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SURVIVAL OF THE SLOWEST. A CASE STUDY OF TWO SLOW JOURNALISM OUTLETS IN ESTONIA

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ABSTRACT

Slow journalism challenges the trend of speed-driven media and, applying the principles of the slow food movement, seeks to improve the media diet of the audience and counterbalance the effects of "fast food". Little research has been conducted on the interaction between its principles and funding. Thus, one goal of this case study of two media initiatives is to examine how this form of journalism survives and maintains its principles with a small audience and intense competition in a small country. Using a triangulation of semi-structured interviews, observations, and a qualitative analysis of annual financial reports, the principles of the founders and funders in the operation of two outlets for slow journalism are examined. Maintaining the principles of slow journalism presents some difficulties in funding and running the outlets. However, there is a middle ground, and the principles themselves subtly function as both an advantage and a control mechanism.

Keywords: slow journalism ▪ business models ▪ small market ▪ operating principles ▪ alternative journalism ▪ magazine journalism ▪ digital journalism ▪ time pressure ▪ founders ▪ triangulation

1. SURVIVAL OF THE SLOWEST.
A CASE STUDY OF TWO SLOW JOURNALISM OUTLETS IN ESTONIA

Contemporary society has undergone a process of acceleration, and journalism has been taken by the same wave. Response to the needs of the audience is accompanied by new technology, which allows for the acceleration of news production and is considered one of the guarantees of the profitability of journalism. As a counterbalance, the concept of slow journalism has been developed to supplement the media diet of the audience with healthier, high-quality journalism that is "good, clean, and fair", sustainable, and enjoyable, just like gourmet food, a luxury (Greenberg, 2007).

Since the term was coined, research on slow journalism has focused on Western countries, and the principles of the phenomenon have been defined by this research. Megan Le Masurier asserted (2015) that independent [slow journalism] magazines would collapse without profit, while noting that "small-scale independence allows

freedom from mainstream journalism organisations and their competing pursuit of profit and the ideology of journalistic speed" (Le Masurier, 2015), highlighting the potential tension between funding methods and the principles of slow journalism. This presents an important dilemma: when slow journalism outlets follow their ideals – by avoiding competition, scoops, profit-seeking, sensations, and celebrity (Berkey-Gerard, 2009) – they risk extinction.

Although the funding models of outlets have been briefly touched upon in previous studies, there has been no further investigation into how independent slow journalism outlets navigate between their principles and funding requirements and what – if any – conditions funders impose on these organisations. We examined two Estonian slow journalism outlets through interviews with two founders and three funders and used observations of editorial meetings and financial reports from both organisations to examine how they implement their stated principles and what compromises, if any, they make to survive.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF SLOW JOURNALISM

The concept of slow journalism was popularised in general terms by Susan Greenberg in Prospect Magazine in 2007, where she emphasised aspects such as depth, exceptionality, time spent, telling less-known stories, high-quality storytelling, and highlighting the essay, reportage, chronicle, and other nonfiction as a genre. Quality is later specified by David, Blumtritt and Köhler (2010) as a content and aesthetic principle and is also manifested in storytelling and narrative (Neveu, 2016). One aspect is sustainability – content that weathers the test of time (David et al., 2010) and goes beyond daily reporting. The literature review of slow journalism by Ines Mendes and Sandra Marinho (2022) showed that the words mostly used by researchers were slow, journalism, news, media, narrative, new, literary, quality, and documentary. But as Mendes and Marinho point out, the business model as a research approach is rarely used.

We noticed that the characteristics attributed to slow journalism revolve around the axes of why slow journalism should exist and what and how it seeks to achieve with the overarching theme of an ethical approach. For example, the goals of giving voice to the voiceless, i.e. underrepresented groups (Palau-Sampio, 2018) and creating understanding (Craig, 2016; Ball, 2016) are pursued by avoiding polarisation (Drok & Hermans, 2015), sensationalism, celebrity and competitiveness, focusing on quality and untold stories (Berkey-Gerard, 2009), diving into topics and being creative (Greenberg, 2007), using narrative storytelling frequently (Neveu, 2016), treating both contributors (Rauch, 2018) and audiences fairly, and giving both time to engage with the topic. The stories are often long (Le Masurier, 2015), entertaining and balanced (Greenberg, 2013), ethical, thorough (Gess, 2012), and complement fast-paced news journalism (Drok & Hermans, 2016). Le Masurier (2015) notes that not all forms of slow journalism are the same; they can have different focuses and

genres – some are more investigative, others focus on collaboration or local communities. Greenberg emphasises that a long story provides the opportunity to add more nuance and consider counterarguments, giving the writer time to recognise their biases (2013). At the same time, not every longer story (although it usually requires a longer form to go in depth) or every outlet with a long publication interval is necessarily slow journalism. Le Masurier (2015) notes that a slow publication cycle increases the opportunity to enjoy the reading and that it is likely to be alternative and small media. In addition, there are the possibilities offered by the medium: first, the permanence of print media; and second, the linear nature of the print medium, which promotes enjoyment of what is read (Le Masurier, 2015; Abrahamson, 2015). According to Harold Gess (2012), the slow food ideal of "good, clean, and fair" means information that matters to the community is thoroughly researched, of high quality, ethical, does not harm the community, and avoids stereotypes. Depth can balance speed, as readers who feel that more constructive and in-depth stories offer a broader and richer insight into the topic are also more likely to engage with the story (Kormelink & Meijer, 2020). Lydia Cheng (2021) summarises the arguments of previous researchers: the concept of slow journalism is more descriptive and less prescriptive, flexible rather than rigid.

Another way to define something is to examine what it is not (Cheng, 2021), i.e. "anti-branding" (Dowling, 2016). Since slow journalism emerged in response to the problems of fast-paced media, it defines itself in part by opposing or complementing them (Drok & Hermans, 2016). From its inception, the slow journalism philosophy has been linked to dissatisfaction with the ever-increasing pace of other forms of journalism, abundance of advertising (Dowling, 2016) and the problems this creates for both the public and journalism (Le Masurier, 2015; Reinardy, 2010). Opposition to other media or its attempt to improve it is also expressed in the news values of slow journalism, it is foremost guided by editorial values rather than news values (Carretero & Barriain, 2016); the emphasis is on an editorial philosophy that dictates the style, topics, and approach. Slow journalism has similarities with other forms of journalism (see Figure 1), but it differs in its core concept: it is non-competitive, places more emphasis on context than speed, takes time to research, focuses on storytelling, values accuracy and quality, does not try to be the first to report, and avoids celebrities, sensationalism, and high-profile events (Berkey-Gerard, 2009). Slowness is only one principle, albeit important; it is a tool that helps achieve its goals by taking time (in data collection, creation, shaping, publishing, and consumption) to focus, reflect, dig deeper, search for appropriate sources, create context, enjoy, etc. Slowness helps to appreciate the "other" (Ball, 2016; Thomas, 2016). Because of its slowness, it can focus on these parts of society that otherwise go unnoticed or unreported; it is not constrained by time pressures to use authorities as sources (Craig, 2016).

It is not detached from other journalism fields but instead is related to other forms, such as public and solution oriented constructive (Hermans & Drok, 2018), narrative-based, personal storytelling of literary, long-form New or gonzo journalism

(Romero-Rodríguez, Tejedor & Castillo-Abdul, 2021, Belt & South, 2016) that enable the audience to connect the unfamiliar to the familiar to understand events (Krieken, 2019). It is similar to investigative journalism, which can also be of high quality, long, and comprehensive and can open up new topics by playing the role of a watchdog. Rauch (2018) adds similarities for example with creative nonfiction, and citizen journalism. The latter is similar to slow journalism in that it is collaborative (Le Masurier, 2015), but although the contribution of the audience is important, it is not central. Craig (2016) adds that data journalism and disaster reporting also share similarities with slow journalism by taking time and using public input. Le Masurier adds the term "slow magazines" when researching indie magazines (2020) that are often small-scale, alternative, critical, and not profit oriented and mentions "slow lifestyle" magazines with the example of *Kinfolk*. Cheng (2021) compares slow journalism and "lifestyle" magazines. The latter can also have a slow publication cycle, but Cheng draws the line by their content, focus, and approach, as these magazines focus on how they can simplify the personal lives of their audience rather than solve societal problems (Cheng, 2021), nor do all of these necessarily have a slow publication cycle.

In order to differ from other forms of journalism, slow journalism should follow some principles that distinguish it from other forms of journalism; we call these the operating principles of slow journalism, which justify its existence and explain its role in the wider field of journalism and society. The operating principles of slow journalism can be defined by the content, the working processes, or the specific relationships with its audience, all of which follow the core mindset of social responsibility of the outlet. Theodore Peterson (1984) described six tasks of journalism in the social responsibility theory as providing information and discussion; enlightening the public; safeguarding the rights of the individual; servicing the economic system (advertising); entertainment; and maintaining self-sufficiency. Slow journalism operates (or is expected to operate) on the principles that prioritise the first three: the needs of the community and understanding come first. Certainly, slow journalistic outlets can be and often are also entertaining, have a viable business model, and can include advertisements, but these are viewed through the prism of the first three, and in cases of conflict, preference is given to these. The overlap of the concept of slow journalism with other forms and genres of journalism is shown in Figure 1, which is based on the generalisations of the extensive literature review for this study.
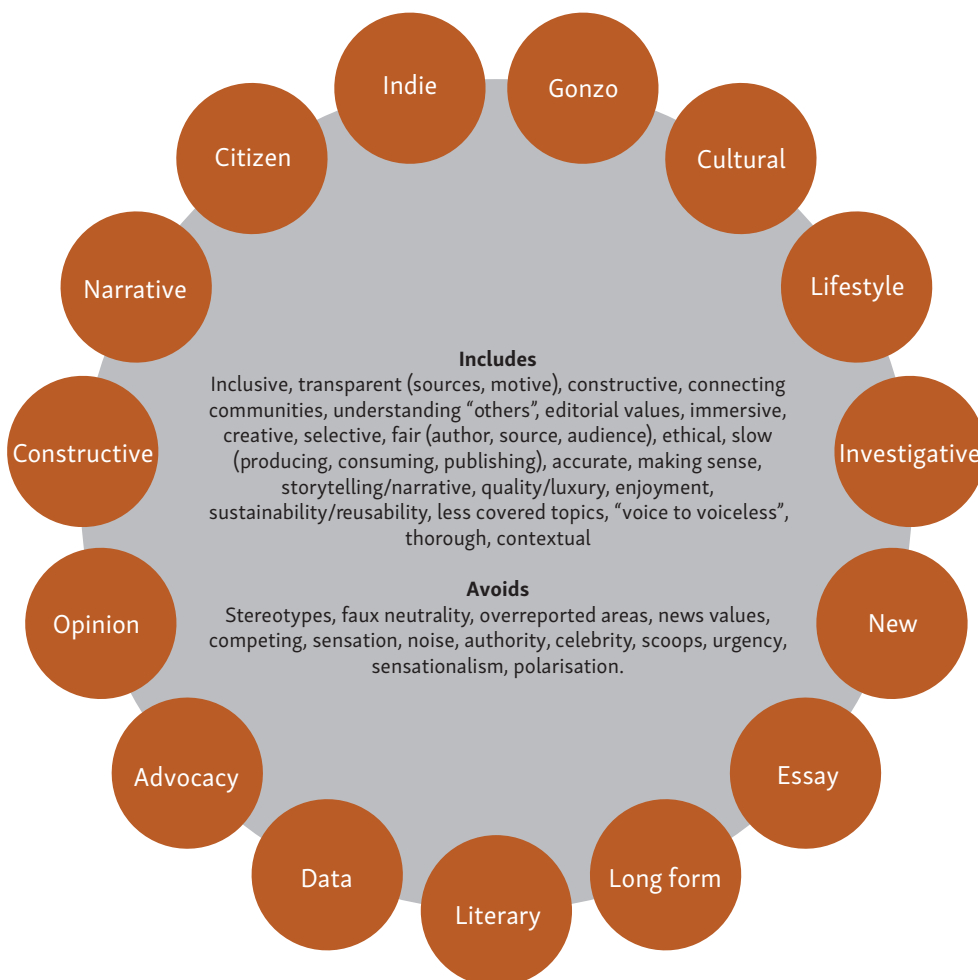
Figure 1: Slow journalism principles (central circle) and associated forms and genres of journalism (surrounding circles) based on authors in paragraph "Characteristics of slow journalism".

As one can see, a large part of the principles of slow journalism comes from the desire to balance the problems associated with the revenue or survival oriented management of the outlets that is prevalent in other media, which in turn often leads to the very problems that slow journalism seeks to avoid and counterbalance. Since slow journalism tries to alleviate the problems that come with that kind of approach, it can't use the same operating principles and its ways to fund its activities are limited. It has to find new business models, at the same time trying to uphold high standards and costly principles that should help avoid the pitfalls of fast-paced media.

For the current research, the question is how the operating principles of slow journalism, which set high ideals for journalistic production, can be implemented in practice. To answer this question, we examine two cases from a small media

market where economic realities can limit their ability to uphold the ideals of slow journalism.

3.   CASE DESCRIPTION AND METHODS OF STUDY

3.1.   Case description

We examined two media outlets in Estonia that practice slow journalism. These are *Edasi* and *Levila*, outlets that combine written, audio, image and video formats in their content. They operate in Estonia, which has a population of 1.3 million, where the media market is saturated and highly competitive (Kõuts-Klemm et al., 2019). The media sector in Estonia is primarily shaped by the rules of the market and the behaviour of the audience; the revenues of media companies are threatened by global companies, and resources for the production of quality journalism are declining (Kõuts-Klemm et al., 2019). Although there are a variety of outlets, which could mean a diverse media landscape, many of them are concentrated in commercial media houses. Journalists are expected to produce "units" quickly without much time to process information (Himma-Kadakas, 2018). Against this background, it seems rather difficult for a niche outlet to build its business model on demanding journalistic production principles and sustain its business in the form of slow journalism.

Edasi (founded in 2016) and *Levila* (founded in 2019) have chosen relatively different formats. *Edasi* describes itself as slow journalism, publishes a quarterly print magazine with most of its online content behind a paywall. *Edasi* publishes advertisements. Its articles cover social, cultural, business, lifestyle, travel, and well-being topics, and are often published as analytical opinion pieces by experts and as interviews (*Edasi*, 2022). The outlet *Levila* calls itself a media lab (*Levila*, 2022) and experiments with formats and genres (radio plays, documentaries, articles, comics, books, short web comedy series), focusing on social issues. Their long pieces are not published regularly. *Levila* does not publish advertising, and the content is mostly free. It also offers several donor packages that provide varying degrees of access to editorial workflows and the opportunity to get an overview of what goes on behind the scenes; the most expensive package allows people to suggest story ideas. In both outlets, the founders serve as editors-in-chief.

Both outlets have funders, but while *Levila* relies heavily on funding from investors and donors (in 2021, its profit was €-573,480, personnel costs were €413,482 and revenue was €34,561), *Edasi* is mainly financed by operating revenues (in 2021, its profit was €1,109, personnel costs were €107,515 and revenue was €294,680, with sales revenues increasing from €38,405 in 2017 to €283,233 in 2021) (annual reports of *Edasi* and *Levila*). As both companies are balancing their operating principles and their financial capabilities, the study will show how they strike a balance between the two in the long run.

3.2. Methods of study

Interviews were conducted with the founders and funders to formulate the operating principles. As the second method, we observed their workflows and interactions during editorial meetings, with 10 participants. For background information, we studied public data from their websites and financial reports submitted to the tax authority and Estonian financial institutions. We conducted semi-structured interviews with both the founders and the main funders of the outlets – five interviews in all from February to June 2022. The interviews with the founders lasted about 1.5 hours and took place in person, while the interviews with the funders lasted on average half an hour and were conducted via Zoom. All five interviewees were male and aged between 30 and 60 years.[1] The questions were prepared based on previous studies and information published on the websites of *Edasi* and *Levila* and in other outlets.

The observations in *Edasi* and *Levila* took place six months after the interviews. The observations in four newsroom sessions lasted approximately 2 hours, with the number of participants ranging from four in one newsroom to six in another. During the sessions, the passive observer took field notes on topics based on keywords that related to the previously conducted interviews or were otherwise relevant to slow journalism and its principles based on literature. The participants in the observations were the editors-in-chief (e.g., the founders), authors (*Levila*), editors, and assistant to the editor-in-chief (*Edasi*). The observer avoided active interaction with the participants during the observations, although he did respond to questions when asked (mostly by editors-in-chief).

