior of users who ever retweeted emotion-filled tweet was significantly shaped by both positivity and negativity of tweets. This means that retweeting activity is affected by sentiment of tweets only in case of a special segment of users (Hoang et al, 2013). Attempting to resolve conflicting findings regarding influence of sentiment on being retweeted, Hansen and his colleagues demonstrated that the type of tweeted contents moderates the effects of sentiment on retweets. Interestingly, while virality of news pieces were shaped by negativity, non-news tweets were affected by positivity. As authors put it, this suggests: "Sweet talk your friends or serve bad news to the public" (Hansen et al, 2011: 12). However, it is important regarding these results, that Twitter differs from Facebook in many respects (features, norms etc.), hence sharing behavior on Twitter cannot be regarded as corresponding with sharing behavior on Facebook (e.g. Bastos,2015)

Little knowledge is available about the subject of current article, that is virality of politicians' communication. Investigating a very specific sample, the most retweeted tweets of 'third-party' presidential candidates during 2012 US campaign, Christiansen shows these tweets are mostly focus on military, security, human rights issues, and the critics of two-party system as well as corporate power (Christiansen, 2013). However, given the very specific sample, these findings seem to be rather context-sensitive. Larsson examined the links between content type of and the reactions to Facebook posts on Norwegian party leaders' Facebook pages and found that mean number of share was higher in case of critical posts. However, these post type was very rarely used by examined party leaders and almost the half of all critical posts was applied by one leader who was generally the most reacted politicians in the sample (Larsson, 2015). Therefore it is not clear whether the high number of share of

critical posts was due to content type or the general viral potential and popularity of the leader who predominantly used it. Samuel-Azran and his colleagues investigated the effects of Aristotelian rhetorical tools on Facebook reactions on five Israeli leading politicians' Facebook pages. The results showed that posts using logos (logic-based appeals) were significantly more likely shared than post applying ethos (highlighting speaker's credibility and trustworthiness), but the mean differences were not significant between ethos and pathos as well as logos and pathos. Considering the finding that the highest mean number of shares belongs to logos rhetorical tools, the dilemma is same as in case of Larsson's study: logos was hardly used rhetorical tools and 62% of post applying logos was posted by only one politician (Samuel-Azran et al, 2015). Much more content aspects were taken into account in Gerodimos and Justinussen' study than in earlier works, but their investigation were confined to only one Facebook page, Barack Obama's pages during 2012 presidential election. The findings showed that posts with policy statement and especially about the policy area of education as well as posts using any Aristotelian rhetorical devices were more likely to be shared. Interestingly, posts with positive acclaims were also more shared than other posts. At the same time posts containing fact/statistic or video were significantly less likely shared on Obama's page (Gerodimos – Justinussen, 2015). The immediate antecedent work of recent study applied an even wider empirical approach as not a small number of prominent politicians' pages were analyzed, but a total of 7048 posts from 183 SMD candidates during Hungarian general election campaign of 2014. In addition, the effects of 31 different content variables on Facebook reaction types (like, comment, share) were tested on this sample. The findings suggested that the number of share was significantly triggered by text, video, share from external resources and meme appearing in the post as well as mobilization contents calling for vote or containing campaign material. However, the strongest predictors were

explicit call for sharing and negativity. At the same time, campaign accounts, accomplishment reports and general information were significantly less likely shared (Bene, 2016a).

Recent work is a follow-up to the latter study. That article offered a general picture about what content factors influence the number of shares. However, virality is hard to be captured only by general patterns, because it is about extraordinariness. While many of aforementioned study talked about virality, they usually measured only the number of shares or retweets. However, the two concepts are not the same, even if they are strongly connected. Numbers of shares are very unevenly distributed among political contents and viral posts mean the highly shared contents. While the highly shared posts count as extreme cases in the investigation of numbers of shares, they are most typical cases in the investigation of virality. Therefore, for understanding virality, it is not enough to consider regular posts. We should get a handle on irregular contents which cannot be captured by quantitative investigation since they have to be removed from data analysis as outliers. Unexpectedly successful posts are irregular contents which are really important in order to understand virality, thus their qualitative investigation may be fruitful. Furthermore, qualitative approaches are hardly used in this field. The only exception I know is the above discussed article from Christiansen which also investigated the most successful contents, but it focused only on topics on a very specific sample (Christiansen, 2013). To sum up, this leads to first research question as follows:

