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Are we having fun? Exploring content factors influencing
engagement on Viktor Orbán's Tiktok

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Introduction

The prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán is a prominent populist figure of political communication not only in his home country but also on a European and global level (Enyedi, 2020). The way his governments dismantled the democratic institutions of Hungary has been studied extensively, particularly with regard to how the media have been regulated (Polyák, 2019). Recent studies examined the way Viktor Orbán positions himself on social media, with special focus on his Facebook (Szebeni & Salojärvi, 2022) and Instagram page (Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023). The findings of these studies indicate a consistent authoritarian image, one that centres around being a saviour for the nation.

In 2023, Orbán joined the fastest growing and most popular social media platform among Gen-Z – TikTok (Frank, 2023). This strategic move attempts to reach young voters and promote the media figure of Viktor Orbán, as he is more popular than the governing party (Fidesz) and is more known amongst Hungarian youth (Frank, 2023). This demographic in the country is rather disillusioned in politics, possibly due to the lack of options in participating in political youth organisations and the way the education system fails to inform emerging citizens about their political rights (Fényes, 2019). Taken into account the vulnerability of young users on social media, the populist approach of Viktor Orbán, and the power of TikTok to downplay the harmful elements of right-wing populist ideas (González-Aguilar et.al, 2023), this master thesis proposes to investigate the intersection of these elements¹.

Building on the theoretical foundation of the Entertainment Overcoming Resistance model (EORM) (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), this study aims at uncovering the effects of political content characteristics in eliciting engagement on TikTok. Recent studies on user engagement in social media found that populist messages elicited more comments than non-populist posts (Kluknavská et. al, 2023), in line with existing literature which states that posts using populist

1. Portions of this paper were developed from a proposal for Master Seminar, Univ.-Prof. Dr. Katharine Sarikakis, WS 2023

message appeals elicit more engagement on posts (Schmuck & Hameleers, 2017). Positive message characteristics were found consistently to decrease user engagement, however, it is not yet proven if these findings transfer to the platform of TikTok, where political leaders mostly use emotions building on positivity (Zamora et.al, 2023) and where humorous content by politicians elicits greater user engagement than hate speech (González-Aguilar et.al, 2023).

TikTok in Hungary is particularly popular amongst young people, the platform in 2023 reached more than 2 million people in the country, predominantly young people. For ages between 15 and 29 only 25% of young people are not users of the platform, and more than half of this demographic opens the app at least once a day (Nagy, 2023).

The contributions of this proposed thesis are threefold. First, it seeks to delve deeper into the elements of digital communication strategy employed by a populist leader on an emerging social media platform. Second, it aims to shed light on how the audience engages with featured content elements, using the EORM model, contributing to scholarship on user engagement in political communication. Third, it investigates a context in which a populist leader has been in power for more than a decade, in a digital era when political narratives and political marketing are increasingly commodified to cater for the needs of the audiences. This thesis addresses several research gaps and a socially relevant phenomenon which carries real consequences for young people's political development in an illiberal democracy.

This thesis first examines the tendencies of youth engagement with politics in Hungary, then discusses the way populism dismantles democracy and how populist communication functions. It will also examine the way personalization is becoming more popular and impactful in eliciting engagement, followed by highlighting how different TikTok is from other social media platforms. It will then suggest the use of the EORM model and quantitative

multimodal analysis combined with automated sentiment analysis to examine engagement and sentiment effects.

Young citizens and the political engagement of Hungarian youth

Young voters, especially members of Gen Z, prefer the visual personalization of politicians on social media as a form of political communication (Parmelee et. al., 2023). As members of this generation grew up with advertisements, technological innovations and the internet, content designed to grab their attention has to be brief, part of a narrative, humorous and preferably shared with them by friends (Parmelee et. al., 2023). This generation craves authentic, less than perfect content to connect with politicians, however, there is a limit to which they deem personalization to be authentic (Parmelee et. al., 2023).

Connecting with younger voters may prove to be difficult for politicians, since younger generations are increasingly critical towards democratic institutions. This disillusionment in Western countries saw the rising popularity of mostly right-wing political parties and the increase of democratic apathy (Foa & Mounk, 2019). The political engagement of young people was found to be increasingly focused on online actions with populism being a catalyst for political participation (Waeterloos et. al, 2023).

Members of Gen-Z are more critical and less trusting towards democratic institutions and research suggests that instead of aligning with the agendas of political parties, they look for horizontal civic engagement (Essomba et. al., 2023) and crave political education (Robin et. al, 2023; Parmelee et. al., 2023). However, the understandings around enjoying political media entertainment differ, based on cultural contexts. Young voters from countries with not long standing democratic traditions or under authoritarian regimes are likely to separate their entertainment practices from political information seeking (Schneider et. al., 2023).

This critical lens of youth likely transfers to Hungary as well, since the education system does not prioritize informing students about their political rights (Fényes, 2019). This is particularly unfortunate, as a recent study highlighted the importance of interactions and conversations between teachers and students as a crucial element in youth's political development (Noack & Eckstein, 2023). The capacity of Hungary's education system to effectively educate young citizens about political participation is highly questionable. This concern is highlighted by recent events, such as widespread teacher strikes across counties in the past year, protesting against the government for better working conditions. These strikes, which had a significant impact on the education system, likely left students directly affected and potentially hindered their learning experiences, but many of them joined the protests in solidarity (Galicza, 2023). Ideally, educational places have the potential to be a place where young citizens can discuss the way algorithms define their media experiences and thereby contributing to their media literacies (Noack & Eckstein, 2023).

Hungarian youth is reported to be the least likely to participate in parliamentary elections amongst V4 countries (Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary) and they trust political institutions and media the least, but put faith in the EU and security services (police, military) (Bíró-Nagy & Szabó, 2021). This raises the concern on how Hungarian emerging citizens access and interpret political information presented to them on social media.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

Populist leaders on social media and the prime example of Viktor Orbán

Populism is defined by scholars as a “thin ideology” that ultimately divides the world into “us” versus “them”, the “pure people” against the “corrupt elite” (Postill, 2018; Enli & Rosenberg, 2018; Foa & Mounk, 2019; Mendonça & Caetano, 2021; Noack & Eckstein, 2023; Bast, 2024; Moffitt, 2024). In essence, populism often lacks a predetermined

ideological agenda, positioning itself as the majoritarian option that holds the truth in politics (Urbinati, 2017). Arguably, it threatens democracy not by being inherently anti-democratic but by promoting illiberalism (Havlík, 2019). A populist government, which claims to act solely in the interest of the majority, disregards the protection of minorities and the institutional mechanisms that serve democracy (Bartha et. al., 2020). Populist governance often rejects input from experts in policymaking, valuing only the preferences of the majority and inherently opposing experts or elites in leadership positions (Bartha et. al., 2020).

The answer to the question of whether populists still exist after being elected—as Müller suggests—is a definitive yes (2016). Hence, this highlights the paradox of populism: it claims to hold the truth (and the solution) to the problems of the majority, yet to remain in power, it must uphold a stance of being in constant struggle against adversaries (Havlík, 2019) to maintain the populist hype (Palonen, 2018). Populist governance rejects political plurality; it is not interested in fostering political debate. The only reason for the opposition's existence is to serve as a constant adversary, not even as a rival (Havlík, 2019).

The policies implemented in Hungary after the 2010s actively inhibit real parliamentary debate and limit the opposition's chances to serve its real purpose (Bartha et. al., 2020). They are used as scapegoats in the constant adversarial and emotional communication style (Muno & Pfeiffer, 2022), necessary only for providing the 'evil' in the populist narrative of 'good vs. evil' (Bartha et. al, 2020). During the last 14 years, with Viktor Orbán in power, the communication of the Hungarian prime minister was characterised as a constant battlefield against various enemies, including but not limited to: non-governmental organisations or the European Union (Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023).

The state of democracy in Hungary is on the decline, and the current governing style can be described as an authoritarian populism (Ádám, 2019). Muno and Pfeiffer compare Hungary

and Venezuela to the closest resemblance of the ideal populist state, rejecting the idea that Hungary can still be called a democracy (2022). In this system, the image of a leader can be seen as a modernized version of Weber's charismatic leader, where power is derived through personal charisma (Ádám, 2019). Populism can be approached from various viewpoints, such as a means to seize and hold power (Weyland, 2017), as political communication (Ostiguy, 2017), or as a performance (Moffit, 2016), with the importance of charismatic leadership highlighted in each instance.

The prime minister of Hungary successfully created an online image of an authoritarian populist leader, who embodies the role of the nation on both his Instagram and Facebook channels (Szebeni & Salojärvi, 2022; Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023). On both of these platforms Orbán constructs an image of a dominant and masculine leader, who focuses rather on an "us vs. them" rhetoric instead of emphasising the "them" aspect of populist appeals (Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023). It is emphasized on both channels that the success of his social media communication lies in the incorporation of his charisma, charm and populism into a complex authoritarian image which can be regarded as "charismatic authority" (Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023).

Populist politicians on social media use the tool of personalization to craft their social media identities and portray themselves as ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, it is suggested that in case of populist political actors, each actor must be examined in their own context. Despite the similarities, there is no universal explanation regarding image construction (Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023; Bast, 2024). Populism operates in a hybrid system, interacting with both traditional and new media whilst being aware of the presence of other, non-populist actors (Postill, 2018), thereby making it a highly strategic effort of communication. The constant

struggle of populist rhetoric to uphold its hegemony, coupled with the growing need for a social media presence by political actors creates new avenues for political communication.

Populism in the digital era seizes power in communication mainly the same way as it functions in its essence. The chances of populism being a successful tool of political communication are more ideal in a digital world where human attention has become commodified, replacing the importance of information (Lanham, 2006), with the main goal of politicians being to reach users so that they can make sense only of their intended message (Klimeš, 2022). Political actors are in a state of permanent campaigning, which means that they are constantly trying to grab attention on every possible channel available to them (Metz et. al., 2020).

Attention populism builds on these conditions and uses a communication style constantly emphasizing the sovereignty of the nation, an 'us vs them' narrative and caters for presumed majoritarian preferences (Klimeš, 2022). Attention populism promotes illiberal communication efforts by fostering communities not based on deliberation and understanding, but rather focusing on the creation of a devoted following (Klimeš, 2022). The hegemony of mass-media in setting the topics of deliberation are behind with digital media leading the way in political communication relying on emotional and personalised follower communities (Klimeš, 2022).

