Hungarian party websites and parliamentary elections

■■■■■■■

Norbert Merkovity
UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED, HUNGARY

ABSTRACT: Analysis of party websites was one of the popular research fields of political communication in the 1990s. It was an interesting question as to how politics and the Internet are becoming connected to one another. However, with the appearance of Web 2.0, these surveys have become pointless, since the emphasis has moved to websites supporting the emergence of online communities. Research of Hungarian party websites has not yet been completed. Adapting to this new trend, researchers have begun to turn their attention to a completely new field of investigation. This study makes an attempt to analyse the changes in the informative and interactive functions of Hungarian party websites on the basis of three different eras (the 1990s, the mid-2000s and the present). Finally, with an international comparison, it evaluates the situation of websites in 2010.

KEYWORDS: political communication, party websites, new ICTs, elections, communication interactivity

■■■■■■■■■■

INTRODUCTION: PARTIES IN THE NEW MEDIA SPACE

Fifteen years ago, nobody would have insisted on parties and politicians having a party website as a channel of communication. Even before that time, politicians did not deny the importance of new media, but they found that world rather strange. The American ex-vice president, Al Gore, argued that from Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) "we will derive robust and sustainable economic progress, strong democracies, better solutions to global and local environmental challenges, improved health care, and — ultimately — a greater sense of shared stewardship of our small planet" (1995, p. 4). Gore did not waste his time, and on 13th October 1994 — during his vice-presidency — the whitehouse.gov website was launched. This has become a symbolic act of the appearance of politics on the Internet.

After the first moments of enthusiasm, it became clear that the reformation of parties and politics was not as easy as was first thought. However, Jacob Groshek (2009), in his study of 152 countries proved that the Internet does have an effect on the democratization of society and on the stabilization of democracy, even though

this effect is not so significant. According to data collected from 1994 to 2003, the Internet functions as a catalyst for the changes going through between society and democracy. Due to its interactive nature, different social groups can express themselves more easily, and they can gain access to traditional media and politics in a simpler way. Yet, the real measure of success is in internet penetration, since the more widespread the technology is, the stronger the catalyst effect becomes.

Several scholars agree that the Internet — and party websites as well — has a positive effect on the political engagement of civilians. There are scholars who argue that the Internet serves to activate citizens who are already interested in politics (Bimber, 1999; Norris, 2001; Bimber & Davis, 2003; Weber, Loumakis, & Bergman, 2003; DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste, & Shafer, 2004; Bachen, Raphael, Lynn, McKee & Philippi 2008). They found that the Internet reduces time, effort and cost to obtain political information and offers an easier way to get engaged in political activities. There are also those scholars who think that the Internet could activate those citizens who have lost their interest in politics (Delli Carpini, 2000; Barber, 2001). They think that new technologies, such as the Internet, may reduce the knowledge gap in societies and after all they can create a more open democracy. The two approaches have their advantages if we examine citizens. But what happens if we want to examine parties?

The study raises the question of whether Hungarian party websites have become more open since the '90s, and whether this openness promotes deliberative democratization, which presupposes interactivity, as well. The direction of logic has reversed. We do not focus on the relationship between civilians and politics and political issues, but on the relationship between parties — party websites, to be precise — and new technologies.

TRANSFORMATION OF PARTY WEBSITES

Political parties need to have their own web appearance, where different pieces of information are available about the party and its candidates. In this way, information about parties becomes more easily available for the voters. One of the most important symbolic missions is probably that the party manifesto is freely available on the website. Yet it has to be emphasised, that this is only an expectation, and it does not mean that voters are reading these party manifestos. Nowadays, the situation is similar in cases of their presence outside the official online channels. People find those parties or candidates more sympathetic, who are representing themselves on the Web 2.0 community sites (Utz, 2009, p. 221–226). In Hungary, these sites are Facebook, Twitter, Blog.hu and YouTube.

One can explore a number of different reasons behind politics' partial move to the Internet, but one of the most important reasons is that citizens expect it to be on the Internet. At the same time, we must not forget that new technologies enable politicians to take up the quick and flexible refilling of news 24 hours a day (Bimber

& Davis, 2003, p. 49). Party websites have successfully faced this challenge in the past decade. The change is not a Hungarian speciality, but a global tendency in the 2000s, where they transformed from their early self-representation into quasi-news websites.

