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## Digital Civic Engagement and Youth Participation: Hungarian LIS Students' Perspective of Political Information

**Objective.** The research seeks to understand, how Hungarian LIS students use social media as an avenue to express their democratic actions and how social media political information affects the youth's trust and judgement when interacting with their close family and friends online. **Methods.** The study employed a quantitative approach to determine the social media engagement of the participants with close family and friends. Convenience sampling was applied in this study (Students of Library and Information Science, University, Hungary), and an online questionnaire was sent to all the potential participants (to 197 students). **Results.** A total of 43% participated in this research. The youth give a high level of trust to their family members and close friends even if they share, post, like, or comment on something that is different from their point-of-view in social media. Moreover, the youth have a low level of judgement towards family and close friends. **Conclusions.** Political participation among youth is voluntary and engagement with political information in social media is rare/low.

*Keywords:* civic engagement; youth participation; social media; political information; Hungary

### Introduction

Access to political information among the youth will help them make politically informed decisions. Sources of political information can also come from family and friends. As young people deal with an abundance of online information shared on social media, how was their political engagement with family and close friends? Political participation and civic engagement are attributes of a democratic nation. The youth being idealistic individuals act in making a difference within the social structure once they are politically committed by studying political issues and putting an effort to advance their political commitment (Oross & Szabo, 2018). The presence of political information in social media makes it easy for its fast distribution online. Political information can also influence public perception as they target people of all ages.

Political discussions can be comfortable with family and can be a frequent topic when like-minded people come together to discuss political matters. Most of the time they come into an agreement as family members and as a matter of respect, they do not easily get upset with one another (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, & Dowling, 2012). As the family is the basic component of our society and individual beliefs and values are generated by family, trust is gained within this structure (Koranteng, Wiafe, Katsriku, & Apau, 2020).

With social media controlling our daily lives, changes in communication happen even with our families. The abundance of social networking websites is popular around the globe, in Europe, and in Hungary (Khan et al., 2019). Hungary has a population of 9.77 million (O'Neill, 2022)

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where 90.1% are internet users (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2021) and 3.7 million are social media users (NMHH, 2022). In Statista's report, 5.4M are Facebook users (Medve, 2022).

### Background of the Study

#### *Political information in Hungary*

Political issues that affect national policies such as immigration policy and multiculturalism are some of the complex positions that Hungarian citizens discuss that lead them as to which party to support (Vegetti, 2019). Hungary has a relatively limited democratic experience and with the surge of political information in the era of infodiversity including social media, it is an overwhelming experience as to how news sources can influence the public as well as how political information coming from social media can shape a relationship among family and friends (Matuszewski & Szabó, 2019; Blokker, 2013).

At the height of disinformation, evidence showed that controversial information is spreading in Hungary. Certain images and videos tagged as propaganda that targets specific people continue to be distributed online. A glimpse of this report shared by Izabella Szentpéteri published by CEU Democracy Institute can be read under the title, "Brave New Hungary: The Anatomy of Fake News on Social Media" (Szentpéteri, n.d.).

#### *Family and close relationships in Hungary*

Albert and Dávid (2018) note that people in Hungary have fewer friends and acquaintances. Young people ages 16-25 discuss serious issues with middle-aged members of the family instead with their friends. In the Hungarian family setting, they remain to be traditional and family ties are strong. Immediate family members provide more emotional support and spend more time with family. Even when set apart, they maintain a strong relationship with their immediate family (Scroope, 2017). Interestingly, highly educated young men experience having enough friends in this age bracket while men in their middle age trust private information with their partners and spouses.

### Statement of the Problem

Information sharing and interaction in social media becomes complex and sometimes virulent. Close relations with family and friends are affected if not everyone shares the same value, opinions, or beliefs. Knowledge acquired online triggers each social media user as to how they will take an action and behave online based on the level of how they understood the information processed.

With the increasing data of the younger population most exposed to social media content, how do they put trust and judgement as one of their personal values in evaluating information? It is interesting to know how library and information students build trust and pass judgement on family and friends' interaction on social media.