In an investigation into the effect of populist appeals in political communication across various levels of prior populist attitudes, it was found that these appeals had an impact regardless of susceptibility to populism (Wirz, 2018). Messages framed in a populist style had a greater impact than those framed non-populistically, with only anger and hope among the emotions elicited by populist appeals leading to persuasion. Additionally, it was confirmed that populist appeals are inherently more emotional than non-populist ones (Wirz, 2018).

Therefore, populist appeals have a greater chance at eliciting interaction or engagement with content on social media, which was found to be the case before (Schmuck & Hameleers, 2017; Klučnavská et. al, 2023).

Regarding the type of emotional appeals used by populist and non-populist political actors it was found that populist actors not in power use more negative emotional appeals (anger, fear, sadness) than positive emotional appeals (joy, hope, pride), which is more often featured by mainstream political communication (Widmann, 2021). While populist actors in opposition use positive appeals to a lesser extent, they still rely on them to craft a positive in-group identity by strengthening a sense of belonging through the use of pride (Widmann, 2021). Using pride as a positive populist appeal to reach voters was linked to increased prejudice against minorities (Widmann, 2021), further eliciting illiberal tendencies. The case of Hungary differs from previous investigations since here a populist actor acts as the mainstream political actor. Looking at the populist appeals in Turkey – a country with long standing populist governance - it was found that populist negative appeals lead to some level of mobilization only in case of low effort actions (eg. signing a petition) (Aytaç et. al, 2024). The question remains still to be investigated how populist actors in governance use positive appeals.

This investigation is also needed to test the theoretical approach of Vitale and Girard towards public trust in populist leaders (2022). It is suggested that the populist leader gains trust from the public based on identification and the trust the public places in themselves. If the public believes they are qualified and capable of making decisions about the country, they will support the populist leader they perceive as similar to them, according to the "trust transfer theory". This loop can only be broken if the public no longer perceives the populist actor as similar to them or if they lose their self-confidence in making good decisions, which would

coincidentally lead to losing faith in the populist leader (Vitale & Girard, 2022). This highlights the importance of identification in populist communication, often achieved through personalization in social media.

Personalization of political visual communication on social media

The effect of visuals in political communication is highly influential (Schill, 2012) and has gathered heightened scholarly attention in the last the decade, as politicians and parties turned to social media in search of a more authentic and reliable image (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018; Metz et. al., 2020; Farkas & Bene, 2021; Haßler et. al., 2023; Parmelee et. al., 2023). Social media helps political actors to carefully construct their online identities, and to avoid the biases audiences assign to them on other platforms, like television broadcasts (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018). These new opportunities for communication prompt political actors to conform to the affordances of the platforms and to create content based on the demand of the audience (Metz et. al., 2020).

On social media sites, especially on X (Twitter), Facebook and Instagram, there is a constant demand for visuals and for a personal touch in communication (Farkas & Bene, 2021; Haßler et. al., 2023). Personalization by political actors is achieved through individualization and privatization, with the former referring to the focus of a single politician instead of a party and the latter hinting at presenting a political actor as a private person (Van Aelst et. al., 2012).

A recent study on the success of private posts over political ones on Facebook revealed that personalized messages elicit different responses from audiences. Insights into the private lives of politicians contribute to greater engagement metrics—like, share, and comment numbers. It is suggested that private appeals affect users differently than political posts, thus contributing to varying ways of engagement (Peeters et al., 2023), which will be further discussed in this thesis. The impact of personal, relatable content in social media communication is

undoubtedly significant. A study examining the communication styles used in the Swiss national election found that on Facebook, entertaining content was almost as frequently used as a pseudo-discursive style of communication, which scholars argue most likely resembles the traditional elements of political communication (Keller & Königslöw, 2018).

Interestingly, entertaining content was found to produce more engagement than pseudo-discursive style and has since been a favoured tool for communication by populist actors.

Entertaining content includes sharing personal and private aspects of politicians' lives, which does not necessarily have to be humorous but must hint at the similarities and shared realities between the politician and their followers (Keller & Königslöw, 2018).

As personalized and entertaining political content contributes to greater online visibility, it is increasingly used by politicians whose main goal is to keep the attention of online audiences and potentially draw in more followers (Keller & Königslöw, 2018).

Engagement with political content online increases the chances of the content reaching more people, not only users from the network of the follower interacting but also by indicating that the content is popular and thus more likely to be recommended by algorithms to users who have not yet interacted with the political actors' content (Keller & Königslöw, 2018).

Therefore, a like or interaction is not just a 'sign of acknowledgment' but a contribution towards the circulation of that message. Not to mention that exposure to political content online has been linked to political participation and voting intentions. Hence, interaction with political content can be regarded as a first step towards political persuasion and represents the ultimate goal of political actors communicating through social media (Keller & Königslöw, 2018). In this thesis, persuasion is defined as the interaction or engagement with political content online. This is further underscored by the fact that populist actors spread their messages more successfully when they transform themselves into 'algorithmic political

forces' (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016) and become the medium of communication. Orbán is suggested to have already become this, as his social media does not rely on any other media sites or use references; instead, he poses as the medium itself (Rétfalvi, 2022).

Still, while this political communication strategy caters for the needs of audiences, it can contribute to depoliticization (Metz et. al., 2020). A study investigating the extent of personalization in election campaigns on Instagram by political actors found that personalization was a frequent method, which came at the expense of addressing policy issues, although not to an alarming degree (Haßler et. al., 2023), but scholars warn that a similar issue might be present on TikTok as well (Moir, 2023).

TikTok and political communication

TikTok is currently the fastest growing social media platform and was globally the most downloaded app of 2022 (Lee & Abidin, 2023). Some of the rapid success of TikTok following the pandemic can be attributed to its (1) hyper-personalized algorithm and (2) its anti-social media tendencies (Feldkamp, 2021). On the opening page of the app, users are presented with the so-called 'For You' page, which features recommendations of carefully curated content, based on previous interactions. Users can like, comment, share and repost videos, or save them in a personal collection, create duets or stitch videos (Feldkamp, 2021; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022). TikTok does not require registration to access its content, and this tendency of not needing friends or followers to enjoy the platform separates TikTok from other social media apps (Feldkamp, 2021). Compared to Instagram, for example, users on TikTok prefer a more genuine and human approach to content creation from social media influencers (Schwär, 2020).

According to Zulli and Zulli TikTok builds on an "imitation public, in which networks form through processes of imitation and replication, not interpersonal connections, expressions of

sentiment, or lived experiences” (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p. 1873). The use of replication therefore is crucial on TikTok, because videos made with the sound and effects of a popular video gain momentum and increase the chances of being spread by the algorithm (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). Hence, most users will likely watch similar – usually challenge or trend – type of videos over and over again, familiarizing themselves with the given format (Zulli & Zulli, 2022).

The experience of scrolling through TikTok deviates from using other types of social media to such a degree that some even hesitate to call it a social media platform. There seems to be a public consensus on the importance of TikTok's algorithm and recommendation mechanism, yet there is no way of knowing how they actually operate. Faltesek and colleagues argue that the flow experience of using TikTok is much closer to watching television than using social media. Despite being considered a social network, community is only important for reproducing memetic expressions and claiming niche affiliations as jokes (2023). They found no evidence that TikTok is merely a platform for singing and dancing videos; in fact, these types of videos, along with political content and celebrities, were found to be secondary to the basic flow of the algorithm (Faltesek et al., 2023). As they put it, the TikTok flow experience “was a highly concentrated world of one-way communication with comedy and lifehacks, the experience of flipping between (local channels)” (Faltesek et al., 2023, p.10). This highlights that above all, the organizing principle of TikTok is entertainment, with a lack of explicit control over the content shown to users.

Due to the ongoing emergence of the app, research is still limited on the platform, but so far personalization is not yet an overly characteristic element of the communication style of political actors on TikTok (Zamora et. al., 2023). Examining a Spanish party and its TikTok communication style, researchers found that while the political party used the specific

language and technicalities of TikTok, it still couldn't fully adapt to the platform (Cervi et. al., 2021). In terms of genres, most political actors post simple videos, and while they use the affordances at their disposal (music, effects, filters), they refrain from taking part in challenges or duets (Cervi et. al., 2023). Looking at how parties and politicians use TikTok in Spain and Poland, it was found that politicians rely heavily on positivity and playing on emotions while parties prefer the use of logical arguments (Zamora et. al., 2023). Populist right-wing parties on TikTok – especially long-standing ones - were continuously found to incorporate an appeal for a hopeful future amongst their characteristically negative messages, to reach younger audiences (Albertazzi & Bonansinga, 2023).

Given the fact that TikTok has the potential to influence political behaviours to a greater extent compared to other social media platforms (Karimi & Fox, 2023) and the relative messiness of the platform and our knowledge so far, scholars call for a balanced approach towards understanding TikTok and warn against the easy dismissal of the platform as being a solution outlet for Gen-Z (Lerat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023). The danger of misinformation and polarization among other things presents a very real threat for all users of the platform, and many voices are calling for a more critical look towards humorous TikTok content (Matamoros-Fernández, 2023).

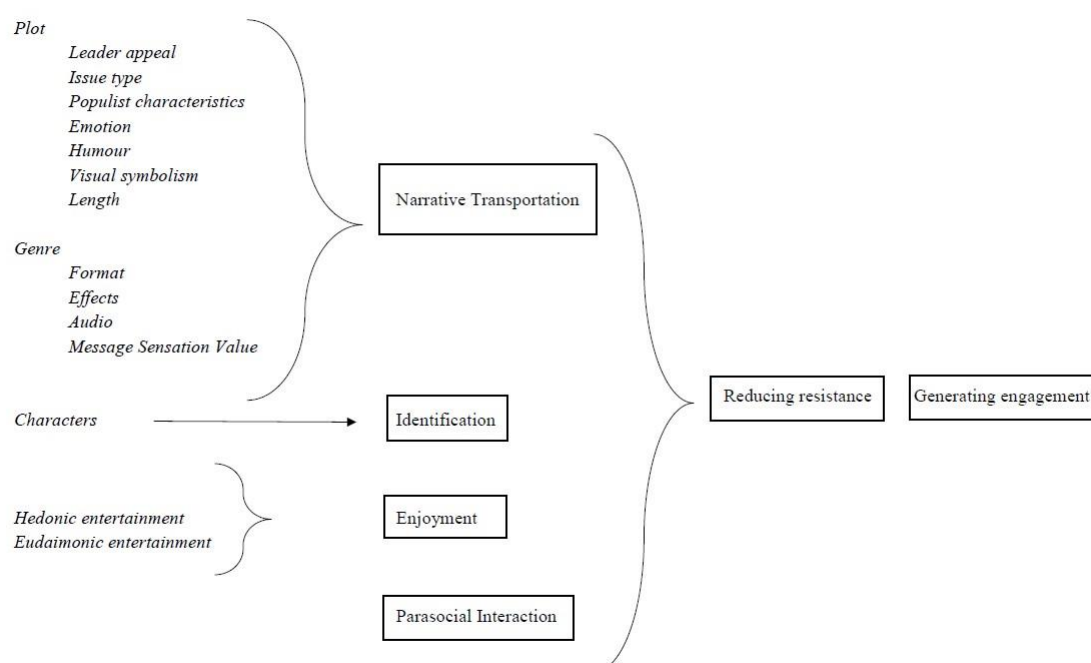
This is an increasingly important concern, because politicians on TikTok are much more likely to produce content unrelated to their specific takes on political issues, in favour of entertaining and engaging content. By the design of the platform, TikTok promotes the use of content which is memetic and has the potential to go viral, diminishing the amount of content directly engaging with policies and their impact (Moir, 2023).