RQ1: *What makes the most unexpectedly successful posts so viral? What do these contents look like?*

Moreover, an important aspect of virality is totally ignored within the literature. This aspect is how posts are shared by users. It is important, because it is clear that going viral on Facebook does not mean a simple message transmission. It is rather an interactive process between various actors (Zhang – Vos, 2015), where the original transmitted message can be

interpreted, commented on, criticized or reframed and thereby distorted by users. This is recognized by both political science literature and practitioner as well (see, Stromer-Galley, 2014), yet it has not been empirically studied. In addition, it is crucial what happened with the post after being disconnected from its original contexts. Is it any effects within personal networks? Is it able to generate further engagement by being reacted by friends of sharer user? A well-grounded picture about virality can only be obtained as long as we gain knowledge about how and what effects posts are shared by users from politicians' Facebook pages. All in all, these interests are reflected in second research question as follows:

RQ2: *What happens with unexpectedly successful posts after being disconnected from their original context? How do users share the most unexpectedly successful contents and how they are reacted by members of personal networks?*

Methods

To address first research question two datasets are used. The first database (total sample – TS) contains all Facebook posts of three most voted candidates owing Facebook pages from all single-member districts posted during the last two weeks of the 2014 Hungarian general election campaign. This means a total of 7294 posts from 184 candidates (see, Bene 2016a). In this research this dataset serves as a population of posts from which unexpectedly successful posts are selected and as a comparative dataset during the analysis. The second dataset using as the subject of the analysis consists of the most unexpectedly successful posts (MUSP) during the campaign picking from TS. Virality depends on some factors being beyond content which is the focus of this research. For example, in non-political contexts Liu and his colleagues found that retweeting is shaped by source trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness (Liu et al, 2012) and other research showed that it is influenced by number of followers and followees as well as the age of account (Suh et al, 2010). Consequently, these findings suggest that Facebook pages have a kind of viral potential in

themselves which strongly affects virality of their posts regardless of their content. As this research focuses on content aspects of virality, this viral potential must be controlled. Therefore, those posts were selected from TS into the MUSP dataset which numbers of shares were much larger than the mean number of share per post of the poster candidates. These are the posts which standardized residuals were higher than 2.58 in a regression model where the individual post's number of shares were the dependent variable and the mean number of shares belonging to the candidates published given post was the independent variable. This means a total of 25 available posts from 20 candidates. Note, that these are not the most viral posts during the whole campaign, but the posts which number of share cannot be explained by the general popularity or 'viral potential' of a given candidate. These are the most typical cases of content virality.

Table 1 shows the general characteristics of selected posts. The sample is dominated by politicians of the left-wing oppositional party-coalition (Kormányváltás party), only a fifth of MUSP were published by government party politicians (Fidesz), and three posts belong to politicians of radical right oppositional party (Jobbik). Most posts' number of shares range between 79 and 508, only one post exceed this: Rózsa Endre's post was shared 5460 times making it the most shared post of the total sample during the campaign. Timing of posts seems not to influence the success of posts. However, slightly more unexpectedly successful contents were posted during the first third of the whole period (10) than during the second (7) or the last (8) third.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

In both datasets posts were coded based on their contents. Variables were grouped into four sets. Structural features means whether a posts containing text, picture, video, shared content, meme[3] or emoticon. Two variables are associated with emotional tones. A post was coded as positive if it is contains one of the following elements: applause, honor, reporting

about success or inaugurations (positive, negative). A post was recorded as negative if contained critique, attack or expressing pity. The third variable set was the character or the post. Information posts contained one of the following elements: accounts of the candidate's acts or public utterances; the candidate's own opinions; pledges; presentation of earlier accomplishments; general information that is not directly connected to the candidate; or notification of upcoming events without calls for participation. Mobilization was coded if it contained explicit call for voting or participation in an offline event or shared campaign material. Engagement variable means explicit call for Facebook action (like, comment, share or question). Personalization was coded if a post contained something personal about the candidate: presentation of her family, her personal interest, her life beyond politics, or her local patriotic sentiment. The last character variable is humor and those contents were coded which were intended to be humorous. The last variable set concerns with the orientation of the posts which could be local and/or national focused. The novelty of this operationalization was that posts were not pushed exclusively into one category or another. All variables were treated as possible elements of posts, and posts are coded according to whether they contain any of these elements or not (see: Bene, 2016a)[4].