To analyse the interview transcriptions and observation notes, we used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis protocol. We used keywords appearing in previous research: polarisation (conflicts, politics, etc.), fairness (sources, writers, pay, etc.), time (fast, slow, taking time, urgency), principles, focus (issues), responsibility, clicks (clickbait), society, audience, contributors, quality, celebrity (fame), sensationalism, funding, advertising, noise, reach, ethics, sources (giving voice), periphery, sustainability, competition, storytelling, form (genre), timeliness, and enjoyment. The participants in the study gave their informed consent, confirming that they are aware of the aims of the study and their confidentiality.

In order to analyse the operating principles of the outlets, we sought answers to the questions of how the founders and funders decided on the establishment of the outlet, what goals they set for themselves and the outlet, and what challenges they faced in operating the outlet. On this basis, we formulate the main operating principles of the outlet and highlight the tensions between the overarching principles and everyday practice.

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1 The gender imbalance is explained by the fact that in Estonia the amount of female top leaders is less than 40%, being still much higher than in other Western countries (Grant Thornton, 2021).

4.   RESULTS

The interviews with the editors and funders of the slow journalism outlets show that starting and running an outlet in general, and a slow journalism one in particular, presents a number of challenges, especially in a small media market, from funding to reaching audiences and finding contributors.

4.1.   Slow journalism focuses on social issues, not on profit

The founders and funders cited general problems with journalism as their main driver to engage in slow journalism to counteract the click economy that divides society and incites adversarial social discussions using a plethora of gossip, negativity, sensationalism, the mixing of broadsheet and tabloid content, an excess of advertising, and noise. *Edasi*'s founder and editor-in-chief cites the outlet's goals as building bridges between different strata, offering analytical articles to counteract the abundance of information, creating quality journalism, and expanding Estonia's landscape of thought.

> R2: When you talk to people on the street about journalism, what do they generally say? They agree that there is an overabundance of information, that there is a lot of negativity, and that serious reporting is mixed with yellow [journalism]/.../with advertising, right? And that usually leads to a person scrolling. Why does he scroll? Because he cannot find relevant content.

He also adds a personal motive: he felt the need to be needed, self-realisation, and improving the world.

The interviewees noted that it is difficult to start a new niche media outlet in the Estonian media market without resorting to the proven business principles of advertiser attraction, sensationalism, and clickbait headlines.

> R5: The daily media seems to be focused on shorter targets and more scandalous headlines. The business model, which is very click and advertising based, breaks into the newsroom, where there is a ranking [of pieces] on the wall of which stories got more clicks today – then you get stories that get clicked. At the same time, we all consume global media, and you can take any weekend edition of *The Atlantic* or *The New York Times* with a long story, read it with interest, and know that the journalist behind it had some kind of an incentive model that allowed them to spend six or twelve months researching the story, so you get something completely different. And we felt like there could be more of that.

The outlets are quite autonomous from the influence of funders, as the funders do not interfere in their daily activities or management, citing lack of time and expertise. However, they are informed about the activities every 6 to 12 months, and the positive aspect of this systematic contact was highlighted: it builds trust. One funder was part of the original founding team and communicates regularly with the founder, but is otherwise not involved.

The funders felt that Estonian entrepreneurs have reached a level of maturity, or a sufficient level of prosperity, where they no longer looked simply for financial gain but donated money out of a sense of mission and a desire to improve society. The funders' point of view is important here: they speculated that journalism as a whole and these outlets in particular are probably not a profitable business. However, for the good of society, they and other entrepreneurs believe they should support these outlets, while at the same time stating as a criterion that they would cut funding if the outlets resorted to the same methods and principles as other media, thereby making the outlets' operating principles their control mechanisms that motivate the funders either to support or quit supporting the given outlet according to the choices it makes.

4.2. Slow journalism outlets use editorial values instead of news values

While respondents were concerned about the state of journalism in general, they also said they had adopted some specific ways to achieve their goals and provide more thorough, high-quality journalism. We explain the principles in two dimensions: how they compile content, and what tensions exist between the principles of compiling content and reality. From the interviews, it appears that editorial rather than news media values apply (Carretero & Bariain, 2016). The observations show that during the editorial meetings of *Levila*, participants discussed how the outlet should differ from other media, look for other topics, try to tell stories through experiences, avoid judgment, and not act as a typical piece of investigative journalism or national television.

An interviewee from *Levila* told us that each year they choose a few focus areas for the outlet, carefully selecting topics they are going to address. For example, *Levila*'s main topics for 2022 were nature and mental health. With problem stories, *Levila* also tries to show the audience constructive ways to cope with the problems and, in this way, reduce anxiety.

In putting together *Edasi*'s content, an interviewee said the focus is on quality, connecting people, and creating understanding, rather than dividing groups, and one of *Edasi*'s slogans is "less noise". On the basis of the observations, the participants in *Edasi*'s editorial meeting discussed how the stories should be constructive, not divisive, and headlines shouldn't be clickbaits. The interviewee describes quality as something that is made with heart and dedication, that pleases the creator himself,

that is thoughtful, has no mistakes or typos, retains its value for a long time, and is aesthetic, citing Apple products as an example.

> R2: I want to surround myself with things that are made with dedication and heart. If you make something with heart, people will like it, so it's the same with *Edasi* – in a way, we are making a magazine for ourselves /.../. One that's beautifully packaged, with stories in it, and I want this product in my life.

One of the ideals of *Levila*'s founder is the principle of "cooperation rather than truth". He illustrated it by saying that social discussions tend to focus on their own truth and turn into controversy, but discussions should start from the truth that the parties share, and from there the problem can be dissected. One of *Levila*'s goals is to create this common space, using the dialogical principle of slow journalism (David et al., 2010). *Levila*'s interviewee also consistently emphasised respect – both to the sources and to the audience – and hopes to create a trusting relationship this way. We noticed during the observations that when discussing sources at an editorial meeting, the participants kept in mind that the sources shouldn't be harmed and tried to come up with ways to offer something in return for their trouble.

Both founders and funders emphasised that the main principle of the outlets is to create socially relevant content rather than to be commercially profitable. At the same time, observations showed that *Edasi* places greater emphasis on profitability. The sentiment of being relevant but without causing stress for both writers and readers, as well as being timeless, is cited as one of the goals of the outlets.

> R4: It [*Edasi*] is so stress-free, right? Like ... this slow journalism is a good expression; it characterises it well /.../ even six months after publishing, simply log in and read, and there are interesting approaches from people on [various] topics; I really like it. Some stories are really timeless.

Observations showed that both outlets still use topicality as a tool (seasonal topics like picking mushrooms in autumn) but not as a focus, more as a storytelling instrument (discussing picking mushrooms against the backdrop of nature and deforestation, in accordance with editorial values).

The recurring principles of slow journalism mentioned in the interviews and during observations were working long and meticulously with sources, transparency (avoiding anonymity), avoiding polarisation, focusing on community, reaching underrepresented groups and sources, using the long form and editorial values rather than news values, and quality assurance. The observations confirmed the application of these in practice.

> R1: I realised that this is how you can do it – that you do not polarise, you do not judge, you just go over the topic with people as if you were on a journey. From that, the strategy evolved /.../ the next most important thing is that we give voice to persons [sources] and do not bend their words.

During the observations, timeliness and timelessness were discussed repeatedly. Journalists tried to find ways to rise above the superficial and expiring nature of everyday reporting, but current events could not be ignored altogether since one problem arises from the tension between timeliness and slowness: while editors see the timeless nature of published content as one of their values, topical events of great significance can interfere with their production cycle. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine made some nearly finished stories obsolete.

Edasi's interviewee believed it is important to use well known experts in the field who, in addition to their expertise, love their field and can speak well about it. Observations showed that during the editorial meetings, the possibilities of involving various renowned co-authors, their competence and storytelling skills, as well as their prominence were discussed. In addition to the magazine's credo of being "inspiring and educational", the interviewee also articulated the premise of addressing "complex topics simply and simple topics interestingly", which limits the choice of contributors. While *Levila* had trouble finding contributors who met the expectations of the outlet, *Edasi*'s founder had no problem finding contributors and linked the impact of the magazine to that of the writers.

While *Levila* operates mostly without revenue from their content, they simultaneously pay more for their authors' work and give them more time (up to a few months) to research and create content, which is consistent with slow journalism's principle of treating writers fairly (Rauch, 2018). The principle of fair treatment of co-writers or assistants was also observed at the editorial meetings.

Both founders were aware of the paradox that arises when monetisation opportunities collide with the ideals of the outlet in finding advertisers, subscribers, and funders and in creating stories: if you produce more and are more aggressive content, funding and audiences are likely to be bigger, but you would have to compromise on your ideals to do so.

Edasi's interviewee noted that these small and slow media outlets are competing with larger, well-established, and faster media outlets, and audiences do not discriminate between whether they are small or large. They expect the same level of quality, even if the smaller outlet has fewer resources. He added that the small outlet must be even better than a large one to remain competitive and compared the outlet to Estonia, which is small but unique, necessary for the world.

It was observed at the meetings that the focus was on creating content that is different from other, faster forms of journalism.

> Editorial board member: If we used the same storytelling style [as other media], it would go faster.
> R1: We don't want that.

4.3.   Slow journalism is in the service of the audience

According to the founders, the goal is not to create slow pieces; a thorough breakdown and inclusion of sufficient context of the subject require a longer format, but creative techniques are used to engage the audience (Gauxachs, Sanz & Bosch, 2019). The founders said that in choosing topics and the manner in which they are told, one criterion is the values or goals of the outlet, while the other is the impact on society and the audience. In terms of audience, *Edasi*'s interviewee was pleased with the results of media monitoring, which showed a wide range of readers, but *Levila*'s interviewee was concerned about reaching outlying areas. The observations confirmed *Levila*'s daily goal of reaching and reporting on places and people outside the main population centres. They struggle to find a concept that appeals to an audience different from their own group (founders, funders, contributors) and who would also be willing to pay for content; they want to reach a broader audience.

One of *Edasi*'s mottos is "complicated made simple", and the editor-in-chief admitted that because of his teaching background he also thinks good language is important. *Levila*'s founder said that experts used as sources in the media tend to use elitist (e.g., bureaucratic) language that is hard to understand. He emphasised that if the audience were not offered free, high-quality, unifying journalistic content, they might turn to websites that offer free content but whose goal seems to be to polarise society.

> R1: We want to increase our audience outside of Tallinn [capital city of Estonia]. /.../ I feel that young people like us more for our design and essence, but young people do not visit our website often enough because the content is not directly targeted at them.

Finding a funding model proves difficult due to the paradox between the outlet's principles and its funding possibilities. Since the goal is to unite and not polarise the audience while reaching a less affluent audience in outlying areas outside the capital, *Levila*'s interviewee explained that content cannot be placed behind a paywall. Nor is it possible to use controversial titles, scoops, sensational items, or clickbait and thereby attract the curiosity of advertisers and the audience.

> R1: And our problem as to why we cannot make money ourselves is that maybe with a paywall we would immediately hit the same problem; we would be talking to people who are similar to us. People like us are already our audience and are also willing to pay money for it /.../ maybe we would

not get rich enough to cover all our expenses, but we could make a normal income /... / we deliberately avoid that.

One of the donors of *Levila* said he believes that paywalls cause audiences to move to other sites that offer free access to low-quality content.

> R5: When you put good content behind a paywall, you create space [in the media landscape] for bad content.

4.4. Tension between journalistic self-fulfilment and sustainability

Since the analysed outlets were born out of personal dissatisfaction (both founders and funders) with the media landscape, and in part represent a path to self-realisation, the question is how sustainable they can be in transferring personal motivation to organisational operation. *Levila*'s interviewee explained that, on the one hand, they are still looking for a sustainable funding model, but the goal is not necessarily to survive at any cost; instead, they aim to improve society and the media landscape, and if this results in a few good articles that serve as examples for other outlets, then the goal is already achieved. At the same time, the founder considers the desire to survive at any cost, sacrificing values and ethics in order to publish, maintain institutions, and make a profit, to be some of the biggest problems facing the Estonian media.

> R1: I understand, it [survival] is quite reasonable and all. But what if we just did the best we can? And then comes the moment of truth: do we close or not, does someone give us more money or not. It [the outlet] does not have to last forever, but if these stories make a difference by that point, well, then that's good enough.

According to the founder, *Edasi* has approximately five major donors, in addition to subscribers and advertising. 85% of the income is self-earned, and more than half of the income comes from subscriptions and retail sales, with the remainder coming from advertising, book sales, and video projects. The smaller circulation of a small magazine and the relatively high cost of advertising are obstacles in finding advertisers, which they try to counter by emphasising the aspect of social responsibility: the importance of supporting a socially responsible magazine that creates value for society and reaffirms the trend of philanthropy among business circles.

> R2: It is a challenge to talk to these companies [and make clear] the fact that it fits well with the concept of socially responsible business, just like I mentioned earlier: slow journalism, less noise /.../ For companies and those who invest, the topic of how you give back to society is becoming more and more important.

At the beginning, *Edasi*'s articles were free, and the reader was offered the opportunity to donate voluntarily; however, as with *Levila*, this did not generate enough income. Now *Edasi* publishes advertisements but doesn't do it indiscriminately; advertisements have to add value and offer something meaningful to the reader. During the observations while discussing the publication of special issues, the participants considered its profitability but also its benefits to readers and advertisers.

Levila's interviewee does not rule out the inclusion of advertisements, but considers that, given the small size of Estonia, there are not many advertisers suitable for this niche outlet. He considers it a possibility that alternative journalism in Estonia can only survive with the help of funders, but is still looking for new funding methods. He also noted problems with using international funding platforms like Patreon, since less tech-savvy monolingual audiences can't necessarily be expected to use these.

A significant contrast between the outlets was apparent during the observations at the editorial meetings, which is not only related to their format: at *Edasi*'s meeting, there was a greater emphasis on discussions on the reach (clicks) and saleability of the stories, which is related to the economic model of the outlet, since the magazine sells advertising space (as opposed to *Levila*) and has subscribers. For example, while discussing a special issue of the magazine, its potential for attracting advertisers was discussed, but at the next editorial meeting, the need to not give too much space to advertisers was also emphasised. So, although the ideal of slow journalism should focus on societal interests, in an outlet that tries to finance itself in a more traditional way (subscribers and advertising), financial goals are also taken into account in addition to societal needs.

Observations showed that *Levila*'s meetings differed from this approach since advertising does not appear in the outlet, so these interests were not taken into account. At the same time, some overlap can be found in the emphasis of the two outlets on the reach of stories, because even though *Levila* did not directly count clicks on articles, during the observations the social impact of stories was still considered important, which was also one of the goals noted at *Edasi*'s meetings. The goals of *Levila* (trying to reach an audience outside the main centres, avoiding polarisation) and *Edasi* (avoiding noise, "building bridges") concerning audiences coincide with the principles of slow journalism. However, *Edasi* has difficulties earning an income since they are not reaching enough people. In order to reach a wider audience, *Levila* has published stories in other outlets, considering the distribution of stories to be more important than competition (similar to Berkey-Gerard, 2009). However, *Levila*'s interviewees noted that this makes it difficult to establish its brand, and that, in turn, may make it harder to gain recognition and generate revenue.

> R1: The reason we chose ETV [Estonian national TV station] for the premiere [of our documentary] is that we realised that on our channel we might be left at best with about ten thousand viewers, which would be a waste /.../

> [on ETV] more than one hundred and thirty thousand people have watched the film.

Thus, to some extent, the size of the audience and their willingness to pay for the content seem to be interpreted as proof of the social relevance of the outlets.

The funders said that they are essentially prepared to continue with the funding to a certain extent indefinitely, while at the same time trying to encourage other entrepreneurs in their circles to do the same.

By applying the creed of slow food – good, clean and fair – that has been transferred to the form of slow journalism, the treatment of authors and other participants (such as translators) in the creation of a story was addressed during the observation of editorial meetings by the founder of *Levila*, in that he proactively provides remuneration to contributors or notes that while volunteer participation is great, it should still be rewarded with fair pay. The observations of the meetings showed a difference in adherence to other principles: in addition to the publication schedules of articles, at *Edasi*'s meetings central aspects included monitoring the popularity of the articles and, when discussing special issues, encouraging advertising in these was on the table. During the observations of *Levila*'s meetings, the founder repeatedly reminded the contributors of the outlet's principles and social goals (big topics) when discussing topics.

> R1: ... but how is this a big topic? It doesn't talk about addiction; it's about relatively well-off people who grow cannabis. It sounds like a niche [topic] to me.