Factors influencing user engagement (EORM)

This study proposes to use the Entertainment Overcoming Resistance model (EORM) to uncover the implications of consuming political entertainment videos on TikTok. According to the EORM the narrative elements of an entertainment program have the ability to reduce scrutiny towards persuasive messages thereby overcoming the initial resistance of audiences through effectively masking the persuasive intent and fostering parasocial interactions (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). The theory builds from elements of social cognitive theory and the Extended-Elaboration Likelihood model by placing emphasis on the impact of being involved in a narrative, thereby reducing the persuasion effect and on the effect of making a personal connection with the characters (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). It is often being described as traveling between worlds, where the audience is immersed into a narrative by content elements and gets transported into an imaginary world intended for persuasion. Narrative transportation is increased by a story incorporating identifiable characters, an imaginable plot and verisimilitude, whereby resistance is reduced from the audience's side (Van Laer et.al, 2014).

Political transportation is defined as narratives which focus on socio-political issues, feature political characters and discuss political events. When audiences interpret political narratives, they are aware that they are also part of the real world in which political narratives are set, yet they are still able to get transported into an imagined scenario using mental Political Situation Models (PSMs). Political transportation allows the audience to experience social realities beyond personal experience, making distant political worlds feel immediate and relevant. PSMs contain rich plotlines, that can be memorized and used to stimulate emotional responses and help audiences imagine future scenarios (McLaughlin et. al., 2019). Political messages in a narrative format were found to be more likely to propel attitude changes compared to political messages in non-narrative format. Political narratives can contribute to polarization, when used to emphasize conflict, however, when they focus on promoting compromise and democracy, polarization is less effective (McLaughlin et. al., 2019).

Resistance towards narrative persuasion is defined as disregarding the persuasive intent (Ratcliff & Sun, 2020). On social media, eliciting engagement on a given post can be seen as a strategic goal itself, since it contributes to the circulation of the message (Farkas & Bene, 2021) and in the context of this research, based on the communication strategies of TikTok and the goal of politicians, persuasion is defined as engagement with the political content (e.g. liking, commenting, sharing).



1. Figure - Conceptual model

Viktor Orbán uses his social media channels to craft the image of a dominant, masculine and populist leader, who is in charge of the country. Based on research examining the ways in which Orbán expresses himself on Facebook and Instagram, and on the ‘trans-platform travel’ of populist messaging style (Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023), his TikTok channel is expected to use elements from the same toolkit. Although, given the platform specific differences, the effect of the same communication style used previously on Facebook and Instagram might yield varying results on TikTok.

Resistance to persuasion was found to decrease when the audience could identify with the characters present in the narrative. Identifiable characters can affect the audience in two ways, one is through the use of a parasocial relationship or interaction (PSI), when the character in the story appears as a friend to the viewer (Tukachinsky & Tokunaga, 2013). The other is through empathic identification, which describes the audience relating to the character and identifying with them (Tukachinsky & Tokunaga, 2013). Political posts from politicians mentioning other members of the same party were found to negatively relate to user engagement (Heiss et. al., 2019), which is in line with the suggestion of Ratcliff and Sun on narrative transportation and focus, mainly that one main character elicits stronger effects and helps identification (Ratcliff & Sun, 2020). Based on this, the thesis proposes that:

H1. Videos with identifiable characters will generate more engagement compared to videos with no identifiable characters.

H2. Videos with one main character (leader) in the focus will generate more engagement than videos with the main (leader) character and own party members.

PSI occurs when the characters “break the fourth wall” and address the viewers directly (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This process inhibits narrative transportation to a certain extent, since it makes the audience aware of the reality (Tukachinsky & Tokunaga, 2013).

Scholarship investigating the effects of PSI found it influential in behavioural change after exposure to a political narrative, but contrary to the expectations of EORM, it was not found to be a significant mediator (Schartel Dunn, 2018). This is line with findings of Ratcliff and Sun, who observed that PSI induced the weakest effect on narrative involvement (2020).

Nevertheless, consuming media with PSI was found to foster stronger relationships with politicians, creating a sense of intimacy (Cohen & Holbert, 2021). In case of social media influencers, PSI was connected to the viewer’s strengthened ability to interact (Rasmussen,

2018). Although it may not be through narrative transportation, but the effect of PSI is likely to be significant, therefore this thesis expects that:

H3. Videos using parasocial interaction techniques will generate more engagement than videos without parasocial interaction.

The genre of a given narrative alone does not affect narrative involvement, however, the familiarity of viewers with the given format does (Van Laer et.al., 2014). Examining advertisements on Instagram, it has become evident that, although ads presented in a format not congruent with the platform's theme and style were able to grab attention, ads in a congruent format were more likely to lead to persuasion (Huang & Yoon, 2021). This was confirmed specifically in the case of public service announcements, which – when presented in platform congruent style – were more likely to enhance engagement. This effect was not observed when the ad concentrated on a brand advertisement, as the flow experience of scrolling through social media was disrupted (Huang & Yoon, 2021). This is in line with previous findings on ad-intrusiveness and matching platforms (Yang & Jiang, 2021). Furthermore, in case of political ads, the platform type was also influential in deeming advertisements intrusive. In that study Instagram was used as a less politicized platform, on which less political messages were seen as less intrusive (Zhou et. al., 2024). However, the effect of format and style congruent political content has not been investigated on TikTok before. Therefore, this thesis proposes the following question:

RQ1: How does the format of Viktor Orbán's TikTok videos relate to user engagement?

Narrative transportation is a crucial element of reducing resistance and it can be achieved by an imaginable plot that is also believable (Van Laer et.al, 2014). The strategic appeals used by Viktor Orbán on social media can be categorized as dominant, populist, traditional and gentle (Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023; Szebeni & Salojärvi, 2022). In case of TikTok, an additional

category of leader appeal seems sufficient to add, which presents him as a fun, approachable person. The first two categories depict a leader who is aggressive, knows the enemy and is not afraid of attacking, using a populist narrative and ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ rhetoric, while his traditional appeal reveals a successful international politician (Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023; Szebeni & Salojärvi, 2022). His gentle and fun appeals reveal a more vulnerable, private person who is specially nurturing towards his family (Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023). In the first case and in the latter it is a personalized image, which depicts the leader as an authentic politician who is easy-going, approachable and engages with his followers. These appeals carry a lot of potential to depict Viktor Orbán as a main character within different narratives. As the plot of a TikTok video is essential to achieve transportation, relying on these appeals as narrative structures can lead to greater audience immersion and reduce resistance against persuasion or engagement.

Hungarian user engagement regarding personalization of politicians’ posts on Facebook and Instagram was found to differ depending on platforms. There was a clear preference for more formal content on Facebook compared to Instagram. Interestingly, private and informal content was not found to be more liked on Instagram, but overall, personalized images still elicited more likes (Farkas & Bene, 2021). Consequently, this thesis proposes the following:

H4a. Videos with a personal appeal on TikTok will yield more engagement than videos with a political appeal.

Recent studies on user engagement on social media found that populist messages elicited more comments than non-populist posts (Kluknavská et. al, 2023), in line with existing literature which states that posts using populist message appeals elicit more engagement on posts (Schmuck & Hameleers, 2017). Different issue types in political posts were also found to generate engagement, especially distinguishing between permanent (eg. domestic policy,

economic policy) and salient issues (eg. immigration), with the latter being a more distinctive driver of engagement (Bene et. al., 2022). Using more negative and more positive sentiments in posts were found to increase reactions on Facebook (Eberl et. al., 2020), and also humour and (Heiss et. al., 2019) visual symbolism (including nationalist and patriotic imagery) (Abid et. al, 2023) were found to positively relate to engagement behaviour. Populist characteristics were also found to have a positive impact on engagement (Bene et. al., 2022). Hence, this thesis proposes:

H4b. Videos using more narrative elements (populist characteristics, mentioning issue types, humour and expressive captions) or more positive or negative emotions will generate greater engagement than videos without these elements.

Post length in case of political posts was related to more user engagement (Heiss et. al. 2019) while Ratcliff and Sun found that in case of audiovisual narratives, medium length posts generated the greatest involvement (2020). This was tested on short films, public service announcements and content that can be generally considered longer than the usual content produced for TikTok. According to the TikTok Research API Codebook, the platform characterises videos into short (no longer than 15 seconds), mid (duration between 15 and 60 seconds), long (duration between 1 and 5 minutes) and extra-long (duration longer than 5 minutes) categories and this thesis will build upon this terminology. Therefore, it is stated that:

H5. Videos with medium (mid) length will generate more engagement than short, long or extra-long videos.

Message Sensation Value (MSV), a term originating from health communication research, pertains to the sensory response elicited by an audio-visual message (Zhang et al., 2024).

Some features of MSV include intense sound and visual effects, loud music, quick cuts and

interesting camera angles or zooming in (Paek et. al., 2010). Previous research indicates that high MSV has the capacity to capture attention, a crucial objective for politicians using TikTok to connect with younger demographics (Moir, 2023). However, despite this, high MSV was found to correlate negatively with public engagement on government social media, suggesting that excessively stimulating messages may have limitations in impacting audiences, particularly in crisis communication scenarios (Zhang et al., 2024). Furthermore, the combination of high MSV and humour was observed to diminish engagement in videos advocating against smoking on YouTube, potentially undermining the seriousness of the message. This aligns with the assumptions of Van Laer and colleagues, who propose that too much distraction can decrease focus on the narrative and prevent the success of narrative transportation, therefore not decreasing resistance. Although this correlation has not been tested specifically in the context of politicians, the combination of high MSV and humour could similarly result in decreased engagement on TikTok, especially for high-profile political figures. This thesis proposes the following:

H6. High message sensation value will inhibit narrative transportation which leads to greater resistance to persuasion which will result in less user engagement.