To answer the first research question I investigate the general features of the selected posts in two steps. As a first step the MUSP dataset is contrasted with TS based on the coded elements in order to find features which (a) are really common among selected posts and (b) appear in selected posts to greater extent than in the TS. After identifying the most noteworthy features of selected posts, in the second step the way the most important elements were used in these posts is qualitatively investigated.

To answer second research question, another dataset was created containing all publicly available shares of posts in MUSP dataset. About the half of the shares were publicly available and thereby become subjects of the analysis. Only one post (No 15) had

much less publicly available shares than 50%. Unfortunately, two posts (No 14 and No 19) were no longer accessible when data were coded for the second phase of the research. All in all, the data contained a total of 1822 shares of 23 MUSP. For all shares it was recorded whether it contained individual contribution, i.e. adding text by user and how many likes, comments and shares it received. In addition, all individual contributions were separately collected for further qualitative investigation. During the analysis shares are examined in a whole as well as variances between posts in terms of their shares are also investigated contrasting with their content elements.

Results

Comparison with the total sample

First, the elements of the MUSP is investigated and compared with TS.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

The first rows in Table 2 show the structural features of these posts. It seems that most posts contained text, more often than posts in TS. Only 5 posts did not use text, two of them were only videos, the other three were meme, campaign material and share in themselves. Many posts included pictures, but posts in TS applied pictures more often than MUSP. At the same time, memes appeared more frequently than in general, 28% of the posts applied them. It is important that there was no post with only text among MUSP, although they were rare in TS as well (3%). Text was always used with picture, meme, video or share. Only one post used three of these features in one piece: No 5 applied text, picture and share at the same time. Emoticon and video were rarely used in these posts similar to the TS, while share was more applied in general than among MUSP. In addition, average word number was greater (50.6) than in TS (35.5), so the MUSP were more talkative.

MUSP' most striking common feature is revealed when examining emotional tone. In TS most posts were neither negative nor positive, and the two opposite tones appeared in similar degree. In contrast, most successful contents were predominantly negative, and no positive post got into this circle. 19 out of 25 posts were negative emotion-filled contents and only 6 posts, a fourth of them were neutral which was in sharp contrast with TS where more than two third of posts were neither positive nor negative.

When it comes to the character of the posts no noticeable deviation from TS appears. Most posts contained information, and call for offline action was also prevalent. Call for Facebook action appeared only 6 posts but this frequency is greater than in TS. Use of personalized element or humor was really exceptional – similarly to TS.

The information element is a rather wide category in this research; hence it is worth taking a look at what kind of information was applied in MUSP. Table 3 shows that the used information differs significantly from its use in TS. In MUSP information was more often personal opinion of the candidates, which was used less frequently in general. In TS the simple account was the dominant information type, but that was hardly used by MUSP.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

Considering the orientation of the posts, there is no remarkable deviation from TS. While local oriented posts appeared slightly more often than national-oriented posts in general, local and national focuses were present in the same degree among MUSP.

From this overview it is clear that the most striking common feature of MUSP is using negativity. Besides that, they often used texts with picture or meme, contains information, mainly personal opinion, or call for offline action. These posts contained more frequently text, meme, negativity, call for Facebook action, and opinion than posts in TS. Interestingly, personalization and humor do not appear to be conducive to get viral.