5.   CONCLUSION

This case study examined the characteristics of two slow journalism outlets in Estonia through interviews with their founders and funders and observations of editorial meetings. Both institutions were founded on the basis of media criticism sparked by dissatisfaction with prevailing trends in the media, a view that aligns with the origins of slow journalism (Drok & Hermans, 2016), but they approach their goals (improving media quality, creating understanding, reducing conflicts in society, etc.) in different ways. Both outlets operate on the principles of avoiding polarisation, harm to society, sensationalism, competition, and speed; creating understanding of the "other" and society; taking time to create and consume stories; focusing on high quality in both analysis and storytelling and in aesthetics; fairness, timeless issues, and who they give a voice to and how; being community-oriented, ethical, and giving context; following a slow publication cycle; having fun creating; and following editorial values, not news values. They differ in the principles of using contributors and sources and in their funding models: *Levila* does not focus on using well-known experts, while *Edasi* uses well-known experts as co-writers. *Levila* relies mostly on

funders and focuses on free digital and multimedia content, while *Edasi* publishes a quarterly print magazine for subscribers, and the digital content is mostly behind a paywall.

It became clear that it is difficult for such niche outlets to operate profitably in the competitive media landscape of a small country while applying the higher standards of slow journalism. This is due to their small audience and because their principles limit money-making opportunities by, for example, not allowing clickbait headlines or controversial articles (Drok & Hermans, 2016). So while the outlets' conventional funding options are limited, they rely (*Levila* almost entirely, *Edasi* less so) on funders. The small media market means there are not many possible financiers among the population, which makes the few funders or advertisers available to the outlets all the more influential. There is a risk to autonomy because the fewer funders there are, the more weight the demands of a funder can carry. It was clear from the interviews that funders do not interfere in the day-to-day decisions and are motivated to continue supporting the outlets as long as the outlets follow the principles on which they were founded. In this sense, the outlets are in a way the face of the founders and funders, and it is difficult to predict how it would affect the principles of the outlets if the funders changed their current views.

At the same time, funders supporting these principles and requiring the outlets to adhere to them could act as an additional control mechanism that keeps the outlets "on track". If the outlets were to deviate from their current path, e.g., to reach bigger audiences, the funders could cut their support. In this sense, then, the principles work in several ways: they justify the outlets' existence, set them apart from other outlets, and motivate funders, while limiting the outlets' economic options. Here, the comparison between *Levila* and *Edasi* shows a kind of a middle ground, where the newer *Levila* represents a wing of non-profit slow journalism that has more autonomy to focus on their idealistic goals and less on survival (even opposing the mindset of surviving), while *Edasi* is 85% self-sustaining, has subscribers and advertising, and focuses – in addition to slow journalism principles – on how to survive and attract readers and advertisers (i.e., lifestyle sections and special issues). While *Edasi* is more in the middle ground and closer to lifestyle magazines with its content and economic model, it is still seen by its funders as counterbalancing the harmful effects of fast-paced media. It has found a way to navigate between the traditional financing model and the idealistic principles of slow journalism, as the philosophy itself leaves room for different paths and formats (Le Masurier, 2015; Cheng, 2021). In this sense, *Edasi* could be described as being closer to the "traditional" form of journalism while at the same time adhering to enough slow journalism principles to stand out in the eyes of funders, advertisers, and subscribers and striving ultimately to have a positive impact on society and the media landscape. The inclusion of advertising, lifestyle sections, a paywall, and *Edasi*'s focus on well-known names as contributors can be seen as compromises with the principles of slow journalism. This strategy has helped the magazine steadily improve its financial sustainability over the six years of

its existence. At the same time, *Edasi* emphasises the social responsibility of advertisers, and advertisements must add value to the audience. In this sense, advertising must also adhere to the principles of slow journalism.

There also arises the question of impact; the small size and alternative nature of the outlets are related to one of the characteristics of slow journalism: the luxury aspect (Greenberg, 2007), because luxury items are usually scarce and at the same time more expensive to produce and more pleasant to consume. Their smallness raises the question of the extent to which a niche luxury product can finance itself while contributing to the "media diet" of the general public to support the democratic social order (Craig, 2016). Most people cannot or do not want to spend money on luxury goods when they can get fast food cheaper or even for free.

Levila's non-profit model, combined with the attitude of focusing on the greater good rather than survival, allows for more autonomy and freedom in decision-making, greater adherence to the principles of (slow) journalism, and ignoring the traditional funding models of other media outlets that would make it difficult to adhere to their principles. And while Le Masurier (2015) assumed that the alternative media may cease to exist without making a profit, this case study showed that even in a saturated media market in a small country there can be enough socially responsible funders for slow journalism outlets, provided the outlets uphold the high ethical and qualitative principles that set this form of journalism apart from other media.

In the context of this case study, it appears that it is possible for a form of slow journalism to exist that adheres to the principles of high quality, non-competition, social responsibility, fairness, slowness and non-confrontationality. And while adherence to the principles of slow journalism may limit the funding opportunities of the particular outlet, there is a space for it in which it is possible to adopt certain parts of the principles while incorporating both non-profit and traditional media funding models. Future research could compare different slow journalistic outlets based on content analysis, their operating principles, and business models.

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THE RISE OF KOREAN CULTURE IN EUROPE BASED ON A SURVEY OF K-CULTURE FANS IN HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, South Korean creative and cultural content has garnered significant global interest, commonly known as the Korean Wave or Hallyu. While this phenomenon has been studied extensively in many countries, its impact on Central Europe, particularly Hungary, remains largely unexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the diffusion of Korean culture in Hungary, a strategic economic partner of South Korea since the 1990s. Despite this long-standing partnership, Korean pop culture only gained traction in Hungary in 2008. The reception of Hallyu in Hungary has given rise to a unique fandom, which is characterized by diverse interests in Korean culture and the economy. Drawing on a literature review, expert interviews, and surveys of fan groups in Hungary, this paper analyzes the characteristics of Hallyu fans and market trends in Hungary.

Keywords: Hallyu ▪ Korean Wave ▪ Korean culture ▪ Hungary ▪ Central Europe

1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of creative and cultural industries (CCIs) to national economies is on the rise, as evidenced by the global success of pop music, cinema, and TV series. Despite economic crises around the world, this sector achieved an impressive annual average growth rate of 7.34% globally between 2003 and 2015 (UNCTAD 2018). Notably, South Korean (hereafter referred to as Korean) cultural content has gained increasing global recognition in recent years (Choe 2021). The success of *Parasite* (2019), which won the Best Picture award and three other prizes at the 92nd Academy Awards in 2020, and the growing popularity of K-pop acts in global music scenes have led commentators to suggest that the Korean Wave phenomenon, or Hallyu (Brody 2020), is now being observed worldwide. Hallyu is a term that fuses the Korean words "Han" and "lyu," literally translating to "Korean Wave," and refers to the overseas popularity of Korean culture (Shim 2020)."

A decade ago, Hallyu was primarily confined to Asian countries as most Korean media and music production companies targeted markets in China, Japan, and Southeast Asia (Anderson and Shim 2015). However, the emergence and widespread use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, has facilitated global access to foreign cultural products, thus expanding the focus of Korean media content exports to global markets (Capistrano 2020). Notably, K-pop has played a pivotal role in disseminating Korean creative and cultural content worldwide. The viral success of "Gangnam Style" by Psy, for instance, broke records by becoming the first music video on YouTube to reach one billion views within just 161 days, propelling Hallyu onto the global stage (Berg 2015; Yum and Shim 2016).

At present, K-pop groups such as BTS are dominating the music charts in various countries, including the US Billboard charts. The BBC has dubbed them as "the Beatles for the 21st century," as BTS has achieved three No. 1 albums on the Billboard 200 Chart within a year, a feat that has not been accomplished since the Beatles (Jackson & Browne 2018). In 2020, BTS's popularity became evident in Hungary, with a commercial TV channel featuring song covers of BTS's "Dynamite" in its music program.[1] The popularity of BTS in Europe and Hungary is reflected in the fact that 20% of the respondents to our Hallyu fan surveys conducted in Hungary are members of the A.R.M.Y., the official fan club of BTS. Not only are BTS and A.R.M.Y. well-known among music listeners, but they are also gaining attention from academia, ranging from cultural studies to economics (Smith 2021). For instance, in January 2020, a research group at Kingston University in London hosted an academic conference solely focused on the BTS phenomenon, with over 150 presentations from around the world.[2]

Hungary, often referred to as the "Crossroads of Europe" or as a "Gateway to the East," became the first among all Eastern European countries to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea, opening the country's embassy in Budapest on February 1, 1989 (Kim and Marinescu 2015; Rac 2014). As middle powers, South Korea and Hungary have made efforts to strengthen their bilateral, cooperative relations, with South Korea being the biggest foreign direct investor in Hungary (Sass, Gubik, and Szunomár 2019). As of 2020, the direct investments of five South Korean companies in Hungary have established more than 2,900 workplaces, surpassing Germany's position as the largest employer in the Hungarian labor market.[3] Hungary is known for its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, which has contributed to its historical significance as a center for trade and cultural exchange. According to the 2018 Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) report, South Korea was the third-biggest export and fifth-biggest import partner of Hungary (Sonline, 2019). Against this

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1   The music program titled Sztárban sztár (Star in star) of the channel RTL was aired on 1 November 2020. https://tv2.hu/sztarban_sztar/349710_sztarban-sztar-kozos-produkcio-d.html

2   One of the authors of this article gave two presentations at this conference. https://www.kingston.ac.uk/events/item/3428/04-jan-2020-bts-a-global-interdisciplinary-conference-project/

3   https://www.vg.hu/gazdasag/gazdasagi-hirek/mar-del-korea-a-legnagyobb-beruhazo-2-1782852/

backdrop, the Korean Wave has had a major impact on Hungary, with more and more people becoming fans of K-pop music, consuming Korean content, and attending events related to Korean culture.

While the Korean Wave has been the focus of significant academic research in global contexts (Anderson and Shim 2015; Chua and Iwabuchi 2008; Kim and Marinescu 2015), there has been a lack of attention given to its reception in Hungary. As highlighted by Shim (2019), exploring the Korean Wave's interaction with different localities can provide new insights into globalization in the 21st century. It is important to note that the Korean Wave is not a one-way flow, but rather a reciprocal interaction between Korean cultural industries and consumers in host countries. Questions arise in this context about how cultures equipped with new media technologies communicate with foreign recipients, what meaning and effect recipients derive from the Korean Wave, and what new possibilities emerge for countries like Hungary and South Korea through their engagement with the Korean Wave. Therefore, this paper aims to contextualize the Korean Wave research across Europe, examine relevant literature on Hallyu in Hungary, conduct interviews with cultural experts, and perform surveys on Korean Wave fans in Hungary to present the history, fan characteristics, and market trends of the Korean Wave in Hungary, thereby expanding the horizons of Hallyu research in the world.

2.   KOREAN WAVE RESEARCH IN EUROPE

The emergence of the Korean Wave can be traced back to the late 1990s when Korean popular culture, specifically television dramas and pop music, began to be broadcast on local media channels in China, Vietnam, and Taiwan (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008). The widespread exposure of Korean cultural products to these regions fueled the growth of Hallyu's global fanbase (Anderson and Shim 2015). Subsequently, the popularity of not only Korean audio-visual products but also general Korean culture and consumer goods soared, garnering attention from scholars seeking to explain the phenomenon's evolution and diffusion. This led to an increase in research on Hallyu, both at the European and global levels. For example, Marinescu (2014_b) examined the cultural impact of Hallyu worldwide, including its presence in many European countries. However, Sung (2014) notes that research on Hallyu in European countries is relatively sparse compared to other regions, possibly due to a smaller fanbase and slower growth of interest in Korean culture in Europe.

Balmain (2016) posits that the emergence of Korean cinema in the UK spearheaded the growth of Hallyu in the country. From 2008 to 2013, Korean movies experienced a surge in popularity in the UK, allowing British fans to engage with and appreciate traditional Korean values, and participate in cultural events organized by various Korea-related institutions, including the Korean Cultural Centre (KCC), the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), the Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS), and the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange

(KOFICE). Under the encouragement of these institutions (Um 2019), K-pop enthusiasts in the UK established cover dance groups, formed K-pop societies at schools, and organized K-pop competitions at the local and national levels, further increasing the demand for Korean cultural products. Through case studies, Um, Sung, and Fuhr (2014) identify the unique demographic attributes of K-pop fans in the UK, who tend to be non-UK-born or short-term residents, with the majority of K-pop events and scenes being centered in London. The growth in the number of concerts and K-pop performances organized in recent years is indicative of the increasing demand for K-pop and Korean culture in the UK. The 2019 BTS concert at Wembley Stadium in London marked a significant milestone for K-pop as the first non-English speaking performers to hold a concert at the UK's largest and most iconic venue, solidifying the mainstream presence of K-pop in the global music industry.

The emergence of Hallyu in France has been documented in relation to the SM Town Live concerts that took place in Paris in 2011, organized by SM Entertainment, one of Korea's largest music producers. The two-day concerts attracted more than 14,000 fans from 14 different countries. However, mainstream French media reported negatively on the Korean Wave, with some newspapers criticizing the "extreme" training methods and limited career longevity of K-pop idols, as noted by Cha and Kim (2011). Despite this, European fans found K-pop's unique visualization concepts and emotional lyrics appealing. Sung (2014) also observed the strong commitment of French K-pop fans to Korean culture through their active participation in live performances, flash mobs, and K-pop concert events.

Fuhr (2014) conducted a study on the spread of Korean culture in Germany and found that K-pop was not well-known in the country until 2012. The popularity of K-pop music was initially hindered by the unresolved copyright conflict between YouTube and GEMA. However, the increasing popularity of K-pop in other countries eventually led to the organization of K-pop cover dance events and flash mobs in Germany. Fuhr noted that K-pop fans in Germany tended to live in major cities with high Asian immigrant population densities. They mainly used Facebook and other online magazines as channels of communication, and offline events were not frequently organized. Two noteworthy online magazines for German-speaking K-pop fans were the *K-Colors of Korea* and the *K-pop Magazin*, which had 12,300 followers as of 2018.

Hübinette (2012) conducted a study on the reception of K-pop, K-drama, Korean films, and manhwa in Sweden. According to him, the introduction of Korean popular culture to Sweden began in 1997 when the Swedish Film Festival screened Kim Ki-duk's films. Since then, the number of Swedish fans of K-culture has gradually increased. In another study, Hübinette (2018) conducted in-depth interviews with Hallyu fans and concluded that K-pop has now become a mainstream genre in Swedish society. He noted that Swedish Hallyu fans could be divided into two groups: non-Western migrants and Swedish-born residents with post-secondary education. Hübinette also found that there was a common, negative perception of Korean male idols in Swedish society, which could potentially limit their acceptance. The spread

of Hallyu content in Sweden was mainly attributed to the Internet and social media platforms. Interestingly, Hübinette also found that the existing J-pop fandom played a role in increasing interest and consumption of Korean content.

Olmedo Señor (2017) identifies two major factors that contributed to the diffusion of Hallyu in Spain: the presence of Asian heritage residents in major cities such as Madrid and Barcelona, and events related to Japanese or Asian cultures, such as film festivals. The Korean Embassy and the Korean Cultural Centre also played crucial roles in organizing events like the K-pop World Festival and the K-pop Academy. Despite the relatively small size of the K-pop following in Spain, the fandom's passion was intense, leading to the organization of the first Spanish K-pop cover dance festival in Madrid and the first official K-pop concert in Barcelona, both in 2011. Escolar and Arias (2020) confirm from their interviews with Spanish fans that K-pop, rather than K-drama or film, is the core element of Hallyu in Spain. Women in their 20s and 30s are the most enthusiastic K-pop fans, and they rely on the Internet, specifically YouTube and VLive, to consume Korean content.

Sung (2014) notes that prior to the "Gangnam Style" craze in 2012, Austrians were generally uninformed about East Asian societies and cultures, and often unable to differentiate between Asian cultures. However, this changed with the rise in popularity of K-pop, which led to the organization of events such as Austria's Next K-pop Star and the K-pop Dance Festival Vienna by a small fan base. The Korean Embassy, as well as various Korean government-affiliated organizations such as the National Centre for South Korean Performance Art, Korean Association of Austria, Korea House of Culture, and Korean companies such as Hyundai and Samsung, played an important role in promoting the diffusion of Korean culture in Austria. Sung (2014) also highlights the connection between K-pop fans in Eastern Europe (Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary) and Austria, as these countries share geographical proximity and often organize joint Hallyu events in order to increase the size of their fandoms.

According to Mazaná (2014), in 2013, the number of Hallyu fans in the Czech Republic was reported to be less than 3,000. Similar to Sweden, biased views against Asian men, and thus boybands, were also found to exist within Czech society. Nonetheless, K-pop fans in the country organized themselves into associations and conducted various events, including fan gatherings, flash mobs, and Hallyu contests (Marinescu, 2014_a). As K-dramas were not aired on Czech television channels, K-pop played a significant role in promoting the Korean Wave in the country, leading to an increase in Korean film festivals and screenings throughout the nation (Mazaná, 2014).