Scholars studying the field distinguish between two main types of entertainment: hedonic and eudaimonic (Radošinská & Hrotková, 2014). Hedonic entertainment revolves around exciting, easy, and enjoyable experiences, featuring content elements that prompt quick reactions to humour, while eudaimonic entertainment offers a more meaningful and profound experience. Even when content includes sad or less stimulating elements, media can still provide enjoyment to audiences and be regarded as eudaimonic. Thought-provoking entertainment leads to appreciation, enhancing the overall experience. Audiences can simultaneously experience both eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment while consuming the same content, as

these experiences are not mutually exclusive; they can affect viewers simultaneously (Radošinská & Hrotková, 2014; Möller & Kühne, 2019).

Hedonic entertainment, characterized by pleasure, encompasses the quick and enjoyable delights of life, while eudaimonic entertainment aims to explore contemplations of a meaningful existence (Radošinská & Hrotková, 2014). According to the Entertainment Overcoming Resistance Model (EORM), enjoyment derived from both hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment can reduce selective exposure (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). The combined effect of hedonic and eudaimonic experiences in comedy were found to lead to destigmatization towards minority groups (De Ridder et. al., 2023), however, the examination of user engagement under political videos from the perspective of the entertainment experience provided by the content remains unexplored.

RQ2: How do TikTok videos of Viktor Orbán featuring hedonic and or eudaimonic entertainment relate to user engagement?

Scholars have examined the impact of content characteristics on user engagement, primarily focusing on political posts on platforms like Facebook and Instagram (Heiss et. al., 2019; Eberl et. al.; 2020, Abid et. al, 2023; Zhang et. al, 2024). Social media engagement behaviour can be classified into high and low levels based on the effort required. High-level engagement entails actions such as sharing content or commenting, whereas low-level engagement includes liking (Abid et. al, 2023). Commenting or sharing under a political video demands high cognitive effort, potentially influenced by external pressures, whereas liking often serves as an instantaneous, visceral reaction to the experience.

RQ3: How do the hypothesized relationships in H4a through H4b vary in their ability to generate different types of engagement, such as liking, commenting, and sharing?

A driving factor for leaving a comment under political videos is anger (Elsayed & Hollingshead, 2022), which was also found to be a prime basis for incivility (Yu et. al, 2022). Incivility against out-group was found to lead to increased polarisation (Druckman et. al, 2019), showing the importance of user comments in political communication. For political user engagement, the effect of counter-attitudinal exposure and pro-attitudinal exposure was investigated in relation with uncivil comments and scholars argued that the anger induced by the content has to be strong enough to overcome the inclination to avoid interaction with opposing views (Yu et. al, 2022). Commenting under pro-attitudinal posts with uncivil comments was less than under similar posts with civil comments and that users are equally likely to respond to counter-attitudinal uncivil and civil posts (Yu et. al, 2022).

User engagement studies confirm that people tend to engage with entertainment videos over political ones on YouTube (Möller et. al., 2019) and in case of entertainment videos, the experience is further enhanced following exposure to comments on how enjoyable the video was (Möller & Kühne, 2019). Recent studies concluded that the focus of the comment elicited an affect only in case of eudaimonic videos, not in hedonic ones which implies that once a comment is deemed as entertaining, no further elaboration process is activated (Möller & Boukes, 2023).

What emerges as a research gap is the drivers of engagement under politicians videos in a context where exposure is designed by an algorithm rather than social circles (Feldkamp, 2021). This proposal aims to answer the call for more studies on comment analysis, in a non-Western context focusing on TikTok (Alafwan et. al., 2023). It was already established that humorous videos of politicians elicit more engagement on TikTok than political parties, however, neither the sentiment of such comments nor the potential driving factors of leaving a comment were investigated before.

RQ4: How does the sentiment of comments under Viktor Orbán's TikTok videos vary with the content characteristics of the posts?

Methodology

To address the research questions, a mixed-method approach is proposed. Firstly, a multimodal analysis will be conducted to effectively decipher the content of posts on TikTok and measure their impact on engagement. Secondly, a sentiment analysis is suggested to uncover the tone of the audience expressed in the comments, thereby shedding light on the impact of Orbán's TikTok presence on users. This comprehensive approach will provide a nuanced understanding of how the content characteristics of Orbán's TikTok posts influence user engagement and comment sentiment.

Building on existing examples using multimodal analysis to understand TikTok (Cervi, et. al., 2021), the coding of different elements, such as video, audio and text provides a sufficient approach to grasp the meaning-making practices of TikTok. Using multimodal analysis, the drivers of engagement can be assessed appropriately.

The format of the video will be assessed by categorizing the video as just a standard social media video or as a type of content which corresponds to a trend or challenge frequently used on TikTok (Cervi et. al, 2021). The main actors from the videos are categorized in the following according to the appearances: leader, common people, adversaries, celebrities and own party members as used by Cervi and colleagues (2021).

The content and visual elements of the videos are categorized according to appeal types: masculine, populist, traditional, gentle (developed using the works of Szebeni & Salojärvi, 2022 and Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023) and fun. Issue types mentioned are separated into salient (immigration, foreign policy) and permanent (domestic, social and economic policies)

(Bene et. al, 2022). Populist characteristics noted are negativity, anti-elite tendencies, people-centrism and describing others as dangerous taken from the same study by Bene and colleagues (2022). Entertainment is defined as hedonic and or eudaimonic, but the presence of humour, visual symbols, unexpected formats and twist end will be noted as well.

Regarding the captions used under videos they are differentiated according to informative, expressive and appellative content as used by Cervi and colleagues (2021). Also, emotions conveyed in the captions are distinguished using the six basic emotions: anger, fear, sadness, disgust along with joy and surprise following the practice of Cervi and colleagues (2021). Confidence was also noted, on account of it being often used in the dataset videos and since previously it was examined in research on populism and emotionality (Widmann, 2021). Visual effects, number of cuts, the speed of video regarding the visuals, and the sound effects, background music and loud music will all be collected to determine MSV values as used by Zhang and colleagues (2024).

A sentiment analysis is proposed to investigate the impression of commentators induced by the content of Viktor Orbán. This type of analysis can shed light on the general receptiveness of the TikTok audience on Viktor Orbán's content. Since previous literature found no evidence of the focus of the comment on the overall enjoyment effect of comments in case of hedonic comments (Möller & Boukes, 2023), sentiment analysis is a sufficient method to analyse which content combination induces positive or negative reactions.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection was achieved through the official TikTok API. Video IDs, descriptions, audio used, effect IDs, number of views, likes, shares, and comments, as well as the comments themselves, were collected using API access. Since the TikTok API uses archived data for video queries, the number of views, likes, shares, and comments represented significantly

inaccurate values compared to live data. Therefore, these entries were updated manually. The videos were collected from July 1, 2023, until January 31, 2024. This period was selected because the political timeline of Viktor Orbán did not include election campaigns or official high-profile visits from Pope Francis, allowing for an analysis of a more natural communication style by Viktor Orbán.

Following data collection and the manual update of the numeric values, the initial coding of the videos was performed to gain an understanding of the dataset before full-scale analysis. After finalizing the codebook, data was annotated according to the investigated elements present in the videos (see Appendix A for a detailed version of the codebook used). Videos made unavailable were excluded from analysis along with videos pinned on the prime minister's TikTok profile. As these videos are always on top of his profile page, data would have been skewed had the final dataset included them. The dataset includes 163 videos; however, the exploratory data analysis revealed 21 outliers based on the dependent variable engagement (sum of like numbers, share numbers, and comment numbers). With the removal of these outliers, the final dataset is composed of 142 videos.

When analysing the text comments gathered under videos, the most frequently used 150 emojis detected in the comments were transformed into textual data to capture a more valid sentiment intended behind leaving a comment. Non-Hungarian expressions and characters were removed from the comments using Python's `langdetect` function. To accurately describe the sentiment of a comment, the Hungarian Aspect-based Sentiment Analysis with the finetuned huBERT model, developed by Zijian Győző Yang and László János Laki (2023), was used. The unit of analysis was an individual comment under a video, but the final sentiment score of the videos was calculated using the weighted average values of grouped comments. The weighted average value took into account the sentiment label (-1 if negative, 0

if neutral, and 1 if positive), the probability score of that sentiment, and the number of likes the comment received.

The engagement of the videos included in the analysis ranged from 1,124 to 17,714 ($M = 5,665$, $SD = 3,613$), while sentiment ranged between -0.45 and 0.73, with a more negative number indicating a more negative sentiment ($M = 0.09$, $SD = 0.16$). The number of likes on videos ranged from 1,038 to 16,300 ($M = 4,992.06$, $SD = 3,279.81$). The lowest number of shares was 24 and the highest was 2,402 ($M = 574.67$, $SD = 388.89$). For comment numbers, the lowest value was 4 and the highest value was 636 ($M = 98.3$, $SD = 100.85$). This suggests relatively low average numbers of engagement and a slightly more positive leaning sentiment in the comment section during the observed period. Only 33% of the videos featured any populist elements with the most often used being negativity ($n=37$), closely followed by anti-eliteness ($n=30$), then endangering ($n=14$) and people-centrism ($n=8$). 42% of analysed videos mentioned at least one political issue, with the most often used one being foreign policy ($n=27$), then immigration ($n=13$) and domestic policy ($n=13$), followed by social policy ($n=10$) and economy and finance ($n=8$). The most widely used appeal was the fun appeal ($n=71$), while dominant appeal ($n=32$), populist appeal ($n=21$), traditional appeal ($n=10$), and gentle appeal ($n=8$) were less used. Out of the observed emotions, confidence was the most used ($n=85$), along with joy ($n=28$). Anger ($n=22$) and fear ($n=7$) were not as widely used in Viktor Orbán's TikTok content. The length of videos ranged from 6 seconds to 2 minutes and 15 seconds ($M = 34.46$, $SD = 21.48$). The message sensation value (MSV) ranged from 2 to 10 ($M = 6.15$, $SD = 1.52$), revealing that most of the content posted used either visual or audio effects and extra elements in the video, which could affect audiences.

Out of all the videos included in the final analysis, 43% used hedonic entertainment, while only 20% of the videos featured an eudaimonic entertainment style. The majority of videos

(n=74) used expressive text captions, with informative texts being the second most used (n=45), and appellative texts being the least used (n=23). Only a small portion of videos posted (n=35) made use of the trend or challenge format (specifically tailored to match the affordances and style of TikTok), while the vast majority of videos were presented in a social media compatible short video form.