With the appearance of information and communication technologies, political communication has also gone through certain changes. "ICTs make enormous quantities of information available to the public. This change in quantity may result in a change in quality" (Vedel, 2003, p. 42). These changes include:

Table 1. The potential impact of ICT on political communication

Properties of ICTs	Potential benefits	Problems or issues
Low costs of producing, storing and especially, disseminating information	Easy access to the production of information. Large amounts of information can be made available to the public	Information overload
Direct link between sender and receiver	Direct communication: media can be bypassed	Risks of propaganda. Lack of mediators able to play a critical function
Selection of receivers	Targeted communication. Closed group communication	Privacy
Speed of information	Possibility of constant updating. Enhanced data gathering	Costs of maintaining systems. Push-button decision-making
Interactive capabilities	Feedback from receivers. Information can be customized to receiver's needs	Privacy
Decentralized architecture	Possibility of designing systems independent from geographical boundaries	Fragmentation of the public sphere. Regulation is difficult
Global dimension	Diversification of sources	Cultural conflicts or homogenisation

Source: Vedel (2003, p. 42).

As can be seen in the table, the advantages of ICT tools provide useful possibilities both for voters and politics. Targeted communication or further developed data gathering techniques are important milestones of recent election campaigns. On the other hand, citizens — among the problems and questions — are more endangered than politics, especially parties. Overloading voters with information can result in counter-productivity, if the users decide to follow only one source of information, or none. In the first case, it is possible that the voter gets distorted information, if s/he tries to make general conclusions for the whole of society. In the second case, the effectiveness, therefore the advantages of ICTs are becoming

questionable. For politics, the cutting up of publicity means challenge, since it has to provide all groups with proper messages. By this, well-prepared but general messages are also becoming more valuable.

The most important significance of the table lies in the fact that it highlights that the channels of the traditional media will become avoidable. Parties and their candidates are looking for new communication technologies, and they spend more and more money on reaching the widest layer of voters with suitable sound bites (Mazzoleni, 2003). At the same time, the phenomenon called videomalaise, spread by the media, will grow further. The term was first popularized by Robinson's studies (1975, 1976). He claimed that videomalaise is to be blamed for the growing number of citizens with cynical attitudes towards politics. Robinson's thesis was unlocked by Norris' (2000) theory of the virtuous circle. According to this, those who are interested in political news will be better informed, which will lead to the strengthening of democracy, while those who are not interested, will be much less-informed. This means that Norris' theory of the virtuous circle is closely-related to Paul Lazarsfeld's (1944) two-step flow theory. Both theories divide society into two groups. One group understands the contents of the media, the other does not, and both theories put the emphasis on those who understand the media contents. In case of ICTs and party websites, we cannot talk about videomalaise yet. Instead, a double division is applicable, according to which there are those users, who are searching and reading messages available on the new media surface of the parties, and there are those who do not do so. To avoid this situation, parties and their candidates are not only appearing on websites regarded as official channels, but on alternative community sites as well. They are driven by the intention to reach not only the opinion leaders with sound bites, but the widest group of voters, as well (Delany, 1999).

In the meantime a smaller group of voters also appears on community sites, where through their own interpretations, they comment on political events. Thus, opinion leaders will receive a new meaning. They are now also information emitters, who — like traditional media — will have their followers. For political actors it is not enough to engage in virtual campaigns, but they should convince opinion leaders as well (Crumlish, 2004). Party websites will become places where political actors can standardise various online surfaces and the party's overall philosophy could be published here or their notion about current affairs, because they suppose that this is how they can get to opinion leaders.

Previously, party websites have built on each other regarding the use of informative and symbolic functions (see Norris, 2001; Dányi, 2002; Kiss & Boda, 2005). Having their own websites was a symbolic issue for parties during the nineties. This feature was complemented with the intention of information transfer very quickly. This way, party websites were formed, where beside the party history, biography and contact details of members, information was to be found about party news and information, as well. Currently, we are witnessing that beside the

two previous, one-way features, the interactive feature emerges as well. Such channelling of the "voice of the people" was avoided by politicians in the past (see Kiss & Boda, 2005, p. 34–36). Today's expectation is that citizens can contact their candidates or representatives on the parties' websites. Initially, this desire was fulfilled on forums, but now "blog-style" comments have taken over this role, which means that logged-in users are able to write a comment on current news. Thus, parties narrowed the magnitude of the discussed issues, but in return, the public voice could appear in such sections that were previously published exclusively under the jurisdiction in the section of the party's news. The forum is where there are only a few constraints, and everybody can change their opinion about almost anything and everything. Now, forums are slowly moving out from the official parties' websites to one of the numerous online community sites. However, it should be noted that it is not a closed process. A rearrangement is also taking place today, in which the parties with less political power in parliament are more open than the stronger ones. The major parliamentary parties continue to be advocates of forums; they are reluctant to let their voters near the news, because there is the threat that under a positive piece of news, the voter could meet the negative opinion of the opposing group.

HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES' WEBSITES IN THE NINETIES

The advent of party website development and the (re-)evolution of the Hungarian party system almost coincided. The difference is not significant in terms of political communication. This coincidence could be interpreted as part of the democratization process of the country. To understand the parties' attitude towards the publicity of the Internet, we should take a look at the contemporary homepages.

Hungarian parties — in line with international trends — very soon discovered the benefits of the Internet. The Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) and the Alliance of Young Democrats (at this time Fidesz — The Hungarian Civic Party, from 2003 Fidesz — Hungarian Civic Union) also had its own website. For the 1998 parliamentary elections the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) and other relevant parties also prepared their own website. What these websites had in common was the minimum use of design elements and the sense of wonderment at the cyber world. For example, the small number of Hungarian Internet users could read such a greeting text on Fidesz's website: "Leaving aside the epic praise of the information superhighway, we merely want only to express our joy due to contact with you" (fidesz.hu, 1996). The Hungarian Democratic Forum site welcomed visitors with: "We cordially welcome you on the occasion to meet you on the information superhighway" (mdf.hu, 1998). Other parties greeted visitors with similar words, but this process did not end in the nineties. The Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party (FKgP) had the next greeting text in 2001: "…first of all I would like to greet those whose lives in-

clude online text reading and the exercise of this *particular*[1] genre" (fkgp.hu, 2001). These examples show that the "information superhighway" was strange for most parties, but it was an important communication channel to them, presumably because other parties also recognised this platform and the small number of voters who used the Internet at that time (Karácsony, 1997, p. 39–42). On each website visitors could see the portraits of the party chairman and sometimes the portraits of vice-presidents, too. Thus, visitors could personalise the greeting text. The greeting texts and portraits are evidence that Hungarian party websites were accompanied by a symbolic function. But at the same time, hopes for new types of relations between voters and the party were also expressed in greeting texts. In most cases, this means a minimal opportunity for expressing opinions (see Karácsony, 1997). Citizens could send their messages to their representatives via e-mail or directly from the website through an internal electronic system of the party. The e-mail solution often meant that only the party chairman had an e-mail address, but the address did not contain the name of the chairman (chairman@party.hu formula). The refreshing exception at this time was Fidesz's website. For instance they had FAQ, a forum and a readers' write section. Regardless of one or two exceptions, parties left little space for interactivity in the nineties and at the beginning of the new millennium.

Opposed to the interactivity and greeting texts, the parties' websites allowed more space for informative features. On each site, text about the history of the party can be found, and heading towards the 1998 parliamentary elections, the party manifesto appears on several websites. However, the informative features include the most differences, as well. For example, the website of the Free Democrats had an English version, the Socialist Party had an online press observer, the Democratic Forum had a newsletter and while the Fidesz under a link called "light" had a jest book, which contained politically incorrect jokes, too.[2]

As a summary, we must state that the seriousness of Hungarian parliamentary party websites in the nineties must be handled with reservation. They have in common that at the level of words they see a new multi-directional communication channel in it, while at the level of implementation they rather emphasise the symbolic and the informative functions of the websites.

---

[1] Italics mine — M.N.

[2] "At a feminist congress the American Mrs. said:

— I told my John I will not cook for him anymore. Then the first day I had not seen anything, but the second day he was hungry and he cooked. — Huge applause…

The German Frau took the floor:

— I told my Johann I will not wash his clothes anymore. Then the first day I had not seen anything, but in the next week he ran out of shirts and he had to wash them. — Huge applause…

Aunt Mary also spoke:

— I told my János I will not clean the house after him anymore. Then the first day I had not seen anything. On the second day I started to see a little with my half eye" (fidesz.hu, 1996).

HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES' WEBSITES, 2002–2006

After initial hesitation, parties' attitude towards the Internet changed at the beginning of the new millennium. It could be expected that websites were becoming more and more interactive during those times. Party websites had a much more important role in the 2002 parliamentary elections. Endre Dányi has dated the appearance of postmodern campaign techniques of Hungarian politics to this election year (Dányi, 2002, p. 23). His claims are true. From 144 registered parties, 23 had an official homepage in 2002. This data does not differ significantly from the ratio of Western European countries. Parties who got into the Parliament (MSZP, Fidesz, MDF, SZDSZ) all had official websites, and these sites were more similar to each other than their versions four or six years earlier. The informative nature of these sites is strengthened and on the opening pages the greeting texts were replaced with news or with press releases. The parties paid attention to the design as well. At this time websites became pleasing to the eye, and the visitor could identify the party behind the site without even taking a look at the party logo. Between the links, the dedicatory of unofficial party websites also shows up, which is the most visible part of the MDF's website (mdf.hu, 2002). Among the individual characteristics, the site of Free Democrats should be mentioned. The formation called NetPárt (NetParty) received a prominent place on their website, where voters could join the party online, discuss the party program or direction of party politics and they could play the game Poligocsi (Poligotchi),[3] as well. Poligocsi was similar to a tamagotchi, but here, instead of a pet the player had to raise a politician (szdsz.hu, 2002). A few contemporary web portals would have envied the opening page of MSZP and Fidesz, since a lot of news items were featured on their sites (mszp.hu, 2002; fidesz.hu, 2002). Otherwise, parties considered their websites as a "third way" information source for voters, since television and national rallies were more important to politicians than the Internet, the sites did not have the intention of gaining new voters (Dányi & Sükösd, 2002). This confirms that much of the news from the websites responded to what was said at some campaign event or in the media.

Standard classification is necessary to compare the websites of the era, and to identify which party considered interactive or informative function to be more important. The comparison is based on Pippa Norris' (2001) function of electoral party websites analysis, which Endre Dányi had amended in relation to Hungarian parties (Dányi, 2002). The analysis overviews the communication interactivity and information transparency functions of the party websites. Each function examines a ten-ten element and for every existing feature, the party receives one point. Thus for one function the maximum score is ten points, twenty being the total. Norris does not deal with the symbolic function; the assumption is that the web presence fulfils the symbolic function in itself.

---

[3] The NetParty also existed /exists after 2002, but over time it was removed from the official site.

Some of the elements in the table may seem a bit obsolete now (e.g. forums, chat-room or e-mailing option to the webmaster), while the elements of Web 2.0 are missing (e.g. RSS feeds, blogs or links to official party microsites), but for the sake of comparison in the future, I decided not to change the table items (appendix 1).

In 2002 the parties' websites stressed the informative elements more than the interactive elements. From this perspective the MDF's site can be considered as the most balanced, where both desired elements are present. The table breaks the general assumption that small parties (like SZDSZ or MDF) use the new ICTs in a cleverer and more courageous way. At least, this assumption is not correct with regard to party websites. The SZDSZ and the MDF gained 6 points in the field of communication interactivity. This result of the two small parliamentary parties is only enough to the mid-range. The two subsequent governing parties (MSZP and SZDSZ) achieved 9 points in information transparency. Only the English version of their websites was missing, but this requirement was not compiled on any of the sites. Fidesz's website shows surprisingly weak interactivity. The party did not offer further interactivity beside the publication of e-mail addresses and the newsletter. Generally, the Socialist party did significantly well in this comparison. Hundreds of activists had access to the website, so the final shape of the homepage bore their signature.

The 2006 elections to the National Assembly did not make a groundbreaking change in the power ranking of the sites, therefore I do not analyse the function of electoral party websites. During the election campaign the official sites not belonging to the parties' websites suppressed the official homepages. Blogs, social networking sites and politicians' independent websites came into view for voters and researchers. The whole process was part of a worldwide tendency, since in the 2004 US presidential election the Democratic candidate, John Kerry, wrote a campaign blog and the voters started to use social networks like MySpace (Chadwick, 2007, p. 287–289; Flanagin, Stohl & Bimber, 2006). During parliamentary elections these items are also used in several European countries. However, it should be noted that it is not clear whether these campaign techniques are really helpful, because Kerry lost the presidential election against the technophobe George W. Bush. The wave of Web 2.0 driven campaigns arrived in Hungary in 2006. The new form of campaign techniques is used by politicians who are open to the use of the Internet and the new ICT's (see Kalnes, 2009, p. 63–64). Anyhow, party websites had not become more interactive.

WEBSITES OF PARTIES SETTING UP A NATIONAL LIST IN THE 2010 HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

The party websites made for the 2010 parliamentary elections can be divided into two groups. On one side, there are the political parties which have been members of the parliament for several years, and have established relatively well structured

websites (Fidesz[4], MSZP, MDF). On the other side, there are parties, which were new players in the Hungarian political spectrum. Previously they had not, or had not alone participated in parliamentary elections. In relation to other party websites, these parties had innovative webpages; they used the new campaign techniques in a much more courageous way (Jobbik — Movement for a Better Hungary, LMP — Politics Can Be Different, CM — Civil Movement).