Poland established diplomatic relations with Korea in the early 20th century, but during the Cold War era, the country only maintained strong ties with North Korea (Kida, 2014). Nonetheless, the presence of robust Korean studies programs in Polish universities and the continuous translation of Korean books and novels by Kwiaty Orientu, a publishing house, were fundamental in building a solid understanding of

Korean culture in general. The popularity of South Korean pop culture increased after Polish film festivals introduced Korean movies and television stations started airing Korean dramas in 2010 (Szalkowska, 2008). In addition, according to Marinescu (2014_a), the Korean Cultural Centre played a vital role in disseminating Korean culture in Poland.

Before the emergence of Korean cinema, Bulgarians only regarded Korea as a distant and exotic country, as noted by Sotirova (2014). However, the early 2010s saw a growing interest in Korean culture and Korean studies, as described by Borisova (2020) in her study on Korean pop fandom in Bulgaria, which was divided into three periods. The first generation of K-drama and K-pop enthusiasts emerged with the creation of an online community called Eastern Spirit in 2008, which also focused on East and South Asian cultures. Online platforms have remained the primary source for Hallyu content in Bulgaria, especially before Bulgarian National Television (BNT) began airing Korean dramas in 2018. The second Hallyu generation emerged around 2012 when teenagers and young adults were attracted to K-pop songs and dances, leading them to learn the Korean language and buy Korean products. Their efforts to organize flash mobs and K-pop events contributed to the spread of Korean culture. The third generation is linked to the BTS fandom, where many teenagers joined the A.R.M.Y. fan club in the late 2010s.

Marinescu and Balica (2013) have observed that Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, began to take root in Romania when local television channels started broadcasting K-dramas in 2009. Since then, Romanian fans of K-dramas have turned to the Internet as the primary means to access more Korean content. The emergence of the K-pop craze in Romania, according to Buja (2016), can be traced back to 2011, when a Romanian music channel aired the music video of BoA. The attractiveness of K-pop idols' appearances and fashion styles, as well as the entertaining quality of K-pop music and dance performances, have contributed to the growing fandom of Korean pop culture in Romania. Buja also points out the easy accessibility of K-culture as a factor in its popularity in the country.

Serbia's historical turmoil, such as the Yugoslav Wars, posed a challenge to the country's appreciation of Korean pop culture, which was further exacerbated by the lack of K-drama broadcasts on national television channels. However, the emergence of online media platforms such as social media and YouTube have played a pivotal role in disseminating K-culture. Despite the relatively small size of the fanbase, K-pop enthusiasts in the country have been actively organizing K-pop video and Korean film screening sessions, K-pop festivals, and cover dance events, as reported by Jokic (2020).

The diffusion of Hallyu in Europe has been slower in comparison to Asia due to geographical distance and lack of cultural proximity. However, with the advent of streaming platform services in recent years, these disparities have been quickly bridged. For instance, the 2021 Korean survival drama series, "Squid Game," aired on Netflix and rapidly became the top-rated show not only in Asia, but globally. As

Netflix's most-watched series, "Squid Game" achieved the status of the most viewed program in 94 countries, attracting more than 142 million-member households and accumulating 1.65 billion viewing hours within its first four weeks of launch. The Korean Wave is spreading rapidly worldwide, not only via YouTube, but also with emerging media platforms. Thus, with this knowledge in mind, we shall now delve more deeply into the historical development of the Korean Wave in Hungary.

3.   HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE KOREAN WAVE IN HUNGARY

Understanding the spread of Korean pop culture in Hungary requires an examination of Hungary's media landscape. Following media liberalization in 1997, Hungary experienced the emergence of commercial broadcasting, with approximately 80 television channels competing in the market by 2009. Commercial channels have gained more popularity than the four public channels, including M1, M2, Duna TV, and Duna 2, which have only attracted around 12% of the Hungarian TV audience (Urban 2010). The number of commercial channels has continued to grow, with the count increasing to 120 by 2020.[4]

Korean pop culture made its initial breakthrough in Hungary in 2008, when the Hungarian public television channel M1 aired the historical drama *Te Csanggum* (Jewel in the Palace. 대장금), which attained high viewership ratings in many countries. Hungarian television stations only broadcast eight K-dramas between 2008 and 2018, with some being re-run several times (see Table 1). In recent years, only the commercial Izaura TV has aired K-dramas, sparking criticism from fans who contend that Korean serial dramas are more popular in Hungary than the South American telenovelas frequently broadcasted in the country (Szűts and Yoo 2016).

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[4]   In addition to the increase of commercial channels, the public television company MTVA (Médiaszolgáltatás-támogató és Vagyonkezelő Alap. Or, Media Service and Supporting Syndic Fund) in Hungary also expanded the number of public channels to seven, including M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, Duna, and Duna World (Illés 2017). As reported by the Media Committee (NMH 2020), the number of TV subscriptions in Hungary surpassed 3.59 million in approximately 4 million Hungarian households in 2020.

Table 1: Korean TV dramas broadcast in Hungary (2008-2018)

Title	Broadcast Period	Channel
대장금 – *Jewel in the Palace - A palota ékköve*	March 2008 – May 2008 August 2008 – November 2008 January 2010 – March 2010	M1
	September 2009 – December 2009	M2
	August 2010 – December 2010	Story TV
	July 2011 – September 2011	Story 5
	January 2018 – March 2018 March 2019 – June 2019	M3
	September 2019 - December 2019 September 2020 - November 2020	Izaura TV
	September 2016 - October 2016	Duna TV
선덕여왕 - *Queen Seondeok of Silla - A Silla királyság ékköve*	October 2010 – January 2011	M1
	October 2010 – January 2011 April 2011 – July 2011	M2
	November 2019 – February 2020 November 2020 – February 2021	Izaura TV
이산 - *Lee San, Wind of the Palace - A korona hercege*	July 2012 – November 2013	M1
	July 2017 – November 2017 August 2018 – November 2018 March 2019 – June 2019 September 2019 – December 2019 May 2020 – September 2020	Izaura TV
동이 - *Dong Yi - A királyi ház titkai*	February 2011 – May 2011	M1
	March 2011 – May 2011	M2
	August 2016 – November 2016 November 2017 – July 2018 May 2018 – August 2018 December 2018 – March 2019 May 2019 – September 2019 February 2020 – May 2020	Izaura TV
파스타 - *Pasta - Pasta*	March 2013 – May 2013	M2
기황후 - *Empress Ki - A császárság kincse*	November 2016 – February 2017	Duna TV
화정 - *Splendid Politics - A fény hercegnője*	August 2016 – November 2016	Story 4
7일의 왕비 - *Queen for Seven Days -Királynő egy hétre*	October 2017 – January 2018	Story 5

The emergence of K-pop culture in Hungary can be traced back to 2012, when Psy's "Gangnam Style" became widely popular on Hungarian radio channels and social media platforms. Despite the initial popularity, there were only a limited number of K-pop concerts held in the country, with few rookie bands performing. This changed when the event organizer, Seoul Mates, was established in Budapest in early 2015. Their first K-pop event, a summer camp in 2016, aimed to promote talented cover

dancers between the ages of 11 and 18. This event was successful, leading to Seoul Mates hosting similar events annually. Additionally, the company also organizes K-pop concerts (see Table 2), though due to the small market size in Hungary, these events are held once every two to three months, rather than monthly as desired (Lucia Sáfrán-Koczúr, personal interview, October 21, 2020).

Table 2: K-pop Music Events in Hungary (2017-2019)

Date	Event
3 March 2017	Blockbuster concert
3 March 2017	Block B concert After Party
7 May 2017	B.A.P World Tour 'Party Baby' Budapest Boom
14-15 July 2017	Kpop World Festival
14 August 2017	24K Fan Meeting Tour
22 October 2017	FT Island [X] concert
13 January 2018 – 12 May 2018	K-Ship Open Stage
25 February 2018	Paint It Rose Tour
27 May 2018	AlphaBAT 2nd European Tour
21 July 2018	2018 Changwon K-Pop World Festival
11 September 2018	Kpop Jamboree - Korean Day
11 November 2018	AlphaBAT Free Fan meeting in Budapest
27 November 2018	South Club "Second European Tour"
20 December 2018	VAV 2018 Meet & Live "Senorita Tour"
31 March 2019	Bang Yongguk concert

The popularity of K-pop in Hungary continued to increase in 2017 and 2018 due to the growing presence of K-pop-related content on social media sites and online blogs. One example is the Facebook page called Dél-Korea, which has around 5,740 followers.[5] Another example is the K-pop Hungary Facebook page, which had 2,788 followers in November 2018 and increased to 4,788 in November 2019. The BTS Hungary Facebook page also saw a significant increase, with its membership growing from 3,906 in late 2018 to around 13,000 in January 2020. Cultural events organized by the Korean Cultural Centre are also popular among Hungarian audiences, as evidenced by the centre's online site having more than 12,200 followers and continuously increasing visitor numbers, according to its director, Lee Dangkweon (personal interview, November 21, 2018). Lucia Sáfrán-Koczúr, the managing director of Seoul Mates, estimates that there are around 15,000 K-pop fans in Hungary, based on fan meetings, talent shows, and festivals organized by the company (personal interview, October 21, 2020). Furthermore, fan groups and cultural organizations are

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5   https://www.facebook.com/D%C3%A9l-Korea-103060771222777

expanding beyond Budapest, with new groups emerging in cities like Pécs, Debrecen, and Szeged.

4.   SURVEY RESEARCH INTO THE KOREAN WAVE IN HUNGARY

Our study utilized a multi-method approach, incorporating secondary literature analysis, interviews with Korean culture organization executives, and surveys to gather information about the demographic attributes, fields of interest, and consumer behaviors of Hungarian fans of Korean culture. The study commenced in September 2018 with an analysis of Hallyu fan activity on social media and online fan pages in Hungary. Based on this background research, we designed the questionnaires, which were distributed to research participants between November 14, 2018, and February 28, 2019. During a period of three and a half months, the questionnaires were distributed through three main channels: (i) offline distribution to participants of events organized by the Korean Cultural Centre in Hungary, (ii) online distribution through linked Google Forms questionnaires on the Centre's webpage and Facebook page, and (iii) online distribution through linked Google Forms questionnaires on K-pop and K-drama Facebook pages, with members of these pages sharing the links with their friends. In total, 74 offline and 1,698 online respondents completed the questionnaires, amounting to a total of 1,772 respondents. More than 60% of the online forms were submitted within two weeks of being linked online. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software. The survey results are summarized below in relation to three main topics: i) the characteristics of Hungarian fans, ii) fan preferences, and iii) fans' purchasing power.

5.   ATTRIBUTES AND PREFERENCES OF HUNGARIAN FANS

The majority of respondents to the questionnaire (96.4%) were female, which reflects the gender bias among Hungarian Hallyu fans. In terms of age, 42.4% of fans were under 18 years old, and 78.1% were less than 31 years old. Only a small proportion of respondents (8.1%) were above 51 years old (Figure 1, cumulated result of the two age groups). The results showed that 55.8% of respondents had been fans of Hallyu for between 1 to 5 years, while 27.0% had been fans for more than 5 years. There was a direct correlation between age and duration of being a fan, with 45.3% of older fans (above 50 years old) having been interested in Korean culture for more than 5 years, and 73.2% of younger fans (under the age of 18) having been fans for between 1 to 5 years.
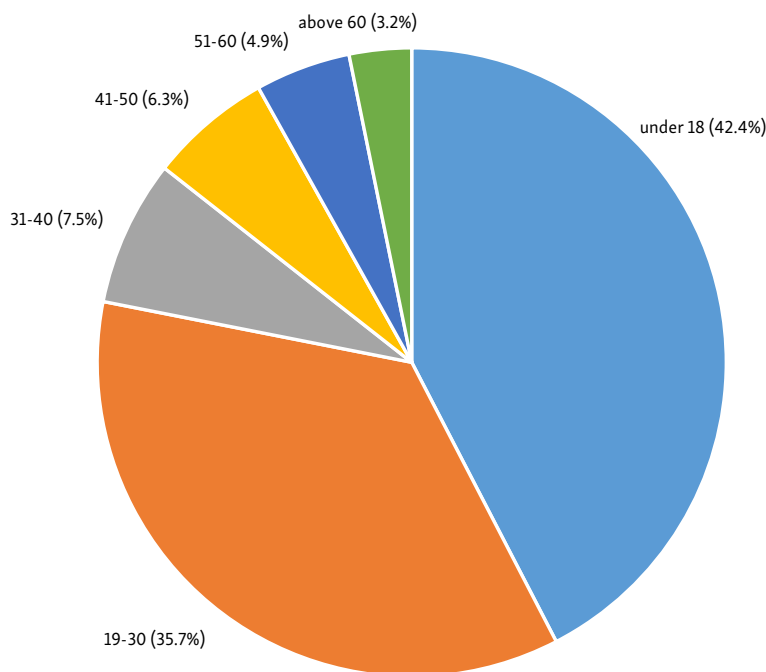
Figure 1: The age categories of the respondents

The survey also aimed to determine the regional distribution of Hallyu fans in Hungary, classifying respondents into three categories based on their place of residence: Budapest, other cities, and villages or farms. It should be noted that Budapest is the only city in Hungary with a population exceeding one million, while the second-largest city, Debrecen, has a population of only 202,000. Our data indicated that 29% of respondents lived in Budapest, which represents 17.9% of the total population of Hungary. On the other hand, only 20% of respondents lived in villages or farm regions, which make up 29.5% of the entire population. These results suggest that the majority of Hallyu fans in Hungary reside in urban areas, as opposed to rural areas (see Table 3).

Table 3: Regional Population vs. Regional Respondents

Region of residence	Population make-up by region (%, 2019)	Respondent make-up by region (%)
Budapest	17.9	29.1
Other cities	52.5	49.8
Village and Farm	29.5	20.6

Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office

The survey examined the respondents' fields of interest within Korean culture. The participants were given multiple-choice questions with the option to choose more than one answer. The results show that the most popular field of interest (87.5%) among the respondents was K-pop, followed by K-drama (80.1%), and surprisingly, the Korean language (72.3%). Korean movies came in fourth place, with 64.9% of fans choosing this category. All the cultural fields presented as options were selected by more than 64% of fans, except for Korean folk dance. The respondents also reported other fields of interest, with 5.8% of participants choosing Korean food as an additional area of interest. Fans also expressed their interest in Korean history, K-beauty, and other types of Korean music, such as rock music (see Figure 2).
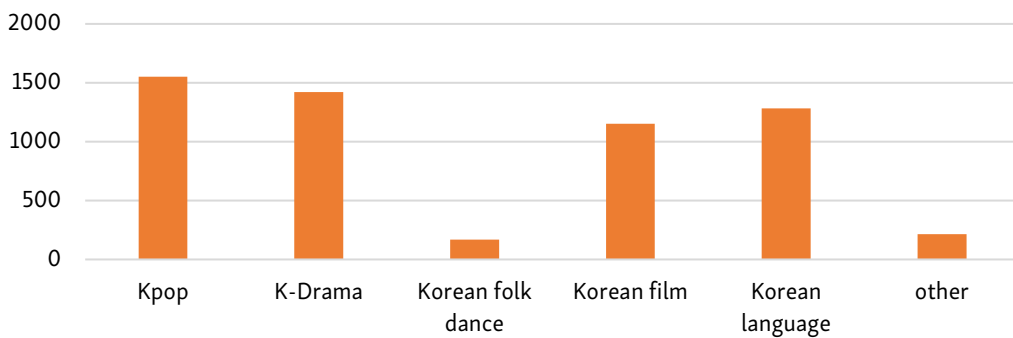
Figure 2: Distribution of fans by their preferred cultural fields

We also conducted an investigation into the reasons behind fans' attraction to Korean culture and its content. An open-ended question was posed, and 63.3% of the respondents provided an answer. Out of these respondents, 36.8% stated that they were drawn to Korean culture because it felt exotic to them. The second most common reason (21.9% of respondents) was that Korean music and dramas were different from those of European or American origin. The third most common reason (14.2% of fans) was that they enjoyed the language, which influenced them to consume more Korean content. In fact, one respondent even expressed that they initially fell in love with the language after watching a Korean drama, which led them to learn it and subsequently become a big fan of K-dramas and K-pop.

The results of the survey suggest that the interests of Hallyu fans are influenced by their age group. Specifically, K-pop appeared to be more popular among respondents under the age of 30, while K-dramas were more popular among those over 31. Meanwhile, Korean films were most popular among respondents over the age of 41. Interestingly, among fans under the age of 18, the Korean language was the second most popular area of interest, after K-pop.