Results

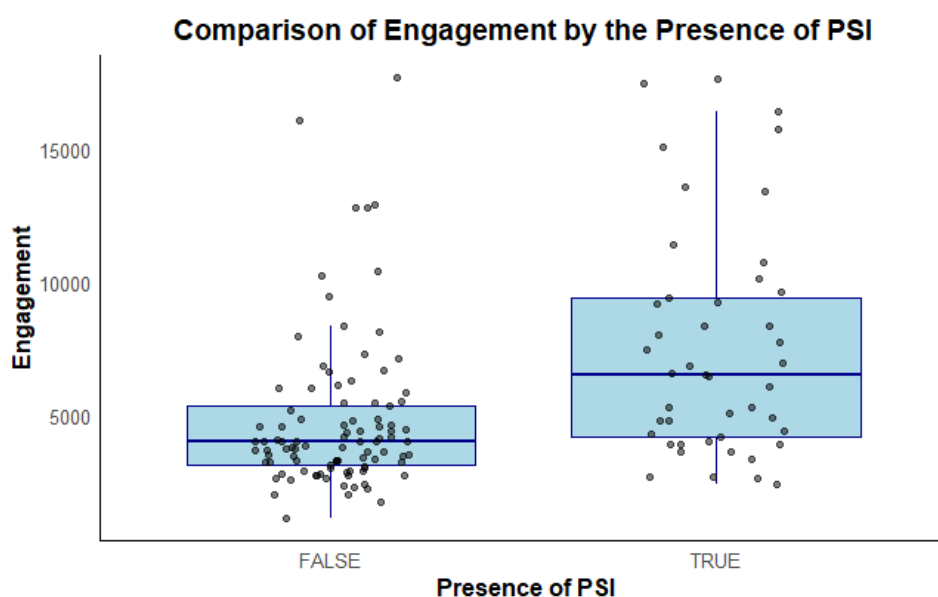
The Shapiro-Wilk test revealed that the dataset was not normally distributed for all hypotheses (W-values ranging from 0.787 to 0.890, $p < 0.05$); therefore, non-parametric tests were used for analysis. This thesis reports unstandardized results.

To examine H1 and the effect of identifiable characters compared to non-identifiable characters, the latter were defined as videos depicting only common people. The leader, the own party members, the adversaries, and the celebrities appearing in the videos were grouped as identifiable characters. The Wilcoxon rank sum test revealed no statistically significant difference between the engagement values of videos with identifiable characters and those without ($W=317$, $p=0.782$). Therefore, H1 is rejected.

H2 predicted that videos featuring only the party leader and prime minister, Viktor Orbán, would yield higher engagement compared to videos depicting him and other party members. However, a linear regression model between videos featuring only Viktor Orbán and those featuring him with his party members suggests a different observation. The Wilcoxon rank sum test uncovered that there is no statistically significant difference between videos featuring only the leader and those featuring him with his party members ($W=374$, $p=0.3457$). Hence, H2 is rejected.

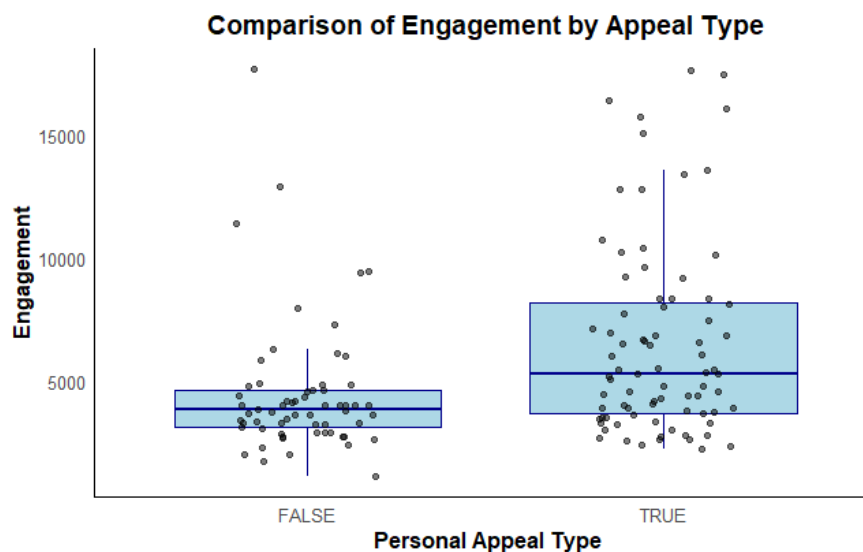
Interestingly, videos with party members received more engagement. Upon deeper investigation it was revealed that the majority of videos which featured party members were in a trend or challenge format. A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted and confirmed a significant positive relationship between party members in the video and challenge format ($r = 0.426$, $t = 5.576$, $df = 140$, $p < 0.001$) however, this observation had no statistically significant effect on engagement values.

H3 investigated the effect of parasocial interaction (PSI) on engagement, predicting that it would enhance engagement values. The Wilcoxon rank-sum test revealed a significant difference between videos using PSI and those not using PSI ($W=1189$, $p < 0.01$). PSI contributes to higher engagement values, hence H3 is confirmed.



2. Figure - PSI on engagement

To test H4a, appeals using a more politically masculine representation (dominant, populist, and traditional appeals) were grouped together, as well as personal appeals (gentle and fun appeals). The effect of personal appeals on engagement was tested in a Wilcoxon rank-sum test which revealed a significant difference ($W=1594$, $p < 0.001$) between personal and non-personal appeals and their impact on engagement, thus confirming H4a.



3. Figure - Personal appeals on engagement

First, to test H4b, the number of narrative elements present in each video (including populist characteristics, issues mentioned, humour, visual symbols, and expressive text messages) were added together. Additionally, the occurrences of positive and negative emotions were summed independently. This approach allows for a detailed analysis of how the narrative elements and the distinct emotions contribute to the overall impact of each video. Videos featuring a higher number of narrative elements than the median were categorized as having more narratives.

The multiple regression model regarding narrative elements and emotions revealed that the use of more narratives contributed to a significant decrease in engagement ($B=-0.299$, $t(138) = -2.77$, $p < 0.01$). The use of more positive emotions significantly increased engagement ($B=0.492$, $t(138)=3.28$, $p < 0.01$), while the positive impact of negative emotions were not significant ($B=0.145$, $t(138)=1.05$, $p=0.296$). Therefore, H4 is partially confirmed, with the use of positive emotions enhancing and the use of more narratives inhibiting engagement.

Table 1.

Regression coefficients of increased narrative elements and emotions on engagement

Variables	B	t	SE
More narratives	-.299**	-2.77	.108
More positive emotions	.492**	3.28	.150
More negative emotions	.145	1.05	.139

Note. N = 142 $p < 0.05^*$ $p < 0.01^{**}$ $p < 0.001^{***}$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0.109$

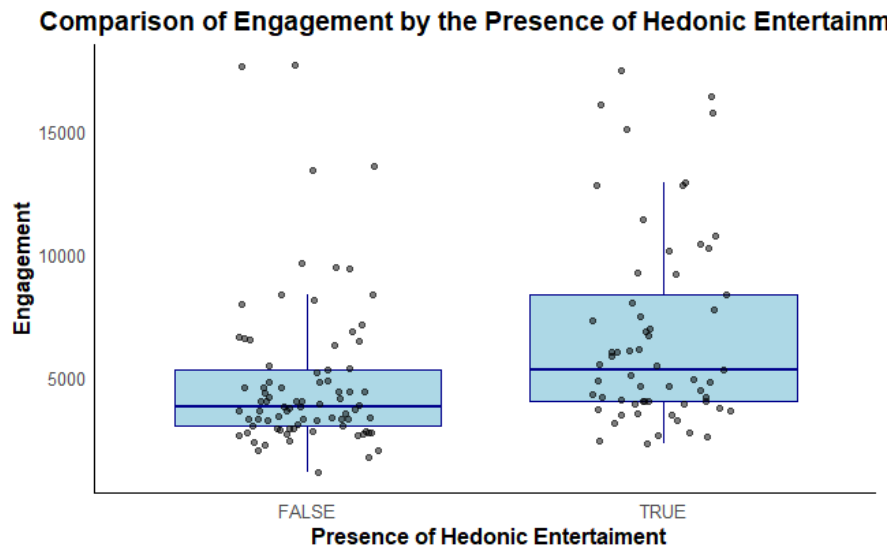
H5 considered the length of videos and proposed that medium-length videos enhance narrative transportation, thereby increasing engagement. To determine the difference between short, mid, and long videos, a one-way ANOVA was conducted, revealing no significant differences between different length types in eliciting higher engagement ($F(2, 139)=1.957$, $p=0.145$). Thus, H5 is rejected.

To test H6, the investigation of the MSV (Message Sensation Value) was required. As the normality assumption was violated, a robust linear regression model was used, which revealed a negative impact of high MSV values on engagement, however, the relationship was not statistically significant ($B= -0.020$, $p=0.488$), thereby rejecting H6.

RQ1 aimed to elucidate the relationship between the format and genre of Viktor Orbán's TikTok videos and user engagement. To test whether the trend or challenge format specifically influenced engagement, a robust linear regression model was constructed, considering the trend format ($B=0.339$, $p=0.208$), video length ($B=0.002$, $p=0.604$), MSV ($B=-0.03$, $p=0.330$), and appellative captions ($B=-0.011$, $p=0.945$). However, none of these characteristics revealed significant relations to engagement values, suggesting that these observations cannot account for the success of Viktor Orbán's presence on TikTok.

In the focal point of RQ2 is hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment types and their relation to engagement. To test whether hedonic videos receive more engagement compared to non-hedonic ones, a Wilcoxon rank sum test was performed, revealing a significant difference ($W=1567$, $p < 0.001$). However, in the case of eudaimonic entertainment, the same effect was

not observed ($W=1396$, $p = 0.281$). This result suggests that hedonic entertainment in videos yields significantly more engagement than non-hedonic entertainment.



4. Figure - Hedonic entertainment on engagement

RQ3 investigates the relationship between different levels of engagement (liking, commenting, sharing) and hypothesized content characteristics. As the Shapiro-Wilk normality test suggested, the share and comment numbers were not normally distributed; therefore, robust regression models were used to account for normality violations when investigating RQ3.