As the table shows in appendix 2, the Fidesz has worked most on its website in the last 4-8 years. As for the communication interactivity function, the former tail-ender is now the first one. It is also striking that two of the newcomers, the Jobbik and the LMP are at the same level, and they achieved a good result compared to the other parties. They are just behind the Socialist Party, which brings unchanged results compared to 2002. The English version of the homepage appeared at the Fidesz's, the Jobbik's and also at the LMP's website, too. The weakest results were achieved by the Civil Movement's website in the 2010 Hungarian parliamentary elections. The CM fulfilled really only the most basic demands; they paid much more attention to the symbolic function as for the information transparency or the communication interactivity. This is indicated by the fact that the movement operated its newsletter sooner than the site itself.

Innovation was the possibility of financial support in 2010. Such creative realization of fundraising is not listed in the table; however we cannot ignore this new form of interactivity. Hungarians could donate money online to every party listed in the table except the Socialist Party. Most often it meant bank transfer, but the Jobbik also offered the option of PayPal payment. The possibility of party donation was known previously, but it was not posted on their homepage. The recruitment of party activists at the websites was also an innovation in 2010 and it also does not appear in the table. The three new parties (Jobbik, LMP and CM) lived with this new opportunity and this option was also available at the other parties' website, but it was not emphasised on the opening pages.

It can be stated that the Hungarian party websites' function of communication interactivity underwent a transformation in the spring of 2010. In contrast to quasi-activities (voting, games), real and in some cases measurable activities came forward (donations, joining the campaign). Taking into account the processes of 2010, the future growth of interactivity is expected, and by the end of this process, the party websites will be no longer "news portals", but they will also encourage new forms of political activity, which is expected in political campaigns and political communication in the era of the post 2008 US presidential election (Dessewffy & Ravasz, 2009; Merkovity, 2009). However, Hungarian party websites have to develop a lot to reach this level.

---

[4] One could proceed in two directions from the homepage of fidesz.hu, towards the Election 2010 or to the news portal pages. Since at the other websites I have viewed the news portal pages, I chose the same at fidesz.hu, as well.

AN INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK — THREE PARTY WEBSITES FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

We can place Hungarian party websites in international relations only if we examine other countries' party websites, as well. A month after the Hungarian parliamentary elections, in May 2010 parliamentary elections were held in the UK. So — like Hungarian party websites — we can also analyse UK party websites in the heat of the campaign. Furthermore, while the Hungarian party system is a multi-party system, the British is a two-party one. This presupposes different party behaviour in the two countries. Yet, at the same time, regarding the interactive and informative functions of the websites, fewer differences are expected, since the technical solutions offer a limited number of choices. The intention behind this outlook is to compare the parties of a new democracy and an established democracy. The three chosen parties are the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, because they are considered to be the most powerful parliamentary parties in the UK.

The function of electoral party websites analysis gave the following results: the UK's three largest parties improved the features of informative functions on their websites to perfection (appendix 3). In addition to those not listed in the table, they work with a huge amount of information, while they do not operate a news portal type of website. For instance, the reports of the party conferences can be searched by years back, and unlike Hungarian parties, a wider range of speeches, opinions and political resolutions by party functionaries can also be found. However, the question of interactivity is more interesting. Similarly to the trend in Hungary there is no voting function on the UK party websites, and games are not really popular, either. According to the function of electoral party websites analysis, the website of the Liberal Democrats shows the greatest similarity with the two new Hungarian parliamentary parties, LMP and Jobbik, while the website of Fidesz shows similarity with Labour and the Conservatives.

However, the similarity can be found only in the final index, and after a closer look we can see a higher degree of interactivity and a more qualitative website in the UK. Each supports a different level of citizen participation in the campaign. From online renewal of party membership, through the donation amount chosen by the citizen, to the self-made campaign website, the sympathisers have a lot of opportunity to participate in the party's life. The willingness to build a Web 2.0 community can be seen on these websites. This is supported by the fact that the Conservative Party created its "MyConservatives" separate campaign site on the basis of the (name of the) popular MySpace social networking site, while the Labour Party has launched its own campaign site called "Labourspace". Of course, the parties still use Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other smaller social networking sites besides their own webpages. Perhaps these social networking sites are one of the most significant differences between Hungarian and UK party websites. It is not typical for Hungarian parties that besides the existing and established social networking sites they start their own community sites. One of the precursors could be the Free Demo-

crats' NetParty, which, despite its popularity among young voters, has not developed into a true community site over the years.