In a separate question, the survey examined the popularity of the Korean language among respondents. The findings revealed that 33.7% of the participants claimed to be able to speak Korean, while 51.6% expressed a keen interest in learning it in the

future. Given that the survey did not assess the fluency level of the respondents, individuals with diverse proficiency levels in the language may have responded positively to the question. Notably, the study demonstrated that younger respondents displayed a stronger inclination toward the Korean language. For instance, 32.2% of the respondents aged below 18 years claimed to be proficient in Korean, while 60.4% of them wished to acquire proficiency in the language. Similarly, 39.2% of the respondents aged between 19 and 30 years reported being able to speak Korean, while 49.5% expressed an interest in learning the language. In contrast, among the respondents aged between 31 and 50 years, only an average of 30.8% claimed proficiency in Korean, while about an average of 45.5% expressed a desire to learn the language.

Many respondents shared their admiration for the Korean language. Some mentioned that they appreciated its euphony, melodiousness, tone, and respectful expressions. Others mentioned that they liked it, or they felt comfortable with its melodiousness, tone, and respectful expressions of the Korean language. For some respondents, their interest in the language served as a pathway to explore other aspects of Hallyu. For example, a middle-aged respondent reported that she "first met Korean culture through K-pop music, which led her to like the language and then K-dramas." Similar opinions were reflected in the answers stating that "the tunefulness of the language was what caught me first, and it continues to be the greatest source of attraction for me," and "when I first heard the original language of K-drama I liked it a lot." In an expression of her visceral connection to the Korean language, a respondent in the age group of 51 to 60 went as far as to say: "For me, it is a specific and engaging world. I might have lived there (read: Korea) in my previous life as the melody of the language is in my ears and the writing of the letters is clear and logical."

Data on the channels utilized by Hungarian fans to access Korean cultural content was also collected. The results revealed that YouTube was the most frequently used content-sharing platform, with 95.0% of the respondents indicating that they utilized it. Facebook was found to be the second most popular platform, with 68.8% of respondents attesting to its use. Instagram and free sharing websites, such as RakutenViki, Sorozatbarat, or DramaCool, were also used by more than 66.8% of the respondents.[6] Interestingly, Twitter was a comparatively less popular platform for Hungarian fans, despite its status as a main channel for fans in other countries (Jang 2021; Choi and Meza and Park 2014; Capistrano 2020; Sung 2014).

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6   https://www.viki.com/, https://www.sorozatbarat.club/login, https://www.dramacool9.co/
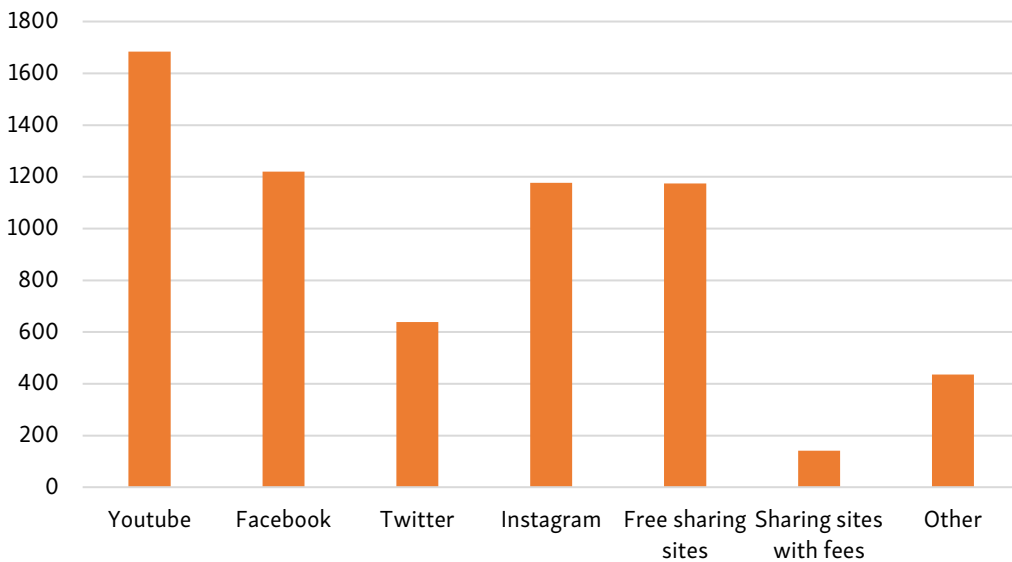
Figure 3: Channels Used to Reach Korean Cultural Content

Based on our survey, YouTube emerged as the most commonly utilized platform for accessing Korean cultural content among fans of all age groups, except for those aged between 51 and 60 who reported a higher frequency of usage of free sharing websites. Instagram, on the other hand, exhibited conspicuous popularity among younger fans, as evidenced by the data presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Channel Preferences by Age Used to Access Korean Cultural Content

Ranking / Age Group	1st	2nd	3rd
under 18	YouTube	Instagram	Facebook
19-30	YouTube	Free Sharing Sites[7]	Instagram
31-40	YouTube	Free Sharing Sites	Facebook
41-50	YouTube	Free Sharing Sites	Facebook
51-60	Free Sharing Sites	YouTube	Facebook
above 60	YouTube	Free Sharing Sites	Facebook

It seems that a significant percentage of respondents who communicate with other fans use multiple channels for communication. Among those who answered "yes" to the question about communicating with other fans, 65.4% reported using personal communication, 62.9% reported using Facebook, and 33.5% reported using Instagram

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7   Free sharing sites such as RakutenViki, Sorozatbarat or DramaCool (https://www.viki.com/, https://www.sorozatbarat.club/login, https://www.dramacool9.co/)

as their method of communication (see Figure 4). It is worth noting that respondents were allowed to choose multiple methods of communication. This suggests that fans use a variety of channels to communicate with each other and highlights the importance of understanding how fans engage with content and each other across different platforms.
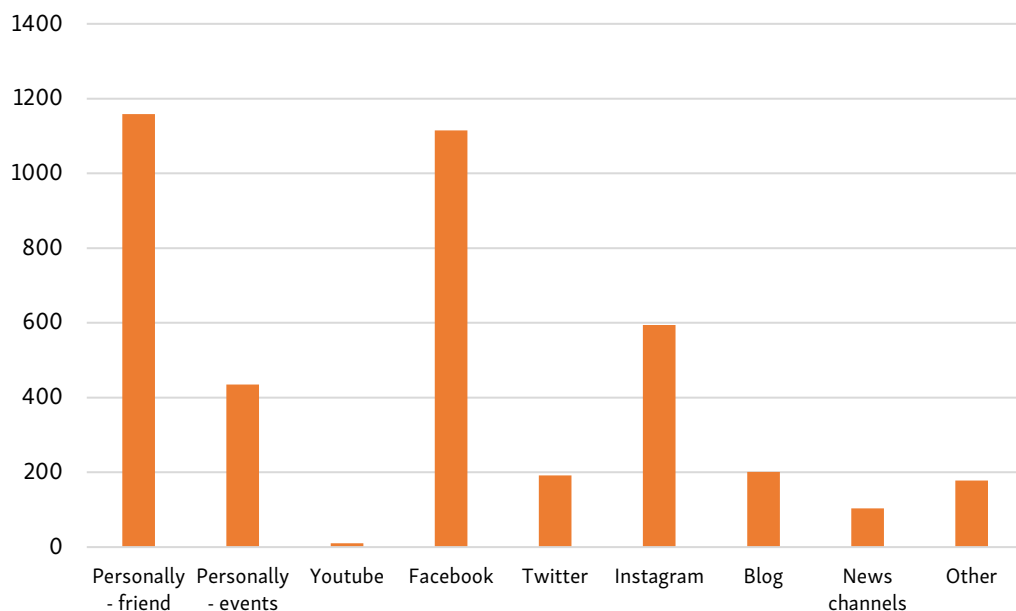
Figure 4: Channels used for communicating with other fans

The results of the survey suggest that a significant percentage of respondents make Korean culture a frequent topic of conversation. Specifically, 49.5% reported conversing about Korean culture more than once a day, 6.0% once a day, 22.1% several times a week, and 5.7% once a month or less frequently. The frequency of communication about Korean culture also varied across different age groups. The highest percentage of respondents who communicated about Korean culture more than once daily was in the "under 18" age group, at 62.9%. The second-highest percentage was in the "51 to 60" age group, at 41.8%. These findings suggest that Korean culture is a topic of significant interest and discussion among fans, with younger fans being particularly engaged in frequent communication about Korean culture.

According to the survey results, 49.2% of respondents reported participating in K-culture-related activities, while 12.9% expressed a desire to participate in the future. The most popular K-pop-related activities among fans were making cover dances and singing, with 34.7% and 32.6% of respondents respectively reporting participation in these activities (see Figure 5). Other popular activities included makeup/beauty (16.4%) and translating songs and films (12.8%). These findings suggest that K-culture has inspired significant levels of fan engagement and participation, with

a range of creative and artistic activities being pursued by fans of different ages and backgrounds.
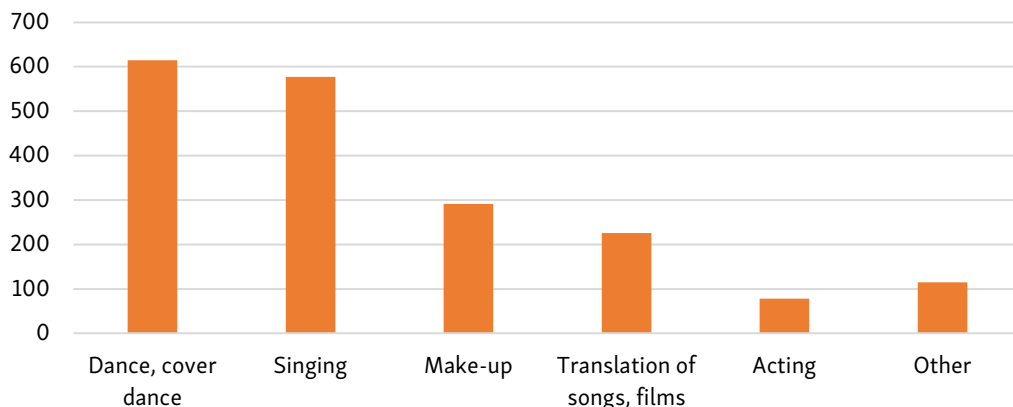
Figure 5: The most popular related activities of Hungarian fans

 According to Table 5 below, the preferences for K-culture-related activities varied across different age groups. Making cover dances was particularly popular among younger fans, while singing and translating songs and films were more popular among older fans. These findings suggest that different age groups have distinct preferences for the types of K-culture-related activities they engage in, with younger fans tending towards more performance-based activities and older fans being more interested in creative and intellectual pursuits.

Table 5: Activity Preferences of Fans by Age Groups

Age	1st Popular Activity	2nd Popular Activity	3rd Popular Activity
Under 18	Dance, Cover Dance	Singing	Makeup
19-30	Dance, Cover Dance	Singing	Makeup
31-40	Singing	Other	Translation of Songs, Films
41-50	Singing	Translation of Songs, Films	Makeup
51-60	Singing	Translation of Songs, Films	Makeup
Above 60	Singing	Translation of Songs, Films	Other

According to our research, more than 75.0% of respondents acknowledged themselves as fan group members, with 6.2% expressing a desire to join fan groups in the future. It is important to note that the high percentage of group membership (75%) may be attributed to respondents' understanding of the term 'fan group membership' as encompassing both formal fan groups and casual fan cafes. The research also found that fan group membership was particularly active among age groups under 18 and above 60. Specifically, 94.4% of respondents under 18 years old and 73.26% of

respondents above 60 reported being fan group members or expressing a desire to join a group. These findings suggest that fan groups and fan culture are an important part of K-culture fandom, with a significant proportion of fans actively participating in these communities across different age groups.

The questionnaire contained an open-ended question that asked respondents to name the fan groups they had joined. 47.6% (843) of all respondents provided a response, revealing a total of 407 different fan groups. Among those who joined fan groups, the majority (64.5%) were members of K-pop act fan groups. The remaining respondents reported their membership in fan groups related to K-drama, Korean film, Korean food, travel, and entertainment agency pages. The most popular K-pop fan group was BTS's fan club (A.R.M.Y), with 42% of questionnaire respondents claiming membership, followed by Black Pink's fan group, which was represented by 22.6% of all questionnaire respondents.

Lee Dangkweon, director of the Korean Cultural Centre of Hungary, has observed that the fervor of Hungarian fans surpasses that of other countries. To exemplify, Hungarian supporters established the Hungary-Korea Society, a Hungarian-Korean civil society organization, entirely on their own in 2004,[8] pre-dating the government-backed Korean Cultural Centre's opening in 2012.[9] Hungarian fans have also energetically arranged cultural events without assistance from Korea-related entities, demonstrating their resolute commitment and strong camaraderie. Interviews with Hungarian A.R.M.Y. leaders and the event organizer company's representative (Seoul Mates) acknowledged the fans' tight-knit community. Both interviews cited Hungarian fans' countless commemorations following the Danube boat accident in 2019, a testament to their deep connection with Korea. Fans congregated on the Danube shore, sang Korean songs, and tossed flowers into the river. Active members of the Hungarian-Korean Community Facebook page, Dél-Korea, also orchestrated some of the tributes.[10]

According to some scholars (Hübinette 2012; Mazaná 2014), European fans of K-pop and K-drama show a keen interest in Japanese culture. For instance, Mazaná's (2014) research revealed that 73% of Czech fans were already interested in Japanese culture before they became Hallyu fans. Therefore, Japanese culture, such as J-pop, serves as a bridge for European fans to become exposed to South Korean culture. This bridge function of Japanese culture is also evident in Hungary's K-Culture context, where 76.0% of the survey respondents reported being fans of Japanese or Chinese films, music, or other cultural content. Among the non-Korean cultural content mentioned, Japanese manga and anime were the most popular, with over 62.6% of fans indicating their interest in them, followed by Japanese and Chinese drama series, J-pop, Chinese pop, and other genres (see Figure 6).

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8   http://hukor.hu/

9   http://hungary.korean-culture.org/hu/7/contents/723

10   https://www.facebook.com/groups/delkorea/?fref=nf
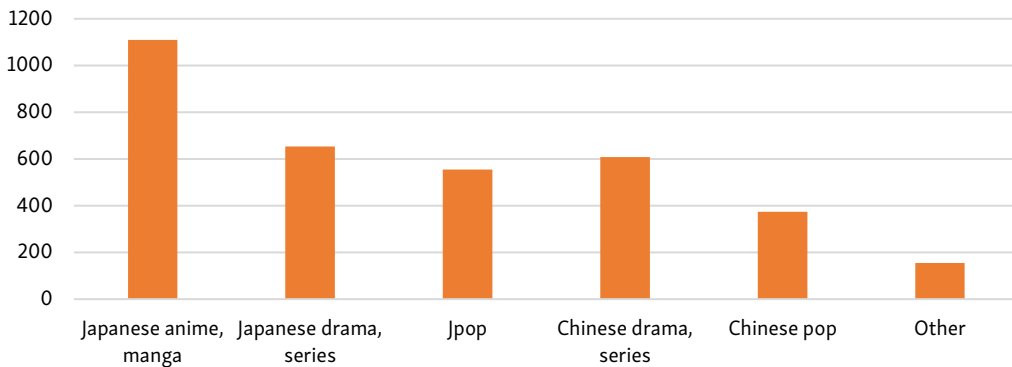
Figure 6: Hungarian K-culture fans' interest in other East Asian cultural content

According to the authors' crosstab analysis, there was a significant correlation between being a fan of K-culture and being a fan of Japanese or Chinese cultural content. Specifically, 88% and 92% of K-pop fans were also fans of Japanese and Chinese cultural content, respectively. This trend was also observed among fans of K-dramas (83% Japanese, 93% Chinese), Korean language (76% Japanese, 88% Chinese), and Korean film (70% Japanese, 80% Chinese). The analysis indicated that the correlation between K-culture and Japanese or Chinese cultural content was consistently high across different forms of K-culture. However, Korean folk dance did not reflect this correlation. This finding is reminiscent of what occurred in Southeast Asia when Taiwanese drama "Meteor Garden" (2000) gained immense popularity in Indonesia and the Philippines before Korean dramas did in the early 2000s. Taiwanese dramas helped cultivate a taste for Northeast Asian male actors among fans, paving the way for the subsequent rise of Korean dramas in these countries (Shim 2013). This illustrates how similar cultures, such as Japan and Taiwan, played a bridging role in the success of the Korean Wave, highlighting the ongoing flow of cultures that shape international cultural exchange.