The use of personal appeals was found to contribute to greater like numbers ($W=1584$, $p < 0.001$). The inclusion of more positive emotions affected like numbers positively ($B=0.333$, $p < 0.001$), but the use of more narrative elements significantly decreased like numbers ($B=0.367$, $p < 0.05$). The use of negative emotions in case of like numbers did not yield a significant effect.

In case of sharing, personal appeals positively affected sharing numbers ($W=1766$, $p < 0.05$). However, the use of increased positive emotions did not contribute to higher share numbers

($B=0.385$, $p < 0.05$) and incorporating negative emotions did not yield a significant effect on share numbers and the same was observed regarding more narrative elements.

Table 2.

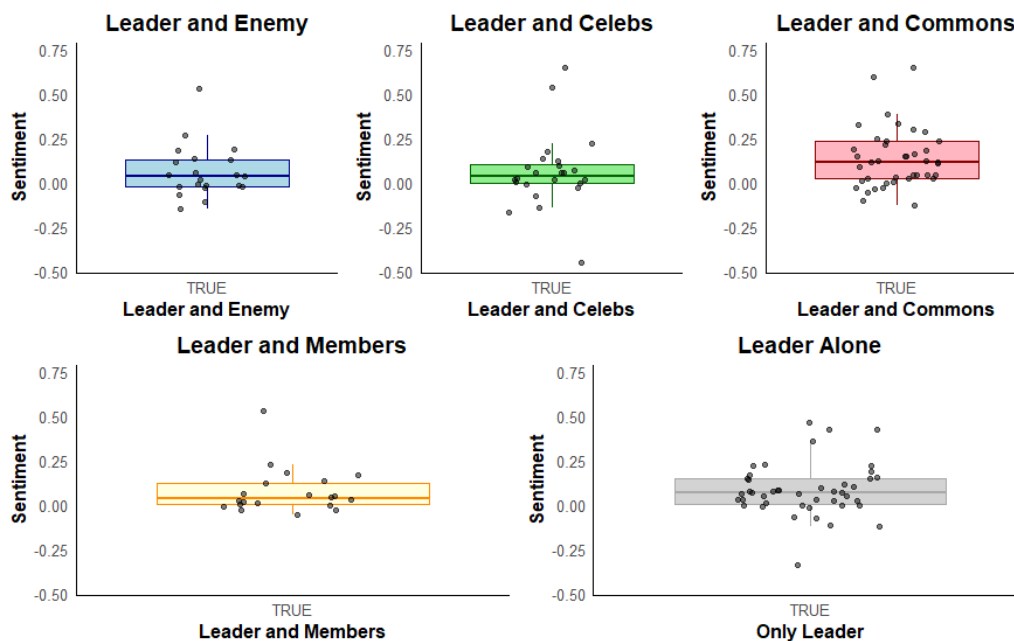
Regression coefficients of liking, sharing and commenting

Variables	Liking			Sharing			Commenting		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Narratives	-.262*	.102	-2.56	-.114	.103	-1.10	-.018	.167	-.107
Positive emotions	.526**	.174	3.02	.274	.221	1.24	.746***	.220	3.39
Negative emotions	.078	.111	.705	-.086	.123	-.69	.348	.213	1.64

Note. $N = 142$ $p < 0.05^*$ $p < 0.01^{**}$ $p < 0.001^{***}$

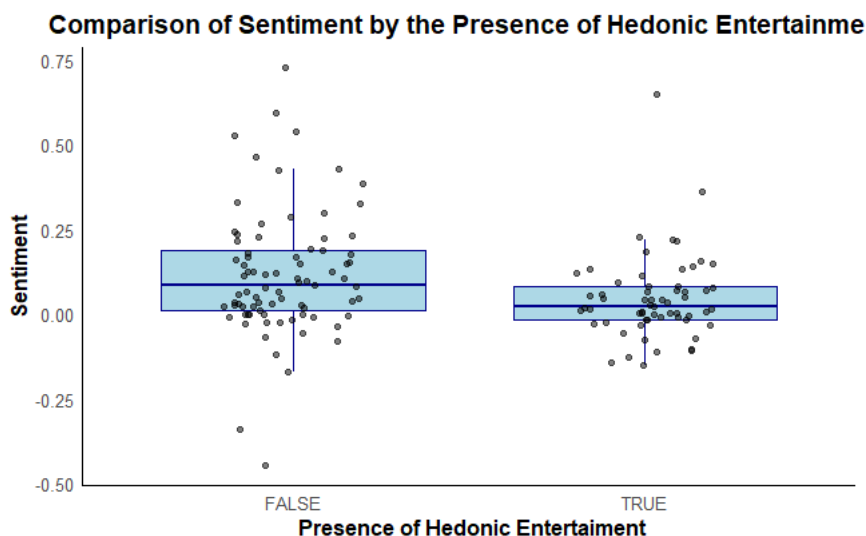
The driving force of comment numbers was the inclusion of positive emotions ($B=0.560$, $p < 0.001$) while negative emotions elicited no significant effect on comment numbers. The use of personal appeals was also not found to have a significant impact ($W=2310$, $p=0.486$)

To determine the sentiment of comments under videos, the Hungarian Aspect-based Sentiment Analysis with the finetuned huBERT model was used. After calculating the weighted average sentiment of each comment section in the dataset, the effect of content characteristics on sentiment was tested. A one or multi-way ANOVA was conducted for each content characteristic (format, PSI, actors present, issues mentioned, populist characteristics, appeals, emotions featured, entertainment type, and captions used), since this analysis method is fairly robust to handle normality violations.



5. Figure - Characters present in the videos and sentiment values

The results indicate that among actors in the video, only the presence of the leader and common people together had a significant positive effect on sentiment values ($F=(1, 140)$, $p < 0.01$). Regarding issues, social policy had a significant positive effect on the sentiment of comments ($F=(1, 130)$, $p < 0.05$), with foreign policy approaching significance and having a negative effect ($F=(1,130)$, $p=0.055$). Out of the observed populist characteristics, only endangering others approached significance with a negative impact on sentiment values ($F=(1, 134)$, $p=0.095$).



6. Figure - Hedonic entertainment on sentiment values

Hedonic entertainment type had a significant negative effect on sentiment ($F=(1,139)$, $p < 0.05$). None of the observed emotions had an effect separately on sentiment values, and neither did different leader appeals.

Table 3.

One-Way ANOVA results of binary content elements on sentiment scores

Content characteristics	Df	SS	MS	F	p	η^2
Appeal						
masculine	1	.021	.021	.961	.329	.00
personal	1	.018	.018	.832	.363	.00
Residuals	138	3.033	.022			
Issues						
immigration	1	.000	.000	.006	.939	.00
foreign policy	1	.080	.079	3.744	.055	.03
domestic policy	1	.014	.014	.635	.427	.00
social policy	1	.098	.098	4.598	.034*	.03
economic policy	1	.020	.021	.981	.324	.00
Residuals	130	2.78	.022			
Populist characteristics						
negativity	1	.035	.035	1.623	.205	.01
anti-elite	1	.000	.000	.019	.890	.00
people-centrism	1	.005	.005	.237	.627	.00
dangerous others	1	.062	.062	2.825	.095	.02
Residuals	130	2.92	.022			
Emotions						
anger	1	.047	.047	2.123	.147	.02
fear	1	.006	.006	.269	.605	.00

disgust	1	.005	.005	.234	.629	.00
Residuals	136	2.996	.022			
joy	1	.006	.006	.286	.594	.00
surprise	1	.033	.033	1.463	.229	.01
confidence	1	.005	.005	.229	.633	.00
Residuals	134	3.014	.023			
Entertainment						
hedonic	1	.119	.119	5.513	.020*	.04
eudaimonic	1	.002	.002	.094	.759	.00
unexpected form	1	.072	.072	3.348	.069	.03
surprise end	1	.002	.002	.100	.753	.00
trend format	1	.000	.000	.020	.887	.00
Residuals	128	2.7633	.026			
PSI	1	.011	.012	.52	.472	.00
Residuals	140	3.06	.022			
Text						
informative	1	.015	.015	.662	.417	.00
expressive	1	.008	.008	.382	.537	.00
appellative	1	.025	.025	1.151	.285	.00
Residuals	138	3.0241	.022			

Note. N = 142 $p < 0.05^*$

Upon closer inspection, it was revealed that videos discussing social policy were presented using eudaimonic entertainment style. A Pearson correlation was conducted to confirm a positive significant relationship between social issues discussed and eudaimonic entertainment style ($r=0.475$ $t=6.388$, $df=140$, $p<0.001$). Further significant relationship between this observation and sentiment scores were not found.

Continuous variables like length, MSV, and emotionality and their relationship with sentiment scores were tested using robust linear regression models, revealing that negative emotions had a significant negative effect on sentiment scores ($B=-0.038$, $p < 0.05$). Content characteristics eliciting some positive or negative effect on sentiment values were combined into two robust regression models, which confirmed the significance of hedonic entertainment ($B=-0.067$, $p < 0.01$) and foreign policy issues ($B=-0.062$, $p < 0.05$), while endangering and negative emotions were no longer found significant. In the case of a model investigating positive

effects on sentiment, the presence of actors and common people together was found approaching significance ($B=0.456$, $p=0.076$), while social policy was no longer significant.

Discussion

The positive impact of personal and positive content on user engagement

Young voters scrolling on TikTok might come across videos from Viktor Orbán, and in a non-election period, that content is likely going to use a personal appeal with positive emotions. This thesis found results that indicate the impact of PSI, verisimilitude and entertainment to be the most defining factors in eliciting higher engagement values, while the use of narrative elements impacts sentiment scores to the highest extent.

The results of the investigation revealed no significant effect of only the leader being featured in the videos to yield higher engagement numbers. Contrary to expectations, TikTok videos in which the leader was present along with members of his own party, received significantly more reactions, compared to videos in which adversaries or celebrities were featured.

The effect of identification with the characters present in the video was not found to reduce resistance towards persuasion with regards to engagement, but reduced resistance in the comment section. When Viktor Orbán was presented in videos together with common people, the sentiment of comments under the video were more positive, suggesting that the attempt to appear authentic and approachable does lead to more positive reception. This is line with the findings on the successful communication strategies employed by Greek politicians on YouTube (Mochla et. al., 2023). The presence of ordinary people and the leader in videos appealed to audiences as an authentic, likeable image and the findings in this study reveal that this positive effect is not only observable during election periods and transfer from YouTube to TikTok as well.

The impact of PSI on enhancing engagement is confirmed, videos which feature PSI receive significantly more engagement than videos without PSI. The way PSI reduces resistance towards persuasion is highlighted, further strengthening the claim that PSI and fostering an authentic, personal interaction with audiences is a significant driver of engagement and success in political communication as well as in YouTube videos by beauty bloggers (Rasmussen, 2018).