On the basis of function of electoral party websites analysis, the final result is dual; Hungarian parties have reached or soon will catch up with the level of British political parties' websites. This way, they fulfil the hypothesis raised at the beginning of the paper, namely that citizens have become more open, and they are able to gather information on the parties more easily. However, the methods applied in this study could not give an answer to the question whether this openness has an effect on democracies becoming more deliberate.

At the same time, this result is misleading, since it summarises only the quantitative variables. However, UK party websites indicate that qualitative analysis is not enough. The content of websites is also worth investigating in order to get more exact results. In terms of qualitative variables, Hungarian sites perform quite poorly. Nevertheless, it should not discourage Hungarian parties; both informative and interactive features are present on the party websites. Now, the task is to fill the websites with some quality content.

THE FUTURE OF QUALITATIVE INTERACTIVITY

Through the function analysis index the study has proved that nowadays there have not been any real differences between parties' websites. They are uniform, as regards the informative and interactive functions, at least. One reason for this could be the fact that during the examined period, they have independently managed to realize Norris' (and Dányi's) general expectations, which has been a long way for all of them.

Hungarian party websites have grown up to their task since the nineties. This can be seen, if we compare them not only to each other, but to the parties of a stable democracy. However, the process does not come to an end at this point. New forms of interactivity appear in the social media system and the parties need to respond to these challenges. We have seen the reaction of UK party websites to these challenges; they integrated social networking web pages in their sites to build their own online communities. The role of party websites is enhanced by the fact that there are more and more campaign tools appearing on them. One such example is collecting donations online, which was a new form of interactivity of the Hungarian election campaigns in 2010. The average Hungarian citizen thinks that party funding is carried out by the state, although it is done from the citizen's tax. Another example is that instead of opening new forums for related party website news, citizens had the opportunity to write their comments below the news. Both examples expect from the users to register on the website, to participate in the life of the party, and overall, they promote the quality of interactivity.

On their way towards interactive websites with quality content, Hungarian political parties have much to do. They should firstly give up the news portal type sites

and they should take advantage of the best practices of online community building. There is no need for parties to make news centre- based websites after the new media has got a foothold on the media market. The second step is to maintain the interest of the online community between the elections that is expected to be not only the echo of the opinion expressed by the old media. This means entertainment contents that go beyond television show politics. Such a change could mean the new age of *politainment* that could bring about a change in the current frigid relationship between political parties and the electorate.

REFERENCES

Bachen, C., Raphael, C., Lynn, K-M., McKee, K., Philippi, J. (2008). Civic engagement, pedagogy, and information technology on web sites for youth. *Political Communication*, 25, pp. 290–310.

Barber, B. (2001). The uncertainty of digital politics: Democracy's uneasy relationship with information technology. *Harvard International Review*, 23, pp. 42–48.

Bimber, B.A. (1999). The Internet and citizen communication with government: Does the medium matter? *Political Communication*, 16, pp. 409–429.

Bimber, B.A., Davis, R. (2003). *Campaigning Online: The Internet in U.S. Elections*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chadwick, A. (2007). Digital network repertoires and organizational hybridity. *Political Communication*, 24, pp. 283–301.

Crumlish, C. (2004). *The Power of Many: How the Living Web Is Transforming Politics, Business, and Everyday Life*. Alameda: Sybex.

Dányi, E. (2002). A faliújság visszaszól: Politikai kommunikáció és kampány az interneten (The message board talks back: Political communication and campaign on the Internet). *Médiakutató*, summer, pp. 23–36.

Dányi, E., Sükösd, M. (2002). Szavazz.ram: Párthonlapok a választási kampányban [Votefor.me: Party websites in the election campaigns]. *Népszabadság*, 25 March 2002.

Delany, C. (1999). The real revolution? Issue-advocacy campaigning on the Internet. *Political Information*. Retrieved April 10, 2011 from http://www.politicalinformation.com/features.html.

Delli Carpini, M.X. (2000). Gen.com: Youth, civic engagement, and the new information environment. *Political Communication*, 17, pp. 341–350.

Dessewffy, T., Ravasz, Á. (2009). A változás hálózatai [The networks of change]. *Politikatudományi Szemle*, 2, pp. 103–119.

DiMaggio, P., Hargittai, E., Celeste, C., Shafer, S. (2004). Digital inequality: From unequal access to differentiated use. In: K. M. Neckerman (ed.). *Social Inequality*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 355–400.

Flanagin, A., Stohl, C., Bimber, B. (2006). Modeling the structure of collective action. *Communication Monographs*, 73, pp. 29–54.