However, these common features are not independent from each other. For example, all posts containing personal opinion were negative, and there were only 6 out of the 19 negative posts which did not include opinion element. Four of them provided only general information about negative incidences, another two in turn aimed to mobilize followers with negative emotion-filled contents without adding personal opinion. Memes were also all negative, they were an often-used tool for expressing negativity. Almost all call for Facebook action posts were negative emotion-filled, only one post with engagement element were neutral. As negativity seems to be the most important common feature of MUSP and strongly related to other special features (opinion content, meme, engagement), it is reasonable to more closely investigate the appearance of this element.

The use of negativity

First, I examine the general characteristics of negative posts. Only three negative posts did not contain text: one informative meme, one informative share and a video reporting about an event. Texts were most often used with memes (7 times) or pictures (5 times), but in three posts texts were presented along with shared contents and once with video. Out of the negative posts there were 12 opinions, 4 general information and 3 accounts. 5 posts contained call for Facebook action, and call for offline action appeared in 5 posts as well. More negative posts focused on national (11) than local issues (7).

Negative posts most often dealt with corruption (7 posts), but moral critics about opponents' political worldview, especially focusing on the lack of solidarity was also prevalent (4 posts). 3 posts aimed at alleged election frauds and 2 posts criticized opponents' economic performance as incumbent. 3 posts used general negativity without specific focus. Consequently, most negative posts applied some moral critics focusing on injustice and opponents' personal morality rather than substantive or performance-oriented critics. Noteworthy, no policy critic was present within these negative successful posts.

As for target of negativity, 13 posts were directed to special persons, but three of them appeared in generalized form where the targeted person (the PM) represents collective agent (the Government). Four posts were against specific parties, and two criticized a generalized 'they'. No negative post focused on specific situation, issue or policy without naming some enemies. It is not surprise that all corruption-focused posts named specific persons, even if in one of them the named person represented collective agent. All four posts about concrete worldview critics also targeted special persons, while in the two performance-oriented posts persons were presented in generalized form. Interestingly, specific person who was not negatively presented – and thereby a way is offered for positive connection to the post as well – appeared only in one post. In this case the injustice was illustrated by a man who had suffered it – as a symbol who could be sympathized with. This post is remarkable, as it was the most shared in TS (No 14).

Moral counterpoints, however, appeared in only three posts. These counterpoints were usually collective substances (nation, political community) or values. Interestingly, only the right-wing critics (Jobbik, Fidesz) used moral counterpoints, negative posts of left-wing anti-government candidates applied only critics without any positive counterpoints. The dominant emotion in negative posts was anger and outrage, but the moral critics involved disgust as well. These are high-arousal negative emotions (see, Russal – Ferdman-Barrett, 1999) which viral character was highlighted Berger and Milkman (2012) as well.

As a rhetorical tool, left-wing anti-government candidates often used statistics and data illustrating the presented injustice. Pathos was a salient rhetorical device of Jobbik (2 posts) and Fidesz (1 post) candidates using negativity. It was used to support the moral counterpoints against the subjects of their critics. They all applied quotes for this purpose. Left-wing successful negative contents did not contain pathos element or quotes.

Non-negative most unexpectedly successful posts

Only 6 posts did not contain negative elements. 2 of them were without text, including only a video or a campaign material in themselves. In three posts text appeared with campaign material and in one post with a video. Out of the six posts, four focused on mobilization by calling for voting (2) or attending offline event (2). Other two posts were not explicitly political in themselves. One promotes a family day event sponsored by the given candidate and the other one was a video about a local fountain without any text, voice or any person appearing in it, even if it was opened by given candidate as local mayor in the previous day. Although these posts were indeed non-political in themselves, the context was, of course, not devoid of politics. All in all, non-negative successful posts were mainly pure mobilization or seemingly non-political posts.

Sharing most unexpectedly successful posts

Interestingly, users shared these posts mostly without own contribution. It is striking that only the 8% of the shares contained text from the user. Considering individual posts, it can be seen that the highest proportion is only 20% (No 5), so it is true for all posts that shares were predominantly without individual contribution.