Interestingly, the inclusion of more narrative elements was not found to lead to more engagement on the TikTok videos of Viktor Orbán. However, personal appeals were found to enhance engagement, and the effect of positive emotions was significant. This finding reveals that fun and gentle – more personal – appeals are favoured on Viktor Orbán's TikTok by the audience compared to traditional, populist and dominant type of appeals. This is in line with the findings on the importance of personal and entertaining content in politics and their positive influence on engagement metrics (Keller & Königslöw, 2018). Although it must be noted, that the majority of videos observed did not include populist characteristics or issues mentioned and this coupled with the fact that Orbán's populist appeals were not found to fit into a traditional populist communication toolkit (Sonnevend & Kövesdi, 2023) might account for the fact that these types of narrative elements did not contribute to higher engagement numbers.

Also, the findings further strengthen the point that political success on TikTok is based on positivity (Zamora et. al., 2023) and the appeal of negative populist content by politicians is less effective on this platform. It also suggests, that issue types – neither permanent or salient topics – have a significant impact on engagement numbers, therefore it is less in the interest of the politician to rely on these in messages. Nevertheless, this reassures concerns over the lack

of TikTok content addressing policy issues directly over producing viral and relatable content in case of politicians (Moir, 2023).

This finding also confirms the abundance of positive emotions in content uploaded and their positive effect on engagement. By using more positive emotions, Viktor Orbán also contributes to downplaying the harmful effects of his political agenda. Relying on joy, surprise and confidence, Viktor Orbán is a populist actor in governance using the communication style of mainstream parties, to try and preserve the status quo (Widmann, 2021). This adds to the current scholarship on populism by further confirming the chameleonic nature of populism in governance and how populist leaders communicate in non-election periods. Viktor Orbán's party Fidesz can be regarded as a mainstream populist party, which adheres to the technological and cultural affordances of TikTok by uploading personal, positive content which enhances his visibility on the platform. In this way, his communication style on TikTok further promotes illiberalism indirectly, since the majority of his posts feature no direct engagement with policy issues, but promote his image as one with the people. Despite not using as many traditionally populist characteristic, relying heavily on his confidence and personal appeals can be considered populist in and of themselves (Moir, 2023). Especially, because this current TikTok communication contributes to an iconicity of Viktor Orbán by trying to condense his appeal into an ultimate charismatic one (Sonnevend & Kövesdi), in alignment with his social media strategy on Instagram and Facebook.

The impact of narrative elements on sentiment

Sentiment was found to be impacted significantly by the mentioning social issues, which influenced comments to be overall more positive. Videos with social issues were found to correlate with eudaimonic entertainment style, but this elicited no impact on sentiment scores. Also, the inclusion of negative emotions, relying on describing people as dangerous and the

topic of foreign policy impacted negatively the sentiment score of the comments. This highlights the importance of narrative elements in eliciting different type of comments under the video and is in alignment with studies emphasizing the impact of anger on driving negative comments (Elsayed & Hollingshead, 2022). As the scope of this thesis did not include the examination of the exact content of the comments, it is not yet revealed where that negative sentiment is directed. Future studies could utilize the EORM model to investigate whether resistance was reduced by content elements or strengthened by them, but still led to more engagement.

The format of the videos elicited no significant findings regarding the engagement of the videos and sentiments of the comments. Higher MSV values did not significantly decrease engagement, which could be explained by the fact that the TikTok account of Viktor Orbán is not deemed as official of a government channel for higher MSV values to inhibit engagement. Moreover, this suggests that the political nature of the content is not considered as formal as previously examined health topics, to prevent messages with higher MSV values from enhancing engagement.

This observation can also be explained by the fact that distracting elements in the message were found to decrease the focus on the narrative, thus restraining narrative transportation (Van Laer, et. al, 2014). However, if narratives had no profound effect in eliciting engagement, higher MSV values cannot detract from the focus, if the focus had no effect anyway.

The influence of format

The format of TikTok videos, specifically the challenge or trend format were not as widely used in the sample collected, but had no significant impact on engagement or sentiment. It must be noted, that Viktor Orbán did not feature any duet or stich with any other creator or in

response to any comments (a widely used feature on TikTok), which further describes his TikTok channel as an avenue for strictly one-sided communication, in which he continues to serve as the medium itself (Rétfalvi, 2022). Still, investigating the content of Viktor Orbán affirms the findings of Cervi and colleagues on fact that politicians use filters, music, effects to great extent but they still refrain from engaging in established trends or challenges, which would further cement their personalized image (2023). While Orbán did use videos created in a trend or challenge form, the ratio of such videos was relatively low. Not to mention that videos in this format vaguely resembled actual trends circulating on TikTok and were instead a loose adaption and amalgamation of different trend or challenge types and this could further inhibit this genre of videos from eliciting higher engagement.

The length of the videos had no significant effect on engagement or sentiment, highlighting that the duration of TikTok videos is not a deciding factor on its own to drive engagement. Previous studies on the impact of length on narrative transportation focused on videos with more distinctive length categories, in case of TikTok the difference was assessed on a smaller scale which proved to be a non-significant predictor of engagement. This also suggests a limited power of narrative transportation to reduce resistance in this case, as the length of TikTok videos, which typically generate greater involvement with medium-length messages (Ratcliff & Sun, 2020), had no effect.

The effect of entertainment

Regarding the entertainment and whether it can overcome resistance, the effect of hedonic entertainment was found to be impactful. Videos which feature this type of entertainment were significantly more likely to elicit engagement, while eudaimonic type of videos did not yield the same results. This highlights the importance of entertainment in overcoming resistance in case of the TikTok videos of Viktor Orbán and is in line with previous findings

on the positive impact of hedonic type of content in case of advertisements (Yang & Jiang, 2021). The findings of this thesis suggest that it is not only humour itself (González-Aguilar et.al, 2023) that drives more engagement than hate speech, but the fact that the content is meant to entertain and offer instant enjoyment on the platform. By revealing this, it adds to scholarship investigating the reception of political content on this platform by highlighting the fact that conceptually entertaining hedonic content is a key predictor of increased engagement, with a negative sentiment under Orbán's hedonic videos.

The impact of hedonic entertainment was found to be a significant negative driver of the sentiment of the comments under the video, suggesting that despite the video enhancing engagement, the audience received these attempts at entertaining slightly negatively. This should not act as a discouragement from using hedonic content on TikTok, but it reveals that while this type of content drives engagement, it may fuel negative reception. By enhancing engagement and increasing visibility, hedonic types of entertainment can drive content onto the TikTok For You pages of audiences who are not receptive to Viktor Orbán's messages and are potentially more likely to leave negative comments under the video. This could be explained by the tendency of young audiences coming from less established democratic environments to be less receptive towards political content presented to them on platform intertwined with their entertainment-seeking, (Schneider et. al., 2023) which is often through TikTok. While the enjoyment of a video is enhanced by exposure to comments having the same experience (Möller & Kühne, 2019), future research might delve into whether this holds in case of negative comments and enjoyment.

Another reason, why hedonic entertainment can prompt negative sentiment may be that resorting to this type of communication and trying to appear authentic on this platform Orbán actually loses authenticity. It was observed in a fellow populist leader Jair Bolsonaro's case

that the more he tried to appear as an ordinary member of the public through his Instagram page, the more ridiculous he became, thereby eliciting the opposite of what he intended (Mendonça & Caetano, 2021). Furthermore, in the flow experience of scrolling through TikTok, coming across a hedonic political content may disturb the experience and users are more likely to view the content negatively, since it may be deemed less congruent with the style and format of TikTok.

Difference in eliciting liking, sharing, commenting

In assessing how the content characteristics differed in driving social media engagement behaviours it was found that masculine appeals related negatively to like numbers, along with more narratives, while personal appeals and positive emotions prevailed in driving engagement. Sharing was not significantly influenced by narratives or emotions. Interestingly, commenting was only influenced by positive emotions. This is underscored by the findings of Lima and colleagues who looked at message characteristics and the behavioural, cognitive and emotional dimensions in eliciting responses and found that the message itself and verisimilitude had the biggest impact on eliciting behavioural dimension, like endorsing a message (Lima et. al, 2024).

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings of this thesis confirm that message characteristic which affect users on TikTok in reducing their resistance towards persuasion are related to PSI, verisimilitude and entertainment. Some narrative elements were not found to elicit the impact on engagement, which they could have in theory (like standard populist characteristics, or negativity) but were more impactful while discussing the sentiment of the comments under the videos. The results of this thesis draw attention to the fact that populist communication style on TikTok relies less on traditional political appeals and communication elements and is not even that dependent on

format characteristics, but uses personal and entertaining elements to maximize visibility and work the algorithm in its favour. This thesis joins scholars urging for more in-depth investigations into how these political communication styles affect young voters, as this growing tendency to dismiss engagement with policy issues corrodes democratic values and habits which affect young voters.

These implications are worthy to consider for both policy-makers and political communication professionals. Due to the majority of users being a young voter, ruler makers should definitely be aware that political communication and influence on this platform exerts influence differently, as this thesis argues, through capitalizing on iconicity. Content using personal appeals and hedonic entertainment elicits more engagement than political appeals, masking the political implications of engaging with such content. However, professionals can use this knowledge to maximize their potential in reaching younger voters, albeit the inclusion of policy standpoints and suggestions in political content on TikTok has the potential to demonstrate democratic values and increase youth's awareness.

Still, despite the results of this thesis adding to scholarship, it must be noted that content elements were annotated by one researcher and the inclusion of more viewpoints would have increased the validity of the results. Validity could also be increased by introducing a comparative element, since one of the most influential politician from the opposition (mayor of Budapest, Gergely Karácsony) is also active on TikTok and he might rely on other strategies to grab the attention of young people more successfully (Szász, 2024). Results should also be interpreted with the caution that the EORM was not used before in association with short-video formats, therefore, more evidence is needed that the application of this theoretical model holds on TikTok as well.

Also, this thesis uses the huBERT model for automated sentiment analysis, however, the model was not trained on social media texts, therefore, it is likely that a better trained Hungarian language model would have yielded more reliable results in the sentiment scores. As Hungarian social media language uses slang words, often taken from English, the creation of a more complex language model would be ideal to tackle similar future research attempts.

Conclusion

In this thesis the communication strategy of Viktor Orbán on TikTok was investigated using the Entertainment Overcoming Resistance model to explain the drivers of user engagement and the sentiment of the comment sections. Several factors contributing to narrative transportation, identification, verisimilitude, PSI and entertainment were collected from the videos, by examining the visual, audio and text components of the given videos to determine whether their presence elicits higher like, share and comment numbers.