Gore, A. (1995). Forging a new Athenian age of democracy. *Intermedia*, 2, pp. 4–6.

Groshek, J. (2009). The democratic effects of the Internet, 1994–2003: A cross-national inquiry of 152 countries. *International Communication Gazette*, 71, pp. 115–136.

Kalnes, Ø. (2009). E-ruptions in party politics? The case of Web 2.0 and Norwegian parties. *Quaderns del CAC*, 33, pp. 63–76.

Karácsony, A. (1997). A magyar politika az interneten [Hungarian politics on the Internet]. In: *Magyar tartalom.* Budapest: Soros C3 központ, pp. 34–43.

Kiss, B., Boda, Zs. (2005). *Politika az interneten* [Politics on the Internet]. Budapest: Századvég Kiadó.

Lazarsfeld, P.F., Berelson, B., Gaudet, H. (1944). *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mazzoleni, G. (2003). Political communication and television: Between old and new influences. In: P.J. Maarek, G. Wolfsfeld (eds.). *Political Communication in a New Era: A Cross-national Perspective*. London: Routledge, pp. 32–40.

Merkovity, N. (2009). Barack Obama elnöki kampányának sajátosságai: Mitől működnek a hálózati közösségek? [Specialities of Barack Obama's presidential campaign: What makes the network communities work?]. *Médiakutató*, spring, pp. 97–106.

Norris, P. (2000). *A Virtuous Circle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P. (2001). *Digital Divide? Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet in Democratic Societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, M.J. (1975). American political legitimacy in an era of electronic journalism: Reflections on the evening news: new approaches to TV criticism. In: D. Cater, R. Adler (eds.). *Television as a Social Force*. New York: Praeger, pp. 97–139.

Robinson, M.J. (1976). Public affairs television and the growth of political malaise: The case of „The Selling of the Pentagon". *American Political Science Review*, 70, pp. 409–432.

Utz, S. (2009). The (potential) benefits of campaigning via social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14, pp. 221–243.

Vedel, T. (2003). Political communication in the age of the Internet. In: P.J. Maarek, G. Wolfsfeld (eds.). *Political Communication in a New Era: A Cross-national Perspective*. London: Routledge, pp. 41–59.

Weber, L.M., Loumakis, A., Bergman, J. (2003). Who participates and why? An analysis of citizens on the Internet and the mass public. *Social Science Computer Review*, 21, pp. 26–42.

Parties' Websites
Hungary 1996–2002 (2006):

fidesz.hu 1996. Retrieved April 14, 2010, from http://web.archive.org/web/19961219010958/http://www.fidesz.hu/.

szdsz.hu 1996. Retrieved April 14, 2010, from http://web.archive.org/web/19961222181152/http://szdsz.hu/.

mdf.hu 1998. Retrieved April 14, 2010, from http://web.archive.org/web/19980707222726/http://www.mdf.hu/.

mszp.hu 1998. Retrieved April 14, 2010, from http://web.archive.org/web/19980126233655/http://www.mszp.hu/.

fkgp.hu 2001. Retrieved April 14, 2010, from http://web.archive.org/web/20010302181542/www.fkgp.hu/elnok.html.

fidesz.hu 2002. Retrieved April 14, 2010, from http://web.archive.org/web/20020118063100/http://www.fidesz.hu/.

mdf.hu 2002. Retrieved April 14, 2010, from http://web.archive.org/web/20020525021328/http://www.mdf.hu/.

mszp.hu 2002. Retrieved April 14, 2010, from http://web.archive.org/web/20020325212532/http://mszp.hu/.

szdsz.hu 2002. Retrieved April 14, 2010, from http://web.archive.org/web/20020401183406/http://www.szdsz.hu/.

Hungary 2010:

Civil Mozgalom. Retrieved April 9, 2010, from http://civilmozgalom.hu/.

Fidesz. Retrieved April 9, 2010, from http://fidesz.hu/.

Jobbik. Retrieved April 9, 2010, from http://jobbik.hu/.
LMP. Retrieved April 9, 2010, from http://lehetmas.hu/.
MDF. Retrieved April 9, 2010, from http://mdf.hu/.
MSZP. Retrieved April 9, 2010, from http://mszp.hu/.

The United Kingdom:

Conservative Party. Retrieved April 19, 2010, from http://www.conservatives.com/Default.aspx.
Labour Party. Retrieved April 19, 2010, from http://www2.labour.org.uk/home.
Liberal Democratic Party. Retrieved April 19, 2010, from http://www.libdems.org.uk/.