The main objective of this study is to understand how the youth, specifically Hungarian LIS students, position themselves and react to social media posts of their close family and friends in times when misleading and biased information erroneously appears as part of their daily content. This study describes the strength or weaknesses of a connection between the youth and their close relationships on the bases of making judgements and putting trust as their personal values.

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Specifically, the research questions are the following:

1. How does the youth express their thoughts and emotions about political information in social media?
2. How do Hungarian LIS students use social media in online political participation?
3. How does social media political information affect the youth's trust and judgement when interacting with their close family and friends?

### Theoretical Framework

In studying how shared political information coming from close relations considers the value of trust and judgement, it is imperative to review existing frameworks that support this view. Koranteng et al. (2020) believe that the "formation of trust is informed by individual's beliefs and values which are often guided by culture". Our current cultural experiences are highly influenced by technological advancements in communication and information sharing. Thus, the value of kinship and friendship with the help of social media stabilizes and improves satisfaction, commitment, and intimacy as they continue to stay virtually connected with one another (Taylor, Zhao, & Bazarova, 2021). As the youth explore social networks in their almost adult life, the social capital theory applies social relationships in a system of trust and reciprocity that facilitates productive activity (Krishen, Leenders, Muthaly, Ziolkowska, & LaTour, 2018; Coleman, 1988).

### Review of Related Literature

A study on trust formation and judgement among young people was conducted by Rowley, Johnson, and Sbaffi (2015). They stated that credibility is the most favored characteristic of giving trust. Credible information cannot be easily identified when someone consumes them online. The production and publishing of political information are easily shared by online media, and anyone can be exposed to this information at any time. It is also inevitable that political engagement is unavoidable due to the possible social interaction that may happen online (Ekström & Shehata, 2018). However, it is one's choice how to engage online. Some may read comments which continue to be a private activity and some may actively post comments which become a public activity. Today's generation is adept at the transformation of online communication particularly of social media. The online space has nurtured the youth's political identities and the way they source information (Vromen, Xenos, & Loader, 2015). Social media is a platform for the youth to share their thoughts, opinions, and personal comments (Khan et al., 2019).

It is also argued that having social media account does not mean that youth should join political organizations represented online. Yet, they can immerse themselves through access of information while enhancing their expressive behavior by sharing their political views at their own will. The youth's way of social interaction can also be thought of as an extension of their offline lives (Vromen, et al., 2015).

Conversations among family and friends do not stop in face-to-face interactions. Friends update each other on social media by sharing recent information about their lives. In some cases, family members who are away from each other also receive information when their kins start sharing the latest status and other personal content that may seem like a surprise to them. Regardless of the reason for sharing, everyone is entitled to fully express themselves online with caution.

How we deal with information on social media affects the way we think, act and engage depending on where the information is coming from. The trust or mistrust and credibility given to

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the information are based on who shared it. In interpersonal relationships, we judge based on trust. Before a person opens and becomes honest with another individual, perceived trust takes place. Toma (2014) added that in building relationships either professional or personal we allow the trust to happen even before we approach or avoid others.

### Methodology

A set of Library and Information Science students from one higher education institution in Hungary was requested to partake in a digital civic engagement study. The research surveyed the social media engagement of the participants with close family and friends at a crucial moment in Hungarian history where Parliamentary elections happened in April 2022. The survey which was prepared in Hungarian language was sent to 197 students. It received 84 complete responses and one of them did not finish the questionnaire. A total of 43% participated in this research.

The study employed a quantitative approach using numerical data to describe and measure the mean and standard deviation.

#### *Selection*

A mix of undergraduate and graduate students at the master's level (ages 18-25) were the respondents in this study. Quota or convenience sampling was applied in this study and participation was purely voluntary. A link to the online questionnaire was sent to all the potential participants.