When examining the small number of shares with text added by users, it turns out that these contributions were usually short, and never contradicted the original posts. In these cases users generally expressed their agreement with the content of the posts. These expressions were mainly emotion-filled individual annunciations and simple reinforcement rather than rational arguments or own opinion about the issue. When it comes to negative posts, anger and outrage were reflected in these individual contributions expressed by many exclamation marks and capital letters. As long as posts did not offer positive counterpoints in their contents, their shares did not contain positive identification either. This means that they did not praise or express their identification with the candidate who had posted the negative content or argue for a standpoint, they only criticized the subjects or the objects of the

negative posts. In contrast, positive identification appeared in shares of negative posts which contained positive counterpoint as well as of non-negative posts. In addition, individual contributions relatively often had mobilization purpose and call their friends for offline action (voting or attending an offline event). Call for offline action appeared in shares of both negative and non-negative posts.

MUSP were not only shared mainly without individual contribution, but these shares were hardly reacted by friends of the users. In this sample, 52% of the all shares triggered absolutely no reaction from users' networks, and only 8% of them got at least 5 reactions in terms of likes, comments and shares. Consequently, the great majority of friends of users who shared candidates' posts were completely unconcerned with these political contents: they basically ignored these posts or at least did not interact publicly with them. However, of course, there were some variations between individual successful posts in the sample (see Table 4). Biggest differences appeared in likes: posts' mean number of likes per shares ranged between 0.16 and 4, and shares without likes ranged between 36% and 85%. When it comes to comment and share, the range was smaller: in case of all but one posts (No 11) four from five shares got absolutely no comment, this is the same in case of all but two posts in terms of share (No 6 and 24). Only 57 out of 1822 shares got at least three comments, a result which shows political debates or deliberation usually were not evolved from these shares.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

MUSP were sometimes shared by highly followed Facebook pages or other politicians' personal account and these shares often generated extremely high reactivity. The 10 most liked as well as 5 out of 10 most shared shares were posted by Facebook pages or politicians' personal account. Hence the mean value belonging to individual posts should be carefully treated, because it is highly distorted by extreme cases. As most posts got extremely

low number of reactions[5], if any at all, when examining individual differences, it makes more sense to investigate what proportion of shares got no likes, comments or shares at all rather than their mean values.

Investigating the effects of posts' content on individual variations in terms of shares and their reactions, the posts were compared based on some often used features. When it comes to individual contributions to the shares, there were no remarkable variations between different post types. As Table 5 shows users added own text to the shares in similar degree regardless of whether the shared posts were negative or not, contained memes, pictures or candidate's personal opinion or not. Slight differences can be detected when post included call for offline action: these posts were slightly rarer supplemented with individual contribution than posts without it. Considering reactions for the shares, different types of original posts differs mostly in likes that shares getting. Shared negative posts, posts without picture, with personal opinion or call for offline action remained more frequently without like, than shares of non-negative posts, posts with picture or posts without personal opinion or call for offline action. When it comes to comments, there were no remarkable differences. However, it can be seen that shares of posts without memes, without picture or without call for action were more frequently shared by friends of users.

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

An important aspect of virality is whether the shares of original posts generate further shares. The table 6 shows that most successful contents rarely gained significant amount of extra-shares from their primarily shares. After posts were taken out from its original context they usually stopped spreading further: the friends of users who shared candidates' posts rarely shared further those contents. However, there were some exceptions, but these were usually owing to highly followed pages or other politicans' accounts'. Candidates' posts

sometimes were shared by prominent Facebook pages with large number of followers and these shares could generate high amount of extra-shares for candidates. Consequently, while ordinary users' shares may generate few extra-shares for candidates, prominent Facebook-pages can help to get viral.

INSERT TABLE 6HERE

Discussion

All in all, the results showed that the most common feature of these extremely successful posts was negativity. A large majority of these contents were clearly negative attacking political opponents. Although the prominence of negativity on social media political communication has already demonstrated by some other research (Hansen et al, 2011, Bene 2016a, Bene 2016b), the literature about political virality is highly mixed regarding the role of sentiment in virality. Many research suggested that emotionality is what really matter as opposed to its valance: both negative and positive emotion could boost virality (see, Berger – Milkman, Stieglitz – Dang-Xuan, 2012 etc.). Among these most unexpectedly successful posts the extreme dominance of negativity has been revealed and no positive content appeared.