APPENDIX 1

Table 2. The function of electoral party websites analysis among the parliamentary parties in 2002 [5]

Communication interactivity	Fidesz	MSZP	MDF	SZDSZ
E-mailing options to party officials	1	1	1	1
E-mailing option to the webmaster	—	1	1	1
E-mailing option to the party leader	1	1	1	1
Subscribe to newsletter	1	1	1	1
Joining the party	—	1	—	1
Forums, chat-room	—	1	—	—
Support of online shopping	—	—	—	—
Search options	—	1	1	—
Games	—	—	—	1
Voting	—	—	1	—
Total:	3	7	6	6
Information transparency	Fidesz	MSZP	MDF	SZDSZ
Information about party officials, CVs, portrait gallery	1	1	1	1
Party components, programme	1	1	1	1
Description of the party organisation	1	1	—	1
Party history	1	—	1	1
News, information	1	1	1	1
Press releases, media coverage	1	1	1	1

[5] The websites are reproduced with the Internet Archive Wayback Machine and the overall results are on the basis of Endre Dányi's research (Dányi, 2002, p. 31).

Information transparency	Fidesz	MSZP	MDF	SZDSZ
Collection of links	1	1	1	1
Website available in English	—	—	—	—
Reports of party congresses, conferences, meetings	1	1	1	1
Multimedia, downloadable audio and video	1	1	—	1
Total:	9	8	7	9

APPENDIX 2

Table 3. The function of electoral party websites analysis of the party websites in the 2010 Hungarian parliamentary elections (In the parentheses next to the results of Fidesz, MSZP and MDF are the differences from eight years ago)[6]

Communication interactivity	Fidesz	MSZP	MDF	Jobbik	LMP	CM
E-mailing options to party officials	1	1	1	1	0.5*	1
E-mailing option to the webmaster	1	1	—	1	1	1
E-mailing option to the party leader	1	1	1	1	—	—
Subscribe to newsletter	1	1	1	1	1	1
Joining the party	1	—	1	1	1	1
Forums, chat-room	1	1	—	0.5**	1	—
Support of online shopping	1	—	—	—	—	—
Search options	1	1	1	1	1	1
Games	—	—	1	—	1	—
Voting	—	1	—	—	—	—
Total:	8 (+5)	7 (0)	6 (0)	6.5	6.5	5

* The party does not operate in the traditional party chairman system, therefore I gave only half a point.
** Although it is not a forum, comments can be written in the articles. Since these comments are not visible, I gave only half a point.

Information transparency	Fidesz	MSZP	MDF	Jobbik	LMP	CM
Information about party officials, CVs, portrait gallery	1	1	1	1	1	—
Party components, programme	1	1	1	1	1	1
Description of the party organisation	1	1	1	1	1	1

[6] The websites were viewed before the first round of elections on 8–9 April, 2010.

Information transparency	Fidesz	MSZP	MDF	Jobbik	LMP	CM
Party history	1		1	1	1	1
News, information	1	1	1	1	1	1
Press releases, media coverage	1	1	1	1	1	1
Collection of links	1	1	1	1	1	—
Website available in English	1	—	—	1	1	—
Reports of party congresses, conferences, meetings	1	1	—	—	—	—
Multimedia, downloadable audio and video	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total:	10 (+1)	8 (0)	8 (+1)	9	9	6

APPENDIX 3

Table 4. The function of electoral party websites analysis of three parties in the UK — 2010[7]

Communication interactivity	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
E-mailing options to party officials	1	1	1
E-mailing option to the webmaster	1	1	1
E-mailing option to the party leader	1	1	1
Subscribe to newsletter	1	1	1
Joining the party	1	1	1
Forums, chat-room	1	1	—
Support of online shopping	1	1	—
Search options	1	1	1
Games	1	—	—
Voting	—	—	—
Total:	9	8	6

Information transparency	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
Information about party officials, CVs, portrait gallery	1	1	1
Party components, programme	1	1	1
Description of the party organisation	1	1	1

---

7 The websites were viewed on 19 April 2010.

Information transparency	Labour Party	Conservative Party	Liberal Democrats
Party history	1	1	—
News, information	1	1	1
Press releases, media coverage	1	1	1
Collection of links	1	1	1
Website available in English[*]	1	1	1
Reports of party congresses, conferences, meetings	1	1	1
Multimedia, downloadable audio and video	1	1	1
Total:	10	10	9

[*] Since the English version of the website is not a relevant requirement in case of Great Britain, I take this point for granted.