6.   CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND PURCHASING POWER OF FANS

One of the main objectives of this research was to uncover the desires and requirements of Hungarian consumers for Korean cultural and non-cultural products and services. The findings indicated that cultural products associated with K-pop and K-dramas (e.g., music and video CDs, DVDs, accessories, merchandise, and printed materials featuring stars) were particularly sought after by Hungarian fans. Over 63.5% of respondents reported purchasing such items, and an additional 18.3% expressed interest in doing so in the future. Age was a significant factor in purchase behavior, with older respondents (over 51) less likely to buy these products, while

younger fans were more likely to do so. Furthermore, younger age groups demonstrated a greater intention to purchase K-pop and K-drama merchandise in the future.

Our research aimed to identify the particular K-pop and K-drama-related products and services that Hungarian fans were interested in purchasing. Results revealed that accessories (such as earrings and necklaces), fashion products, and clothing were the most popular items purchased by respondents. Food and merchandise products were also popular, whereas only 4.8% of respondents reported purchasing glasses and contact lenses (see Figure 7). Notably, unlike in Western countries, CD and DVD formats remain significant in the consumption of cultural content in Hungary.
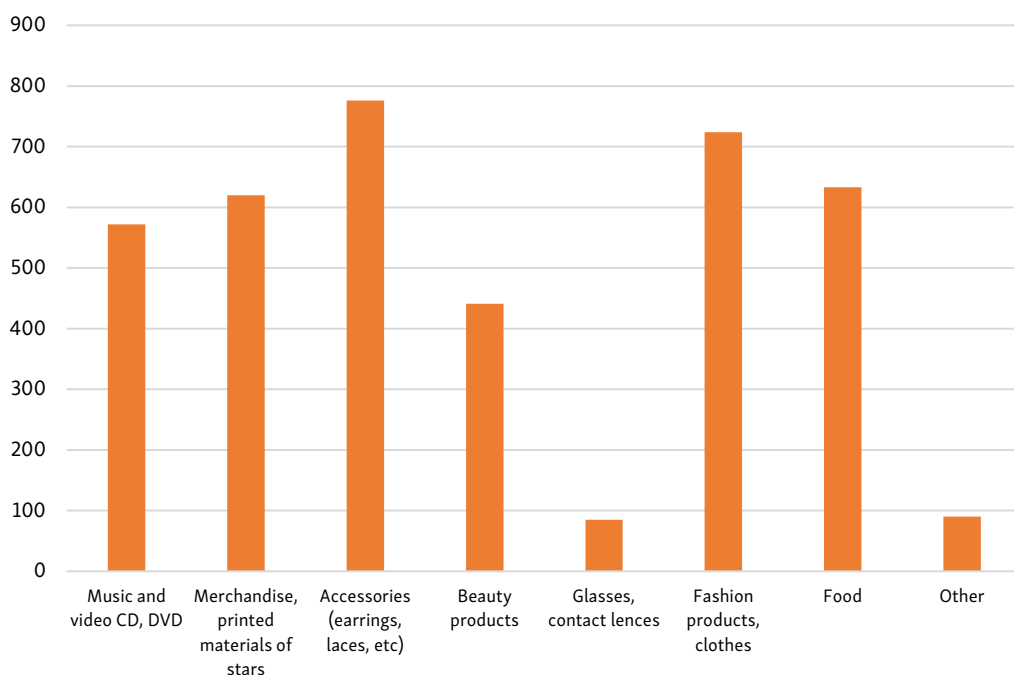
Figure 7: K-pop and K-drama product Interest among Hungarian fans

The gender of the respondents had a significant correlation with the purchase of beauty products and accessories, with a higher percentage of women indicating an interest in these products. However, there was no such correlation observed for fashion products, with both male and female respondents showing similar patterns in purchasing these products. There was a difference in the types of K-pop and K-drama products purchased by fans based on age (see Table 7). Accessories were the most popular product among younger fans (under 18 and between 19-30), while older respondents (above 31) showed a preference for Korean food.

Table 6: Product Preferences by Age Groups

Age	1st Popular	2nd Popular	3rd Popular
Under 18	Accessories (earrings, laces, etc.)	Fashion Products, Clothes	Merchandise, Printed Materials of Stars
19-30	Accessories (earrings, laces, etc.)	Music and Video CD, DVD	Fashion Products, Clothes
31-40	Food	Accessories (earrings, laces, etc.)	Beauty Products
41-50	Food	Music and Video CD, DVD	Accessories (earrings, laces, etc.)
51-60	Food	Music and Video CD, DVD	Beauty Products
Above 60	Food	Beauty Products	Music and Video CD, DVD

In addition to cultural products, the research also investigated the demand for non-cultural Korean products and services among Hungarian fans (as shown in Figure 8). The results revealed that a majority of respondents (85.6%) expressed interest in non-cultural Korean products. However, it was found that respondents over the age of 40 were less likely to be interested in these products. Among the non-cultural products, beauty products, and tourist services were the most popular choices. On the other hand, Korean IT products and software were less popular among respondents, while Korean cars were the least popular. It is worth noting that the questionnaire did not mention any specific Korean car or fashion brands.

Figure 8: Interest of Respondents in Non-Cultural Korean Products and Services

The majority of the non-cultural products and services listed in the study showed a noticeable correlation with the gender of the respondents, as outlined in Table 7.

Table 7: Non-cultural Product Preferences of Respondents by Gender

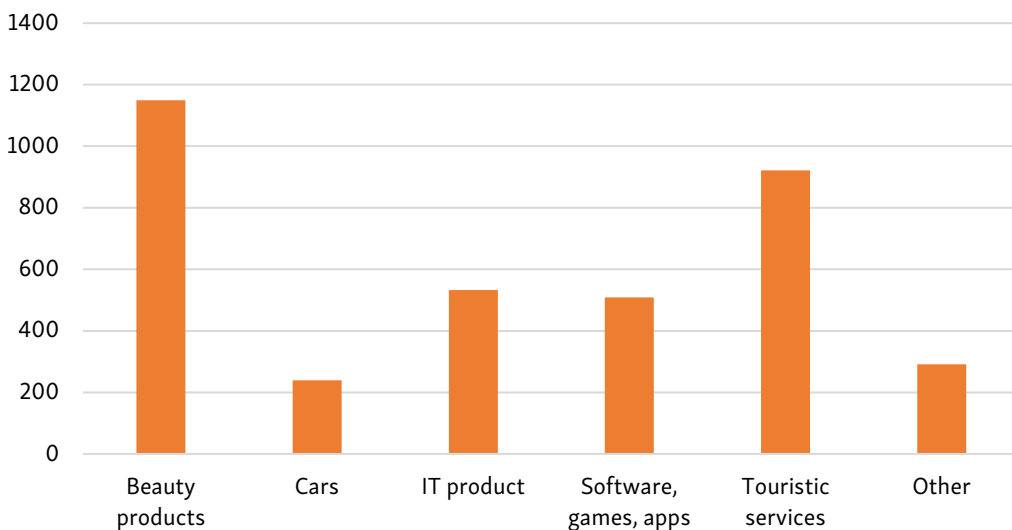| Place/Gender	Women	Men
1st place	beauty products	IT products
2nd place	touristic services	software, games, and apps
3rd place	IT products	touristic services

Overall, Hungarian K-pop and K-drama fans displayed a strong demand and inclination to purchase both cultural and non-cultural Korean products, according to the research. Out of the 1,772 respondents, 67.2% reported purchasing Korean products. Of these respondents, 41.6% spent less than 5,000 HUF per month, while 20.7% spent between 5,000 and 10,000 HUF.[11] Only 0.2% of respondents spent between 50,001 and 100,000 HUF per month. Table 8 provides further details.

Table 8: Hungarian Fans' Monthly Spending on Korean Cultural and Non-Cultural Products

Payment categories	Number of respondents	Percentage
Less than 5,000 HUF	738	41.6%
5,000 – 10,000 HUF	367	20.7%
10,001 – 50,000 HUF	81	4.6%
50,001 – 100,000 HUF	4	0.2%
More than 100,001 HUF	1	0.06%
No reports on spending	581	32.8%
Total	***1772***	***100.00%***

7.   CONCLUSION

The diffusion of Korean cultural products and services in Europe has been increasing, and in Hungary, the Korean Wave has been attracting fans since 2008, which has contributed to the yearly growth of the Korean market size. While Hungarian K-culture fandom shares similarities with other countries, our research has revealed unique characteristics of Hungarian fans. Firstly, they are particularly drawn to Korean culture due to the appeal of the Korean language. With 85.3% of Hungarian respondents either speaking or wishing to learn Korean, many fans consider it a gateway to explore other aspects of Korean culture. Secondly, the rise of Korean culture fandom in Hungary is closely linked to other Asian cultural content, such as Japanese manga/anime and Chinese movies. More than 76% of fans stated that they were fans of Japanese or Chinese cultural content before they became Hallyu fans.

Previous studies have overlooked the purchasing power of K-culture fans, but

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11   1 Hungarian Forint (HUF) is roughly 3.8 Korean Won (KRW).

our research highlights that Hungarian fans primarily purchase accessories, fashion items, and K-pop idol merchandise. In addition, the tendency to buy beauty products and tourist services is also high in Hungary, with older fans showing a preference for purchasing tourist services. However, in contrast to the global trends study (Zero2Turbo 2013), Hungarian K-pop and K-drama fans did not express significant interest in Korean cars.

The aim of this paper was to investigate the Korean Wave and the consumption of Korean commodities in Hungary. Since the implementation of our research, the diffusion of Hallyu has been significantly influenced by the development of new communication channels such as Netflix and mobile apps and web platforms created by Korean Hallyu companies like Dear U Bubble and Weverse. Hungarian fans, particularly the younger generation, tend to utilize these modern assets instead of traditional channels like TV. Moreover, Hungarian national TV channels no longer feature Korean TV series in their programs. Nonetheless, we hope that the information about the preferences and attributes of fans and consumers in this paper can serve as a reference for public and private organizations seeking to understand the Hungarian market. Moving forward, we intend to continue our research on the Korean Wave and involve more European academics in Korean studies to develop a comprehensive understanding of K-culture fandom in Europe.

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12 https://www.obic-bbs.hu/en/

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'DOES ANYONE KNOW I OWN A HOUSE IN CHARLOTTESVILLE?': DONALD TRUMP'S EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC

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ABSTRACT

Epideixis is commonly defined as rhetoric that seeks to attribute praise or blame, and reaffirm or reformulate community values. Key to its rhetorical 'success' with media audiences is its ornamental function and performative power rather than its informative content.
This case study focuses on Donald Trump's rhetoric following the Charlottesville protests in 2017, along a short narrative timeline of a few days. His style might be designated as a distinctive 'populist rhetoric', contravening some political speechmaking norms. The paper integrates analysis of sample sections of the Charlottesville speeches with Celeste Condit's (1985) 'functional pairs', namely, definition/understanding; shaping/sharing the community; and display/entertainment.
The study concludes that Trump's media performance following Charlottesville represents a presidential evasion of the explicit requirements of epideictic rhetoric, and thereby, a consequential failure to provide non-partisan comfort and social unity at a pivotal political moment.

Keywords: epideixis/epideictic ▪ Trump ▪ Charlottesville ▪ rhetoric ▪ dramaturgy

1.   INTRODUCTION

On August 12, 2017, a crowd of hundreds far-right, neo-Nazis and white supremacist activists marched through the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, towards the statue of Civil War confederate General Robert E. Lee. In the southern United States around that time, a deeply acrimonious debate had been taking place regarding the existence of confederate memorials, street names, flags and statues, and the inherent racism of the historical events that they continued to commemorate. The 'Unite the Right' marchers carried swastikas, weapons and torches and chanted deeply racist slogans such as 'Jews will not replace us', 'You will not replace us', 'Blacks will not replace us', 'Immigrants will not replace us', 'Blood and soil' and 'White lives matter'. The

demonstrators were met with an anti-fascist counter-demonstration, and violence occurred, resulting in many injuries. A counter-protester, Heather Heyer, was killed by a far-right activist driving his car into the crowd. Two state troopers on duty were also killed in a helicopter accident.

It is typical that when crisis events occur, citizens look to a trusted public figure, such as a president or other head of state, for some formal statement that may provide reassurance and the promise of stability; it is in these situations where epideictic rhetoric is expected as part of the repertoire of political communication.

In the years following Donald Trump's election as President of the United States, journalists and their audiences witnessed numerous situations that challenged public expectations of 'presidential behavior'. Much media reporting during his term seemed to focus on characterizing him as a populist, undermining many norms, rituals and practices that characterize political office. The aim of this paper is to explore, from a critical perspective, Trumpian epideixis (or epideictic) in the light of the Charlottesville tragedy; and thereby, examine the former President's self-styled media persona as a populist plain-speaker. Working with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) interpretation of Aristotelian rhetoric and Condit's (1985) conceptualization of the epideictic genre, this paper will examine the extent to which Trump's rhetoric after Charlottesville marks a deviation from long-established norms of political behavior on epideictic occasions. In conclusion, the paper aims to consider the implications for the US and elsewhere of far-right inflected political discourse.

Epideictic speeches form part of the public speaking repertoire of almost any political leader, typically comprising formal scripted speeches for relevant political 'fields of action' (see Girnth, 1996, in Wodak, 2009), such as ceremony or commemoration. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Katherine Hall Jamieson (1990: 50), in their important study of American presidential rhetoric, maintain that all speeches in all contexts are 'vital functions for the preservation of the presidency as an institution'. Indeed, many epideictic presidential speeches delivered by Trump have stylistic parallels with similar speeches by his predecessors. Within the epideictic genre are the many regular events in any presidential schedule: inaugural speeches, State of the Union and Memorial Day addresses, commemorations of key anniversaries, etc. However, epideictic also comprises other less predictable situations outside the schedule, such as speeches, statements and eulogies following mass shootings. It is worth noting the tragic frequency of this latter sub-genre: Barack Obama, for example, delivered some 18 such media addresses following mass shootings during his time in office. Scholars also point to the eloquence of epideictic addresses by Abraham Lincoln on the battlefield at Gettysburg; Ronald Reagan following the Challenger space shuttle crash in 1986; Bill Clinton following the Oklahoma bombing in 1995; and George W. Bush following the attacks of 9/11.

Warning signs of normative idiosyncrasies appeared early in the Trump presidency. Incongruous comments were made at an annual celebration of the Boy Scout movement. An unscripted attempt at epideixis followed Trump's failure to attract

most of the Super Bowl-winning NFL team to the White House in 2018; the event was turned into a face-saving 'celebration of America' with patriotic songs. Conversely, the absence of epideixis is also notable. Epideictic memorializing was not forthcoming, or only cursory, for example, on the death of Republican Congressman John McCain in August 2018. Opportunities for presidential words of comfort, a fundamental manifestation and objective of epideixis, were also missed following the multiple deaths of Black men and women at the hands of police officers during his time in office.

The primary focus of this paper is analysis of Trump's words delivered in the immediate hours and days following the Charlottesville protests in August 2017. The purpose is to provide a snapshot case study of Trump's reaction in light of the norms of epideixis. Many existing analyses of Trump's rhetorical style focus primarily on the micro-linguistic (mainly lexical) level (see, for example, Sclafani, 2017). This paper also acknowledges the important contribution by Perry (2018) who discusses what he calls Trump's 'uncivil mourning' regarding Charlottesville in the broader context of American white supremacy. The aim of this case study is to consider linguistic features of a president's epideictic remarks, but set against the performative and verbal norms deployed following public tragedy.

Further to arguing that Trump's epideixis is anomalous within American presidential practice, it is prudent to acknowledge shifts and innovations in available media in different eras that affect the context, delivery, message and reception of political speeches. To illustrate, I have included some contemporaneous material from Trump's Twitter feed to provide illumination on the supplementary role played by social media. The discussion and concluding sections also engage briefly with some of the implications of shifts in political rhetoric in general, and the rhetoric of far-right extremism. The limitations, but also the potential positive and progressive value of epideictic rhetoric in times of moral crisis among socially diverse populations will also be acknowledged.

Research questions:
1. In what ways does Trump's rhetorical handling of Charlottesville represent a departure from the epideictic norms typically deployed on occasions of public moral crisis?
2. To what extent does epideixis play a significant role in the dramaturgy of modern politics, and why should it be upheld in the interests of democratic discourse?