#### *Data Collection*

The online survey as a tool for data gathering aims to document and analyze Hungarian LIS students' civic participation in the conduct of Hungarian parliamentary elections. The survey was distributed using Google forms in March 2022. The survey focused on their utilization of social media and their behavior while engaging with people and information while they are online. Data will reveal their political participation experiences, the strength of trust, and perceived judgement in the social media environment.

#### *Data Analysis*

The results provided an overview of how select library and information science students behave and interact online given that trust and judgement are at risk when people engage online. To measure the frequency, a 5-point Likert scale containing the options always, very often, sometimes, rarely, and never was used. The results of the survey were tabulated, getting the mean and standard deviation, and encoded using IBM SPSS v.28. A total of 84 students (43%) accomplished the survey from a possible population of 197.

### Results

Below are the results of the study. 85 students attempted to answer the online questionnaire but only 84 completed the survey.

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Ön használja a Facebookot?

85 responses

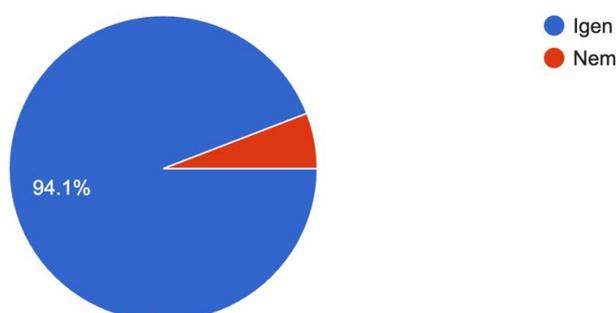


Fig. 1. Do you use Facebook?

Undeniably, many LIS students use Facebook as a means to contact and communicate with their family and friends.

Students were asked about their political information activities online. Below are the results.

I posted or shared something (status, meme, link...) concerning the upcoming national elections in a closed Facebook group.

Table 1

### Posting or sharing a status

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
89.3%	3.6%	1.2%	2.4%	3.6%

Most Hungarian youth are not actively involved in any political communication as 89.3% of them do not post or share any status, memes, or links connected to politics and political information in social media (Table 1).

When my immediate family members share, post, like, or comment on something that I believe contains biased, fake, or misleading information, I call them out and talk to them.

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Table 2

### Calling out family members

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
32.1%	11.9%	15.5%	17.9%	22.6%

Hungarian youth calls out their family members when they share, post, like, or comment on political information that contains misleading information or fake news. However, only 22.6% (Table 2) answered always and there is more youth who never calls out their family members as recorded by 32.1%.

When my close friends share, post, like, or comment on something that I believe contains biased, fake, or misleading information, I call them out and talk to them.

Table 3

### Calling out close friends

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
28.6%	16.7%	19%	22.6%	13.1%

More Hungarian youth do not call out their close friends when they share, post, like, or comment on political information with fake news or misleading information. Only 13.1% do this with their close friends (Table 3).

Participants were asked to rate their answers using a Likert scale with the following legend: 1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always.

Table 4

### Likert scale evaluation criteria

Score interval (Mean)	Evaluation criteria
1.00 - 1.79	Very low level
1.80 - 2.59	Low level
2.60 - 3.39	Medium level

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3.40 - 4.19	High level
4.20 - 5.00	Very high level

The evaluation and interpretation criteria for Likert scale questions (Table 4) was derived from Çelik and Oral (2016).

Table 5

### Value of Trust

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I trust my family even if they share, post, like, or comment on a different view or perspective that is against mine on social media.	4.059	1.144
I trust my friends even if they share, post, like, or comment on a different view or perspective that is against mine on social media.	3.857	1.131
I trust other people even if they share, post, like, or comment on a different view or perspective that is against mine on social media.	2.654	1.227

Three questions were asked to identify the level of trust given by the youth to their close family, friends, and others. Table 5 shows that the youth give a high level of trust (4.059) to their family members even if they share, post, like, or comment on something that is different from their point-of-view in social media. They also give a high level of trust in their close friends (3.857) and a medium level of trust to other people (2.654).