Possible reasons of prominence of negativity in Facebook virality can be personalized political identities and extended networks. Bennett argued that political identities have increasingly been personalized (Bennett, 2012) and this process is strengthened by social media which enable users to selectively connect to different issues, causes or opinions and express these connections in front of a wide personal public. Political contents which involve little identification burden may be more appreciated in this context because they could be used for performing individual, personalized identities without fitting people into homogenized collective identity-blocks (see, Bennett – Segerberg, 2012). It is obvious that

positive contents usually involve more identification burden than negative contents: it is easier to be against something than for something. Incentives towards avoiding identification burden are further increased by 'collapsed contexts' (Marwick – boyd, 2011) and the dominance of weak ties (Vraga et al, 2015) in social media platforms. This urges users to present an image in their social media communication which they could undertake in front of wide and often heterogeneous (Diehl et al, 2015), offline separated, but on Facebook 'collapsed' social contexts (see, Bene, 2016b).

However, beyond highlighting the dominance of negativity this research offered some important findings regarding how this negativity is applied in unexpectedly successful posts. The dominant negative emotions were high-arousal ones like anger and outrage, and usually involved moral critics, especially accusing opponents of corruption. Negative posts were usually targeted: specific individual or collective opponents were named in them. However, moral counterpoints rarely appeared in these negative successful posts and they were applied mainly by right-wing (Fidesz, Jobbik) politicians. No posts with policy critics were among our unexpectedly successful cases, and accomplishment critics appeared only two posts. The use of negativity usually connect to other special features of these posts: all posts with personal opinion and meme were negative as well. Although personal opinion was a rather rare used element in the TS and has no significant effect on number of shares (see, Bene, 2016a), the most successful negative contents were very often personal opinions at the same time (see, Bastos, 2015).

The small numbers of non-negative posts were usually mobilization-targeted: all but one urged followers to act offline such as voting for the candidates or attending offline events. This result shows that users not only express or perform themselves in front of their networks, but they also sometimes try to affect or persuade their friends. Sharing mobilization posts is, of course, an expression and identity performance at the same time, but for these goals

candidates provided many more suitable contents. Consequently, those who share

mobilization posts probably aim to exert some political influence within their network. This

intention was reflected in some individual contribution to shared posts and not only in the

shares of mobilization posts, but also of negative, non-mobilization posts. Interestingly,

personalization and humor was not present among the most unexpectedly successful contents,

even though their importance on social media political communication was found in previous

research (see, Enli – Skogerbø, 2013; Vraga et al, 2015)

Interestingly, most shares remained without individual contributions. Users shared

these contents in themselves in 9 out of 10 cases. They only mediated candidates' Facebook

posts rather than used them to express their political selves in front of their friends in

substantive way. The small numbers of individual contributions were usually very short and

always consistent with the original content. These were usually brief but heated expressions

of negative emotional impression about the subject or object of the posts (anger, indignation)

or calling friend for offline action. Users hardly shared these posts in order to express their

own distinct opinions or argue rationally for or against something. In addition, these shared

posts got hardly any reactions from the members of personal networks. Facebook friends

usually ignored these political contents. Only the highly followed pages or personal accounts

belonging to politicians were exceptions to this rule: they could significantly increase the

visibility or even the number of shares of the original posts.

All in all, these results contradict some general assumptions and findings about

Facebook political communication. One of these assumptions is that the politicians' biggest

challenge of social media communication is controlling the message, because it is

disseminated and commented on by ordinary citizens who could distort its original purposive

contents (see, Stromer-Galley, 2014). These results showed that citizens disseminated the

candidates' message without distorting. Even in the rare cases when they added some own

comments to the shares, they were short, supportive and did not change the original messages. Since their Facebook friends generally ignored these shares, they did not distort messages either. In addition, some findings revealed the conflict potential of political contents on social media which deter many users from posting about politics (see, Vraga et al, 2015). In our cases political posts did not induce conflicts between Facebook friends, because they usually simply ignored them. Of course, the reverse normative expectation regarding deliberative potential of talking about politics on social media was not fulfilled either. Only 5% of shares – including shares of highly followed pages – got at least two comments which is a very minimal condition of rational debate. Another assumption is that politicians' followers who at the same time communicate about politics on Facebook are influentials or opinion leaders of their personal networks (see, Karlsen, 2015). As long as reactivity is considered as an indicator of friends' attention, thereby being an influential or opinion leader (see, Dang-Xuan et al, 2013), these results refuse this assumption as well.