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONCEPTUALIZING RHETORIC AND EPIDEIXIS

How important is epideictic rhetoric in the political repertoire? A revival of interest in Aristotelian rhetoric and its relevance to modern political discourse has been aided by, for example, the canonical work of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), and

later, for example, by Condit (1985), Sauer (1996), Reisigl (2008), Slavíčková (2013, 2014) and Atkins (2018). Briefly, Aristotle (1924) identified three principal modes for persuading audiences, namely *logos* (deploying rational argument); *ethos* (drawing attention to the speaker's personal authority and charisma); and *pathos* (expressing and engendering emotional reactions, etc.). Aristotle also defines three *genera* of oratory. Firstly, the forward-looking deliberative genre (*genus deliberativum*) is oriented to future policy and debate. Secondly, the forensic genre (*genus iudiciale*) investigates events of the past, and is closely related to judicial discourse. Thirdly, the epideictic genre (*genus demonstrativum*), is perhaps the most conceptually opaque. The norm for presidential epideixis is that the *ethos* of the presidential orator is conferred by that person acting as the deictic centre [or *origo*]. If we think of political discourse in dramaturgical terms, in acknowledgement of Goffman (1959) and also Sauer (1996), public figures carrying out their duties are analogous to actors on a stage. The epideictic speaker is the animator, the mediator, the performance vehicle, but not necessarily its author. A dramaturgical perspective renders many political routines predictable and ritualistic, as citizens have *a priori* expectations of genre: what is to be done according to the field of action.

Epideictic speeches may be viewed by some communication analysts as being without intrinsic interest, lacking not only significant informative content, but also performative drive. On the surface, they tend to be predominantly ornamental, platitudinous, euphemistic, controlled and aesthetically pleasing. These features also intersect with some of the affective (*pathos*) qualities of populist rhetoric (see Rowland, 2021), and are unlike the dynamic deliberative and forensic genres which are more conspicuously a part of the rough and tumble of political life and the demands of modern media.

Epideixis is commonly defined as rhetoric that attributes praise for citizens to follow (encomium), or blame (vituperation) for them to reject. A thorough discussion of epideictic rhetoric and its subtle role in public discourse in the modern era is provided by Condit (1985); her framework, based on a critical reworking of Aristotle, underpins this case study. Drawing on earlier theoretical studies (such as Chase, 1961; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Oravec, 1976, and Beale, 1978), Condit designates three possible perspectives: (a) message-centered, (b) speaker-centered and (c) audience-centered (Condit, 1985: 285-7), each impacting on the other. She cautions that the familiar association of epideixis with praise or blame regarding the object of the speech may only serve to simplify its purpose. A unifying rhetoric can also, conversely, be a tool for otherization and discrimination. Condit correctly asserts that many other speech genres also seek to impart praise or blame, concurring with Beale (1978) that these are highly unspecific designations. Function is significant as well as form: praise and/or blame can also be imparted implicitly, without sincerity, or using irony.

Condit elevates the complex framework of epideixis beyond its perceived orientation to the spatio-temporal present, as expressed, for example, by the words *We*

are gathered here today.... Indeed, epideixis goes beyond the here and now, to prepare the ground for audience acceptance of future argumentation and to accept changing realities. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) concur in the notion of a long-term future, deliberative, orientation in epideixis, in their earlier seminal work linking rhetoric, argumentation and persuasion:

Epideictic oratory has significance and importance for argumentation because it strengthens the disposition towards action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969: 50)

An experienced epideictic orator has the strategic skill to 'create a reassuring communal definition [of events and actors] that can be shared by all active members...' (Condit: 1985: 292), hence the need for universal themes and arguments, as citizens are guided to position themselves on the side of good against evil.

Condit's framework acknowledges the range of possible functions of epideixis, suggesting that the three perspectives outlined above can be aligned with three possible functional pairs and deployed as a single pair, or combined:

1. definition/understanding (of the community and its values or challenges)
2. shaping/sharing of community
3. display/entertainment.

Condit (1985: 288)

(The first item in each pair indicates the function for the orator and the second, the function for the audience – thus acknowledging the dialogic, pragmatic relationships inherent in formal, scripted language use.) These three perspectives will be applied to Charlottesville.

Epideixis is deployed in situations where ritual, 'display', sincerity and the artfulness of the speaker are on show for critical evaluation by an audience. Here, content may be seen as secondary to the speaker's oratorical style and ethos, but may be significant in presenting argumentation to be taken up at a future point. At the moment of delivery, however, audiences may experience pathos (positive and negative emotions), the co-presence of a shared experience with other audience members (even at a distance, via mass media), the poetry of their lexical, metaphorical, allusive and even phonological choices, and the physical presence of speakers and their ethos (including their presidential status and charisma). The interaction of ethos and pathos are thus key aspects of populist rhetoric.

Quintilian (1920), in his *Instituto Oratoria*, argues that whatever political expediency is being exercised, the speaker's oratory must convince the audience they are in the presence of someone who is morally upright. The epideictic genre might usually be a bastion of poetic civility in modern societies where political discourse is often characterized by prosaic dysphemism. However, given the hard cognitive work of *logos* is backgrounded, the *pathos* and, most notably, *ethos* orientation of epideictic discourse also permit the politically convenient elision of truth. As Perelman and

Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) attest, the ornamental nature of the genre helps orators to elide or defer ideological messages; its analysis therefore is of interest.

The complexity of political argumentation and politicians' deployment of a nuanced range of rhetorical strategies to persuade citizens is discussed at length by, for example, Finlayson (2007). His paper advocates for an articulation of linguistic and political study, using rhetorical political analysis (RPA). This approach involves not only attention to argumentation, or stylistic aspects of persuasion, but also analyses the varied roles of context, rules and norms; what is designated by Bitzer (1968) as the "rhetorical situation". Politics scholars are encouraged, therefore, to advance beyond arguments as discrete elements, to focus on the situatedness of the political utterance, and thereby its linguistic manifestations. Finlayson urges political analysts to engage more fully with "genealogies" of argumentation and their contribution to affective commonalities and *topoi*. The affective dimension of political argumentation is also taken up by Martin (2015), who proposes an overtly psychoanalytic approach to political argumentation, stating that:

The canny orator is thus not one who crudely 'stirs emotions' but, more precisely, one who articulates desires in terms that permit audiences to grasp a situation and place themselves in it (Martin, 2015: 158).

The rhetorical 'success' of an epideictic oratory is thus predicated not only on its ornamental verbal artistry (see Jakobson, 1960) but also on its performative power (see Goffman, 1959). A modern audience's expectations of what comprises an effective speech are nurtured by exposure to the cumulative repertoire of rhetorical situations. Epideictic speeches may be crafted (using linguistic and non-linguistic signs) to appear uncontroversial, non-partisan, and to reach the widest possible audience. Whatever the content, the overarching, often understated, goal of the epideictic genre is upholding, for strategic purposes, not only the illusion of unity and communality among the audience, but contributing also, perhaps, to the foundation of a new one. For example, there is no doubt that Barack Obama's epideictic speeches following mass shootings and endemic murder levels during his incumbency urged national unity in grief, but they also link to the deliberative (and more partisan) political objectives of gun control and civil rights. Obama has expressed frustration with the institutional constraints on presidential rhetorical freedom, that 'he 'constantly struggled' with translating the passion and concern around some events - like the shootings of [Trayvon] Martin and [Michael] Brown - into political action'.[1] The key dilemma of epideictic rhetoric is adherence to the dramaturgical norms of universality while seeking, implicitly, to persuade.[2]

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1   See https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/26/politics/obama-ferguson-trayvon-martin-justice-department/index.html

2   An excellent (fictional) example of this can be found in Mark Anthony's funeral speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

3.   CASE STUDY AND DISCUSSION: THE CHARLOTTESVILLE NARRATIVE

The text extracts described and discussed below take the form of written and spoken language used by Trump from 12 to 15 August 2017. The data represents extracts from all of his public output referencing Charlottesville in those first few days. Trump's comments on the protest illustrate familiar narrative (and lexical) issues that are found in much of his political repertoire, but which appear stark when set against the normative stylistic range of epideixis. In different rhetorical situations, such as a presidential address to Congress, other genres (forensic and/or deliberative) might be deployed, but it is important to recognize that epideixis is a common first reaction by an orator to an unexpected crisis (as was the case here), before the message is shaped and (re-)contextualized (e.g. within a wider discussion about racial inequality, or gun control).

This body of text comprises 3 text types:

1.   Two short speeches separated by two days. The second of these (612 words) is a reformulation of the first (573 words), which was criticized in parts of the media as inappropriate to the epideictic moment.
2.   An unscripted press Q and A (approx. 15 minutes) which confounds the epideictic style of the second reworded speech.
3.   9 tweets on Trump's Twitter account (original transcripts including typographic idiosyncrasies, from the online Trump Twitter Archive[3]) some of which will also be drawn upon below. (3 tweets from the total of 12 sent in this time period do not relate to Charlottesville.)

12 August 2017: President Trump is at his golf course in Bedminster, New Jersey and informed of the Charlottesville violence. He sends out consecutive tweets:

> *We ALL must be united & condemn all that hate stands for. There is no place for this kind of violence in America. Lets come together as one!*

> *Am in Bedminster for meetings & press conference on V.A.* [veterans' affairs] *& all that we have done, and are doing, to make it better-but Charlottesville sad!*

> *We must remember this truth: No matter our color, creed, religion or political party, we are ALL AMERICANS FIRST.*

Text 1 (12 August 2017): Trump delivers the first of two epideictic speeches. The introductory sentences reveal a reluctance to engage with the ongoing Charlottesville crisis, and to foreground it with distractions. He praises local officials and himself, mentioning that the Virginia state governor thanked him for federal support in handling the aftermath. Throughout the short speech, references are made to the nation's

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3   The data remains available at http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive

economic and social improvement: 'My administration is restoring the sacred bonds of loyalty between this nation and its citizens'; '[O]ur country is doing very well in so many ways'. There are claims that '[racism]'s been going on for a long time in our country'. He fails to denounce white supremacism, claiming 'hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides…'.

> *Thank you very much. As you know, this was a small press conference, but a very important one. And it was scheduled to talk about the great things that we're doing with the secretary on the veterans administration. And we will talk about that very much so in a little while. But I thought I should put out a comment as to what's going on in Charlottesville. So, again, I want to thank everybody for being here, in particular I want to thank our incredible veterans. And thank you, fellas. Let me shake your hand.*
>
> *They're great people. Great people. But we're closely following the terrible events unfolding in Charlottesville, Virginia. We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides, on many sides…*
>
> *… We have to come together as Americans with love for our nation and true affection-- really, I say this so strongly, true affection for each other. Our country is doing very well in so many ways. We have record -- just absolute record employment. We have unemployment the lowest it's been in almost 17 years. We have companies pouring into our country, Foxconn and car companies and so many others. They're coming back to our country. We're renegotiating trade deals to make them great for our country and great for the American worker.*

Two days later, public and media pressure is mounting for the President to openly denounce neo-Nazis, white supremacists and the Ku Klux Klan (whose leader and other members were present in Charlottesville), and to distance himself from the 'many sides' remark. There is strong media criticism of Trump's failure to mention Heather Heyer's death or characterize the attack as domestic terrorism.

In response to the controversy, the business community reacts swiftly. The CEO of Merck Pharmaceuticals resigns from the president's manufacturing council, followed by others. Walmart's CEO posts a lengthy tweet expressing condolences; a statement on the company's website laments the missing of 'a critical opportunity to help bring our country together by unequivocally rejecting the appalling actions of white supremacists'.

Text 2 (14 August 2017): Now back at the White House, the President delivers another short speech, similar in content and style to Text 1, but this time it is noted by journalists present that the speech is scripted and he is reading from a teleprompter. He begins again with self-praise and distraction by celebrating his economic

successes - unemployment, American business, job creation. Later, he moves on to discuss Charlottesville:

> *As I said on Saturday, we condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of bigotry, hatred, and violence. It has no place in America. And as I have said many times before, no matter the color of our skin, we all live under the same laws; we all salute the same great flag; and we are all made by the same almighty God. We must love each other, show affection for each other, and unite together in condemnation of hatred, bigotry, and violence. We must discover the bonds of love and loyalty that bring us together as Americans. Racism is evil, and those who cause violence in its name are criminals and thugs, including the KKK, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and other hate groups that are repugnant to everything we hold dear as Americans. We are a nation founded on the truth that all of us are created equal. We are equal in the eyes of our creator, we are equal under the law, and we are equal under our constitution. Those who spread violence in the name of bigotry strike at the very core of America.*
>
> *Two days ago, a young American woman, Heather Heyer, was tragically killed. Her death fills us with grief and we send her family our thoughts, our prayers, and our love.*

In this reformulated version, Trump repeats more than once the tricolon of 'hatred, bigotry and violence' (whose rhetorical impact is perhaps weakened with each repetition), but he does also refer to 'racist violence', 'racism is evil', 'violence in the name of racism' and 'violence in the name of bigotry'. For now, the reference to blame 'on many sides' has been removed. Here, despite the unrelated and distracting opening remarks, we can argue that praise for the values of those killed and blame for those espousing racist ideology and provoking violence, seem to be appropriately assigned. This is recognizably, in part, an epideictic speech.

On 15 August, Trump obfuscates the previous day's message using Twitter. He retweets a cartoon showing a personified image of news network CNN being run down by a Trump train, and another tweet from a critic that in fact stated 'he [Trump]'s a fascist'; these are quickly deleted. He substitutes his own, more self-oriented tweets, targeting perceived adversaries in the media and business:

> *Made additional remarks on Charlottesville and realize once again that the #Fake News Media will never be satisfied...truly bad people!*
>
> *For every CEO that drops out of the Manufacturing Council, I have many to take their place. Grandstanders should not have gone on. JOBS!*

Text 3 (15 August 2017): Later, in Trump Tower in New York City, the President holds

an abrasive Q and A session with the press. He repeats his condemnation of 'this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence'. However, many responses throw into sharp relief the scripted, measured epideictic of the words spoken the day before. Below are some extracts (Q: assorted journalists, A: Trump).

Aiming for positive self-representation in varied ways, Trump defends his initial reticence regarding Heyer's killing. There is finally a moment of praise for her, but it is the self-praise that is foregrounded (see underlined text):

> *Excuse me. Excuse me. Take it nice and easy. Here's the thing. When I make a statement, I like to be correct. I want the facts. This event just happened. In fact, a lot of the event didn't even happen yet, as we were speaking. This event just happened.*
>
> *Before I make a statement, I need the facts. So I don't want to rush into a statement. So making the statement when I made it was excellent. In fact, the young woman, who I hear was a fantastic young woman, and it was on NBC — her mother wrote me and said through, I guess, Twitter, social media, the nicest things. And I very much appreciated that. I hear she was a fine — really, actually, an incredible young woman. But her mother, on Twitter, thanked me for what I said.*
>
> *...*
>
> *I wanted to see the facts. And the facts, as they started coming out, were very well stated. In fact, everybody said, 'His statement was beautiful. If he would have made it sooner, that would have been good.' I couldn't have made it sooner because I didn't know all of the facts. Frankly, people still don't know all of the facts.*

In a later section of the press meeting, he returns to the issue of blame, targeting the media:

> *Q: Mr.President, are you putting what you're calling the alt-left and white supremacists on the same moral plane?*
>
> THE PRESIDENT: *I'm not putting anybody on a moral plane. What I'm saying is this: You had a group on one side and you had a group on the other, and they came at each other with clubs — and it was vicious and it was horrible. And it was a horrible thing to watch. But there is another side. There was a group on this side. You can call them the left — you just called them the left — that came violently attacking the other group. So you can say what you want, but that's the way it is.*

Q: [Inaudible] *both sides, sir. You said there was hatred, there was violence on both sides. Are the —*

THE PRESIDENT: *Yes, I think there's blame on both sides. If you look at both sides — I think there's blame on both sides. And I have no doubt about it, and you don't have any doubt about it either. And if you reported it accurately, you would say.*

Q: *The neo-Nazis started this. They showed up in Charlottesville to protest —*

THE PRESIDENT: *Excuse me, excuse me. They didn't put themselves — and you had some very bad people in that group, but you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides. You had people in that group.*

The following discussion applies Condit's (1985) framework.

3.1. Defining and Understanding the Event

Jamieson (1973) describes how the generic classification of a rhetorical event, and hence its framing, nurtures audience expectations of message style and structure. This is in accordance with long-established traditions. In the case of the epideictic genre, the speaker is expected to 'explain [a] troubling issue in terms of the audience's key values and beliefs' (Condit, 1985: 288). This is where the framing is paramount, and a presidential speaker is in a position to use ethos and the expectation of being 'comforter in chief' to this end. The 'troubling issue' here is, in fact, racism, bigotry and white supremacy (via 'replacement theory') which provoked the march, and which resulted in the murder of a protester. However, in the Trump narrative, the issue is presented as a literal manifestation of two opposing, but equal viewpoints, with equal rights to free speech and equal modi operandi. The framing of the circumstances of Heyer's death is rhetorically problematic, because Trump avoids explaining it via universal principles or an overarching, unifying message. The message, particularly with regard to praise and blame, is mixed (hence, 'there were very fine people, on both sides').