Table 6

**Judging Others**

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
I judge my family based on what they share, post, like, or comment on social media.	1.476	0.950
I judge my friends based on what they share, post, like, or comment on social media.	1.738	0.995
I judge other people not related to me based on what they share, post, like, or comment on social media.	2.428	1.174
I do not judge anyone based on what they share, post, like, or comment on social media.	3.380	1.240

Four questions were asked to identify how the youth judges their close family, friends, and others. Part of the question asks if they do not judge at all. Table 6 summarizes the mean and standard deviation of how the youth make judgements based on their social media posts.

Results showed that youth have a low level of judgement towards close family with a mean of 1.476, followed by friends with a mean of 1.738, and other people with a mean of 2.428 when they share information or interact on social media. Moreover, they recorded a medium level of judgement in one of the categories, *not judging anyone* with a mean of 3.380 based on what they share, post, like, or comment on social media.

**Discussion**

The primary reason for using Facebook by LIS students is to contact and communicate with family and friends. Students also mentioned that they use Facebook to interact with a larger network of people and to be updated with all sorts of news. Very few of them shares posts of others.

Action and engagement among the youth depend on who they trust. While they use social media particularly Facebook most of the time, they feel they should remain silent to actively participate even in social media. Trust is a major factor in valuing information shared online. This

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is the same as how the youth perceive credible information when shared by close family and friends. They strongly believe that close family and friends are responsible individuals which gives clearance to them to share all kinds of information on social media. Judgement is derived from how we act responsibly as individuals. In this study, judgement comes after a person shares and interacts online.

Personal ties built on a strong foundation will affect how information is communicated online and on social media. As personal relationships flourish in social media, personal ties continue to bond stronger (Chambers, 2013). The youth of today represented by students remain to trust their family members and will solve the issues immediately in case false information is shared. No negative perception will prevail, and it is highly likely that they will not judge their parents or siblings for sharing false information as they will try to correct the misinformation. As Toma (2014) argued we allow trust to happen even before we approach others. This familial trust is sealed.

### Conclusion

Hungarian youth possess a low expressive engagement since they are less participatory in expressing opinions on social media. They also have a low level of judgement with family members and close friends. This translates to giving high value to recognizing freedom of expression. High trust is given to family and friends as strong relationships are built on trust.

Social capital is characterized by strong bonds and maintains reciprocity however the flow of information is not diversified and thus cannot express freely. Trusting other people on social media is an issue as most young people do not trust others online. Political participation is voluntary and practically nil since engagement with political information in social media is rare/low.

It is recommended that validation through interviews is needed to produce conclusive statements.

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### **Цифрова громадянська активність та участь молоді: погляд угорських студентів з бібліотечно-інформаційних наук на політичну інформацію**

**Мета.** Дослідження має на меті виявити, як угорські студенти з бібліотечно-інформаційних наук використовують соціальні медіа для вираження своїх демократичних дій та як політична інформація в соціальних мережах впливає на довіру й судження молоді під час спілкування з близькими родичами та друзями в інтернеті. **Методи.** У дослідженні використовувався кількісний підхід для визначення рівня залученості учасників дослідження до соціальних мереж їхніх близьких родичів та друзів. У цьому дослідженні була застосована зручна вибірка (студенти бібліотечних та інформаційних наук, університет, Угорщина), і всім потенційним учасникам (197 студентам) було надіслано онлайн-анкету. **Результати.** Всього в дослідженні взяли участь 43 %. Молодь дуже довіряє членам своєї родини та близьким друзям, навіть якщо вони розповсюджують, публікують, лайкають або коментують щось, що відрізняється від їхньої думки в соціальних мережах. Крім того, молодь має низький рівень критики, коли йдеться про родину та близьких друзів. **Висновки.** Політична участь серед молоді є добровільною, а активність стосовно політичної інформації в соціальних мережах є рідкісною/низькою.

*Ключові слова:* активність; участь молоді; соціальні медіа; політична інформація; Угорщина

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