The results of this thesis confirm the ability of the EORM to explain the different drivers of user engagement and sentiment values and adds to existing scholarship on populist and personalized political communication. Unlike on other social media platforms, populist political appeals by leaders were not found to contribute to engagement. Instead the impact of positive emotions and personal appeals was found to influence engagement with Orbán's content. PSI and hedonic entertainment also contributed to greater engagement metrics, highlighting the importance of these components of the EORM in reducing resistance.

In case of sentiment under the comments, authentic images with the public, mentioning social policy issues were found to positively relate to sentiment values. Negative emotions, hedonic entertainment type and labelling dangerous others as well as foreign policy issues were more likely to elicit negative sentiment under comments. This highlights the impact of narrative

elements in reducing resistance when it comes to commenting under a post – engaging in the highest form of social media engagement behaviour.

This thesis contributes to scholarship in many ways, firstly, in showing the fact that content by politicians on TikTok relies on positivity, through the use of entertainment to elicit engagement and work the algorithm in their favour and to reach younger voters. Secondly, it adds to implementations of the EORM by using it on an emerging digital platform and highlighting the different effect of narrative transportation, PSI verisimilitude and entertainment to reduce resistance towards political content and generate engagement and positive sentiment, thus confirming the power of EORM to examine political communication strategies. Thirdly, it presents the changing nature of populist communication in an illiberal democracy in which the governing populist party uses communication strategies previously attributed to be mainstream parties.

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Appendix A (Codebook)

VISUAL		
Genre		
	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
Video	A unique TikTok video which makes sense in its own context.	Video depicting Orbán shaking hands with politicians, taking photos with people.
Trend	A TikTok video that is intended to be part of a challenge or in its content it deals with a trending format on TikTok.	Video in which Orbán is answering questions about his personal preferences, or party members are all answering the same questions in one video
Environment		
	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
Political	The video takes place in a political setting.	Video set in a conference, in the parliament, giving a speech in front of an audience, giving an interview
Public	The video takes place in a public area.	Video in a car, in front of buildings, at a festival.
Private	The video takes place at home, or another private setting	Video set in leader's personal home or other people's personal home
Main actors		
	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
Leader	Prime Minister of Hungary	Viktor Orbán

Own party members	Ministers of the governing party, members of FIDESZ and identified international allies.	Tamás Deutsch, János Lázás, Judit Varga, Robert Fico, Recep Tayyip Erdogan	
Adversaries	Actors identified as enemies, or as forces to fight against.	Bureaucrats working for Brussels, immigrants, Ursula von der Leyen, Emmanuel Macron	
Common people	Civil people who appear in the video.	People who take photographs with Orbán, civilians who appear on stock footage.	
Celebrities	Well known people willingly appearing in the video, or through their meeting with Orbán	Donald Trump, Pope Francis	
Content			
	Dominant	Definition	Example
		Traditionally masculine, dominant leader role, showcasing the competence of Viktor Orbán, who is always there on the site of action as the first person of the country.	Videos showing the prime minister alone and focused talking or giving a speech
	Populist	Nationalistic, populist leader who has to fight the enemy to bring peace to his nation.	Videos showing the prime minister relying on “us” vs. “them” narratives

Leader appeal	Traditional	International, right-wing statesman, politically competent politician who is well-respected in the international community	Videos showing interactions with global and EU leaders, or other international states and shaking hands with political elite.
	Gentle	Gentleness displayed towards people and animals, being present and welcomed by the people	Videos showing caring interactions with voters, families, animals and being present at sites of 'action'.
	Fun	Appeal to show Viktor Orbán as a confident and approachable politician who knows how to have fun, in a personalized way.	Videos showing Viktor Orbán interacting jokingly, appealing in a less serious way.
Issue Type	immigration		Talking about the situation in Brussels regarding immigration initiatives or the situation at the southern border of Hungary.
	foreign policy		Discussing the situation between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine and the effects on Hungary.
	domestic policy		Talking about the opposition or any measure that is related broadly to the governing issues of the country.
	social and labour		Discussing the situation on young people, young mothers and the support offered for them to start a family.

	economy	Discussing inflation or any other financial measure.
Populist characteristics	negativity	Videos containing negative content of a refusing, hostile, disliking or hating nature.
	anti-elitism	Distinguished criticism of the elite. Criticising the decisions of the EU or the US.
	people-centrism	Reference to the people as being the most important. Highlighting the role of people.
	dangerous others	Reference to dangerous “others”. Reference to the dangers of immigration, or the planned laws of the EU.
Entertainment	Humour	Videos with an intended humorous element. Using a meme in the video.
	Visual symbolism	Videos integrating visual symbols of Hungarian nationalism. Reference to the flag, historical buildings, turul, military officers, red-white-green colour scheme.
	Unexpected format	Content is not predictable based on other TikTok videos of the politician. An entire video just memetizing the politician.
	Twist/Surprise end	The presence of a climactic, shocking end in the TikTok video. Ending the video with a meme template.
	Hedonic	Videos characterized by pleasurable experiences and quick delights, focusing on excitement and enjoyment.

	Eudaimonic entertainment	Videos delving into deeper, more meaningful experiences, seeking to provide a profound and thought-provoking experience.
PSI	Parasocial Interaction	The actors in the video face the camera, talk directly to the audience and make gestures towards the viewer.
Effects		
Number of cuts	Definition	Example
	The frequency of camera cuts.	The frequency to be recoded of 0–6, 7–14 and over 15 times as low (0), moderate (1), high (2).
Visual effects	Presence of visual effects.	
Slow motion/Sped up	Manipulation of the speed of the video.	
Bold or unusual colours	Varying text size, colour, or unnatural colours in the video.	
Length	The duration of the video in seconds.	
Valence/Tonality		
Negative	The video appeals on negativity to influence.	
Positive	The video appeals on positivity to influence.	
Neutral	The video is neutral in sentiment.	
AUDIO Music		
Sound saturation	Definition	
	Persisting sounds, such as conference noise rather than a person's	
Background music	Song playing in the background of the video	
Loud or fast music	Presence of loud or fast music in the video	
Sound effects	Use of sounds which are not occurring in the video naturally.	
TEXT		

Type of interaction		
	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
Informative	Caption text with the role of denoting	"This happened in April"
Expressive	Caption text aiming to provoke an emotion in the receiver.	"Merry Christmas!"
Appellative	Caption text as an incentive to incite a reaction.	"What is your favourite?"
Emotions		
	<i>Example</i>	
Anger	Ukraine's EU membership must not be put on the agenda!	
Fear	Peace will come when there is change in Brussels!	
Sadness	Let us pray for our Czech friends	
Joy	Advent with Alice, Annus and Berci 🍷🍷🍷	
Disgust	-	
Surprise	And what would you have looked like in the 1930s?	
Confidence	We will be right in the end!	

Abstract

Politicians increasingly use social media to maintain an authentic and direct line of communication with their followers. Despite growing attention to populist, right-wing political actors, the communication style of populist leaders in Eastern Europe on TikTok remains largely unexplored. This thesis investigates the drivers of engagement and the sentiment of comments under the TikTok videos of Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary, to decipher the reception by a younger audience in an illiberal democracy. By applying the Entertainment Overcoming Resistance Model (EORM), this study evaluates various content elements of TikTok videos to determine which components effectively contribute to user engagement. Using multimodal analysis coupled with automated sentiment analysis employing the huBERT model, the findings reveal that parasocial interaction (PSI), hedonic entertainment, and positive emotions significantly enhance engagement metrics. Furthermore, the inclusion of narrative elements prominently influences sentiment values, making them more distinctive. The analysis highlights how specific content strategies can overcome resistance and enhance viewer interaction and emotional response. This thesis provides valuable insights into the online engagement strategies of populist leaders and underscores the importance of content elements in shaping audience reactions. The theoretical implications suggest a need to reconsider traditional engagement models in the context of new media platforms, while the practical implications offer guidance for political communication strategies aimed at younger demographics. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of social media dynamics in political communication and the role of narrative and emotional content in driving engagement.

Keywords: user engagement, EORM, Viktor Orbán, huBERT model, TikTok, populism

Zusammenfassung

Politiker nutzen zunehmend soziale Medien, um eine authentische und direkte Kommunikation mit ihren Anhängern zu pflegen. Trotz der wachsenden Aufmerksamkeit für rechtspopulistische politische Akteure ist der Kommunikationsstil populistischer Politiker in Osteuropa auf TikTok noch weitgehend unerforscht. Diese Arbeit untersucht die Triebkräfte des Engagements und die Stimmung der Kommentare unter den TikTok-Videos von Viktor Orbán, dem ungarischen Premierminister, um die Rezeption durch ein jüngeres Publikum in einer illiberalen Demokratie zu entschlüsseln. Unter Anwendung des Entertainment Overcoming Resistance Model (EORM) evaluiert diese Studie verschiedene Inhaltselemente von TikTok-Videos, um festzustellen, welche Komponenten effektiv zum Engagement der Nutzer beitragen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass parasoziale Interaktion (PSI), hedonische Unterhaltung und positive Emotionen die Engagement-Metriken signifikant verbessern, indem sie eine multimodale Analyse mit einer automatisierten Stimmungsanalyse unter Verwendung des huBERT-Modells verbinden. Darüber hinaus beeinflusst die Einbeziehung narrativer Elemente die Stimmungswerte deutlich und macht sie unverwechselbar. Die Analyse zeigt, wie spezifische Inhaltsstrategien Widerstände überwinden und die Interaktion und emotionale Reaktion der Zuschauer verbessern können. Diese Arbeit liefert wertvolle Einblicke in die Online-Engagement-Strategien von populistischen Führern und unterstreicht die Bedeutung von Inhaltselementen bei der Gestaltung von Publikumsreaktionen. Die theoretischen Implikationen legen nahe, dass traditionelle Engagement-Modelle im Kontext neuer Medienplattformen überdacht werden müssen, während die praktischen Implikationen eine Anleitung für politische Kommunikationsstrategien bieten, die sich an jüngere Bevölkerungsgruppen richten. Diese Ergebnisse tragen zu einem tieferen Verständnis der Dynamik sozialer Medien in der politischen Kommunikation und der Rolle von narrativen und emotionalen Inhalten bei der Förderung von Engagement bei.

Schlüsselwörter: Nutzer-Engagement, EORM, Viktor Orbán, huBERT-Modell, TikTok, Populismus