Last, the findings showed the important role played by prominent pages or accounts in achieving virality. While ordinary users' shares hardly generate extra-shares for the original content, the shares of prominent pages or account could often boost the virality. A reason of this may be that these pages with many followers could transmit the original message to a wider public which otherwise could not see that. Another possible reason would be that as these pages may know well their audiences and their needs, they could present the message in a way which is popular among their followers. However, out of the highly re-shared pages' shares only one contained individual contribution, the others only shared the content without any substantive comments. Nonetheless, this means that an important strategy of getting viral could be reaching elite actors, thereby tailoring message for their Facebook communication.

Conclusion

This work qualitatively investigated those extremely successful posts from candidates which got unexpectedly large amount of shares during 2014 Hungarian general election campaign. These posts could be regarded as typical cases of virality. Those posts were picked from a database of 7294 posts from 184 candidates which numbers of shares cannot be explained by the general popularity and 'viral potential' of a given candidate. The main purpose of the research was to understand why and how these contents could be so highly shared. For this, the characteristics of the posts and the way they had been shared were examined.

All in all, these results have advanced our knowledge about virality in politics. Extreme cases are crucial dimension of virality which was not examined so far and qualitative methods were also hardly applied in this field. In addition, no study has investigated so far the interactive dimension of virality, i.e. how and what effect viral contents are shared. Furthermore, a more fine-grained picture is provided about negativity in social media political communication which seems to be one of the most important features of it.

The greatest limitation of this study is its context-boundness. In the lack of similar study it is hard to distinguish which findings are the results of specific political context and which can be specific features of Facebook political communication. Obviously, political context and culture shapes the way politicians communicate and which political contents can get viral and are paid attention both online and offline. For example, while Gerodimos and Justinussen found the viral character of policy statement on Obama's page in 2012 election campaign, this research showed that policy questions were not present at all among most viral contents. To overcome this limitation more case study about political virality in many different contexts as well a comparative investigations are needed. Moreover, candidates' posts during campaign are only one area of political virality. It should be investigated in case of other political periods and actors. When it comes to investigation of shares, privacy settings

means another limitation of the study. Although the half of shares were available and thereby subject of analysis, we know nothing about users who shared the message applying privacy settings. Furthermore, two posts were unavailable during the second phase of the analysis, including the most viral post of the total sample (No 14).

As a theoretical consequence scholars should consider whether it makes sense to talk about the viralization of politics. While mass media political communication is about making media outlets communicate and affecting it, social media political communication is about making ordinary citizens communicate and affecting it. The first requires fitting to mass media logics which process is captured by mediatization of politics approach (see, Strömbäck, 2008). Is that means that latter requires fitting to 'networked media logic' (Klinger – Svensson, 2015) and/or a kind of logic of citizen political communication? Can viralization of politics be an alternative or challenger of the mediatization of politics and if it so what consequences it have on the politics as a whole? Future theoretical and empirical studies should address these and similar questions.

Funding

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Footnotes

[1] Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely, 2015.

http://mertek.eu/sites/default/files/reports/politikaitajekozodas.pdf (accessed at 15 July 2016)

[2] Although sharing is the most important device in achiving visibility, like and comment can also increase it in certain degree, hence they are also the part of the virality. However, this research focuses on only sharing as the central element of virality.

[3] A meme was defined as picture with text on it, excluding official campaign materials (where the party or candidate's name appears on it).

[4] Krippendorf's alpha intracoder reliability was measured in 109 posts. Alpha value of structural features = .95; of emotional tone = .87; of character variables = .91; of orientation variables = .82. These values are considered to be high (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007).

[5] 5% got at least 5 likes, 1% got at least 5 comments and 0.6% at least 5 shares