In all three speech events, we can observe Trump's repeated attempts to foreground his personal connection to the economic successes for which he is seeking praise (thereby attempting to turn the focus onto positive self-presentation). This represents a serious obfuscation of the epideictic message.

3.2. Shaping and Sharing the Community

A more subtle underlying function is that of shaping/sharing the community's/nation's values. As Condit observes, drawing on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969:

...a focus on partial interests is anathema. When speakers violate this rule and make arguments which do not gain general assent audience members feel a sense of misuse of an occasion...For, we create epideictic occasions...in order to have opportunities for expressing and reformulating out shared heritage.

(Condit, 1985: 289).

When used in a funeral oration or following a natural disaster, epideixis is sometimes arguably intended to provide a publicly 'managed' forum, and sometimes even, a vocabulary, for more individual-centered emotions such as grief and anger. This is a typical feature of any kind of mass 'comfort' discourse. Trump is not celebrated for his oratorical eloquence (over-using, for example, the singular personal pronoun *I*, avoiding the universal present tense, using dysphemism, extensive repetition and hedging). However, in the more controlled, scripted, Text 2 there are a few stylistic elements that acknowledge the unifying drive of the genre, and this is revealed in some of its ornamental norms, such as the double tricolon (one embedded in another): *'We must love each other, show affection for each other, and unite together in condemnation of hatred, bigotry, and violence'.*

Condit argues that 'shaping the community' often entails drawing a picture of shared experiences to promote unity of purpose within a diverse audience. However, the Charlottesville speeches are just as likely to entail the construction of in- and out-groups, and it is certain that Trump's presidential framing power invoked cultural, gender and racial divisions. The dilemmas of expressing universal values at the expense of personal opinions have been experienced by previous presidents, of course: most notably in recent years, as mentioned earlier, by Barack Obama, for example, in regard to gun control, but also referring to environmental legislation and immigration. Trump's populist instincts (in the sense of ignoring or subverting the norms of rhetorical situations) led him to circumvent the 'institutional constraints' of the epideictic situation that frustrated his predecessor on parallel occasions, facilitating a 'both sides' tolerance of the intolerable.

3.3.   Display and Entertainment

Trump's cultivated persona as non-politician, deft at evading the tedious norms of presidential office, came into conflict on numerous epideictic occasions with the demands of ceremonial traditions where eloquence is expected and valued:

'Eloquence' is the combination of truth, beauty and power in human speech, and is a unique capacity of humanity.' (Condit, 1985: 290)

We might argue that Trump entered office with the deliberate intention as a populist to entertain (and seduce?) his audience by shattering these 'elitist' norms, and we can see the verbal consequences of his struggle with normative expectations in terms of the rhetorical hybridity of the two Charlottesville speeches (contrasting Text 1 and Text 2).

Strictly speaking of course, the Q and A and the tweets are extraneous to the

norms of Aristotelian epideixis. However, in a modern multi-media environment, all these speech events should be viewed together as narrative segments of the epideictic whole. The tweets seem to be aimed at provocation of Trump's opponents and the entertainment of his base, by rupturing the normative expectation of eloquence. The relationship between the two speeches, the unscripted remarks to journalists, and the 'unfettered Trump' comments on Twitter reveal much about the President's unpredictable rule-breaking performances. With hindsight, observers may choose to speculate on the deliberateness of this narrative cacophony: perhaps they reflect little more than a reality TV-inflected conscious effort to secure ratings.

The political significance of this most sensitive, and controlled, of rhetorical situations is challenged in the Charlottesville case by a tendency towards ad hoc diversions, contradiction and distraction. The Q and A exposes not only the President's anger and frustration with journalists, but also, if we consider it as a narrative that we would, normally, expect to complement the previous, more epideictic, speech (Text 2), there is a lack of coherence in the overall message. The remarks to the press on 15 August erase the possibility that the relatively 'presidential' epideictic focus of the previous day's narrative will stand as worthy of the genre, or as a correction to hasty remarks made in Text 1. Perhaps the primary motivation was little more than the guarantee that supporters and opponents alike will be united in their curiosity to watch the spectacle.

4.   CONCLUSION

It is possible to summarize some significant types of departure from the norms of epideixis in Trump's performance; all of these are clearly interconnected and overlapping, with divisive repercussions. All may also be considered familiar populist tropes, foregrounding *ethos* and *pathos*.

4.1.   Praise, Including Self-praise, Aggrandizing Own Successes

> *I want to salute the great work of the state and local police in Virginia. Incredible people. Law enforcement, incredible people. And also the National Guard. They've really been working smart and working hard. They've been doing a terrific job. Federal authorities are also providing tremendous support to the governor. He thanked me for that* [my underline]. (12 August)

> *The statement I made on Saturday, the first statement, was a fine statement.* (15 August Q and A)

4.2.   Irrelevant Distractions and Unpredictability

We have companies pouring into our country, Foxconn and car companies and so many others. They're coming back to our country. We're renegotiating trade deals to make them great for our country and great for the American worker. (12 August)

I own a house in Charlottesville. Does anyone know I own a house in Charlottesville? Oh boy. It is the winery...I know a lot about Charlottesville....great place, I own actually one of the largest wineries in the United States in Charlottesville. (15 August Q and A)

4.3.   Dysphemistic Co-Synchronous Use of Twitter, Distortion of Praise/Blame

Now that Ken Frazier of Merck Pharma has resigned from President's Manufacturing Council,he will have more time to LOWER RIPOFF DRUG PRICES (14 August Twitter)

Made additional remarks on Charlottesville and realize once again that the #Fake News Media will never be satisfied...truly bad people! (15 August Twitter)

In keeping with Goffman (1959) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), epideictic actors are normatively empathetic narrators of a message that in effect transcends their individuality, thus, never foregrounded talking about themselves and their achievements. The epideictic script is external to the speaker, analogous to an actor speaking lines; in that moment, a good actor uses passion and sincerity to inhabit and 'own' the text. The normative choreography of the epideictic drama must convince an audience (which may be skeptical) of the speaker's role as conduit for the values of a community rather than simply as the opinions of a private individual.

Regarding the dramaturgical model applied to modern political communication, one should be mindful of significant variables underlying the political performance. Jamieson (1988), for example, insists that attention be paid to relationships between speakers, the technologies they use, and the 'ghosts' (i.e. the real, invisible authors of political speeches, who may be many, varied and unknown to audiences). Often in Trump's presidency, observers may have gained the impression from tone of voice that he was bored by ceremonial discourse; that Twitter was his 'authentic' voice, the real window into his personal and ideological mindset. There were many documented occasions when sentiments expressed in tweets, and during interactions with the press, directly contradicted the official statements and speeches. This may well be in keeping with the unpredictability that maintained entertainer Trump on center stage, whatever the occasion, with the power of a populist to shape values.

Perhaps the most startling departure from normative epideixis lies primarily in

President Trump's failure to focus the narrative on a death. Although Jamieson (2013) reminds us that mistakes can be made by all presidents in their choices of rhetorical genre and dramaturgical conditions on specific occasions (pointing to epideictic errors made during the Obama presidency), it is hard to imagine similar behavior by others. Narrative focus on the victim would be done firstly, of course, as an act of decency and respect; secondly, to take the opportunity, as the genre demands, to provide moral leadership in the face of a hate crime; thirdly, to rhetorically reinforce the nation's core self-image: of goodness, tolerance and democracy. Surely, an unequivocal stance on racism is essential to a modern democratic presidential repertoire, which is why, amongst the other deviations surrounding Charlottesville, the 'many sides' trope was so disturbing. Trump's performance over those several days, comprising scripted and unscripted rhetoric and moral equivocation, represented a strong contrast to normative epideictic discursive consistency, and undermined the poetic gravitas of the moment.

The increasing complexity surrounding the sources of information available to the public can also be mapped onto this picture. Of course, social media and the smartphone are relatively new contributors to political discourse, adding a further dimension to the dramaturgical repertoire. The media events following Charlottesville represent what might be seen by some as a (deliberately) missed opportunity for Trump to assert presidential and moral authority by distancing himself from accusations of sympathy for white supremacists and the rhetoric of violence. By failing to do so, on this and other occasions, he potentially reopened and re-legitimized a discursive space for proponents of hate speech. This seems to have been borne out by subsequent events, such as the storming of the US Capitol by pro-Trump activists and white supremacists in January 2021, as well as a growing adherence to conspiracy theories within the Republican party. Understanding the significance of this failure also allows us to identify an intersection between rising anxiety regarding a shift towards linguistic dysphemism and disrespect in the public sphere in recent years, and actual acts of violence. The causes of this shift are undoubtedly complex and varied, but clearly the accessibility of hate speech via new technologies and media (including Twitter[4]) must be factored in as a global issue under scrutiny in our age (see, for example, Shepherd et al., 2015). Furthermore, violent discourse has already translated into actual ideologically-motivated physical violence, not only on Heather Heyer in the US, but also in the form of attacks on politicians in Europe; for example, the murders of British members of parliament Jo Cox and Sir David Amess in 2016 and 2021 and the mayor of Gdansk Pawel Adamowicz in 2019. The global reach of social media's dark side is also implicated in communicating acts of violence to mass audiences in real time, such as the massacres in mosques in New Zealand and churches in Sri Lanka in 2019, and the attempts by a far-right extremist to livestream the shooting dead of Black citizens in Buffalo, New York in May 2022.

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4   The extent to which social media can be relied on to monitor itself for hate speech continues to be uncertain.

Historically, as Martin Medhurst (2004) reminds us, US presidents are temporary occupants of the White House institution; they are tasked to fulfil the established traditions and rituals of office in upholding the Constitution. This also includes the requirement to interact with voters. In the mainstream of democratic political fields of action, the broader issue of respect and inclusiveness has to do with the role of any leader or president at any time. Dramaturgically speaking, an individual has been elected to act as the primary representative/mediator/animator of a nation state, to be a role model for all its citizens, however diverse they may be, and it is for this reason that scripted rhetoric according to historical norms is often necessary if the nation is to hold together conceptually.

In one sense, Condit (1985) recognizes that the notion of epideixis acting to manage and shape national consensus may seem a somewhat conservative proposition. Indeed, we might therefore take a negative view of epideixis as a politically convenient and illusory sticking plaster concealing real and intractable social differences. However, Condit herself goes on to argue that there is an alternative, positive perspective within the civic framework. Well-delivered and sincere epideictic rhetoric can, conversely, also fulfil a more progressive, constructive function in providing a basis and opening up a reluctant public mindset to new ideas and realities[5]. The genre has therefore, at least potentially, a fundamental social importance. For all its possible manipulative characteristics, the epideictic event can be regarded at its best as a forum for diverse entities to come together and affirm those cultural values that underpin a nation's self-image as a force for good. This seems particularly urgent at this moment in history when historically cohesive value-communities are seen to be fragmenting in the face of structural inequality, populism, misinformation and racism. In times of cultural crisis, the epideictic ritual space and the affective power of its visual and aural poetry may help a society to resist vulnerability to civil war or terrorism, and to shore up social stability. If nothing else, respectful, debate-based, democratic striving for consensus must be preferable to a chaotic, divisive, violent alternative. In this spirit, Condit (1985: 297) concludes her discussion by celebrating the dialogic message engendered by epideixis as 'an awesome humane tool' that offers benefits to orators, opinion leaders, audiences and society as a whole, in equal measure.

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5   This may, indeed, have been the central message of Lincoln's Gettysburg address.

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THE ALTERNATIVE MEDIA-INFORMATION SOURCES "LIKED" BY THE POPULIST POLITICAL LEADERS IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP AND ITALY ON FACEBOOK: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comparative overview of the way the Facebook (FB) "Like" button was used by the selected populist leaders in four Central-Eastern European countries and Italy for a more permanent designation of their favourite public pages. In particular, research attention was focused on identifying the "alternative" media as potentially the main or a major source of linked and "liked" (both literally and figuratively) media and information sources on FB. If present, this should prove the existence of the ideological affinity between the "alternative" politics as presented by the populist leaders and parties and the "alternative" media. However, only some limited evidence in support for such connections in the five case studies was found. In contrast, although the original sample was carefully and logically selected based on cultural-historical-geographical proximity and presence of populist leaders (the most similar cases), the results suggest rather diverse results. The populist leaders under the analysis do not seem to have direct and more permanent affinity toward the "alternative" media sources. Even more in some cases (Matovič, Babiš) they seem to prefer the quality liberal mainstream media, while in other cases (Kaczynski, Morawiecki and Salvini) they prefer the ideologically close media, or show no more permanent preference for any media – Orbán and Kollár (who did not use this tool for more permanent designation of the "liked" media). These diverse findings suggest more questions than answers.

Keywords: populism ▪ political communication ▪ Facebook ▪ "Like" button ▪ Babiš ▪ Matovič ▪ Kaczynski ▪ Kollár ▪ Morawiecki ▪ Orbán ▪ Salvini ▪ network analysis

1.   INTRODUCTION

Although research on various aspects of populist communication on social media is broad and diverse (e.g., Engesser, Ernst, Esser & Büchel, 2017; Školkay and Marincea,

2021), there are still niche but important areas of research that remain uncovered. Specifically, in this study, we present a qualitative comparative overview of how selected populist leaders in four Central-Eastern European countries and Italy chose to designate their Facebook (FB) affiliations more permanently by "liking" other FB public pages, which remained displayed on their FB profiles as a symbolic acknowledgement (although not easily visible to others without making an additional effort). Due to space limitations and the existing abundance of research on the topic, we do not extensively discuss the relationship between social network sites and populism (for this, refer to Školkay, 2021a), nor do we delve into the conceptualization of populism (see Piccolino and Soare, 2021; Hunger and Paxton, 2021; Školkay, 2021b). The focus of this study is instead on the qualitative comparative analysis of the use of a specific niche but important digital tool and its subsequent analytical implications. While the social aspects of this FB tool were first explored in a study by Eranti and Lonkila in 2015, no previous analysis has specifically examined the political aspect of the "Like" button, particularly in relation to alternative media and from a comparative perspective.

Traditionally, comparative analysis has emphasized "the explanation of differences, and the explanation of similarities" (Azarian, 2011, p. 2). Tilly (1984, p. 82) distinguishes four types of comparative analysis: individualizing, universalizing, variation-finding, and encompassing. In this study, we employed the variation-finding comparison, which seeks to "establish a principle of variation in the character or intensity of a phenomenon by examining systematic differences between instances" (Tilly, 1984, p. 82). The study includes findings from four in-depth case studies (Rétfalvi, 2022; Winiarska-Brodowska, Piontek, Dzwonczyk & Jabłońska, 2022; Školkay, Laczko, Havlíček & Žúborová, 2022; Školkay & Daniš, 2022), as well as a theoretical-methodological background study (Školkay & Marincea, 2022) and a working paper (Marincea, 2021). Within the countries under investigation, the following populist politicians' Facebook (FB) pages were selected by the cited authors: Viktor Orbán and Fidesz (The Alliance of Young Democrats-Hungarian Civic Union) for Hungary, Andrej Babiš and ANO (The Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) for Czech Republic, Igor Matovič and OĽaNO (The Ordinary People and Independent Personalities) for Slovakia, Mateusz Morawiecki and Jaroslaw Kaczyński for Poland (The Law and Justice party), and Matteo Salvini for Italy (The Lega). Additionally, Boris Kollár, the leader of the right-wing populist We Are a Family Party and the Speaker of the Parliament, was included for Slovakia. These populist leaders were selected based on their key roles in executive and/or party (e.g., Jaroslaw Kaczynski) and/or parliamentary (e.g., Boris Kollár) politics in 2020. Their populist dimension was tracked using the 2018 Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey (POPPA) dataset, which includes key indicators such as Manichean, indivisible, general will, people centrism, and anti-elitism. According to the POPPA dataset, all the selected parties exhibited high levels of populism.

The four countries of Central-Eastern Europe were initially selected as members

of the Visegrad Group (V4). The V4 was traditionally perceived more as an ad hoc regional lobby group rather than a political concept. The 2018 EU Coalition Explorer confirmed that the V4 countries consider each other as default partners. However, a 2021 survey among V4 experts revealed the existence of two axes: Czech and Slovak respondents named each other as their country's closest ally, while Polish and Hungarian respondents identified mutual closeness (Janebová & Végh, 2021). There is a nearly three-decade-long tradition of conducting comparative research focused on the V4, including studies on populism (e.g., Kim, 2021). Italy was included alongside the V4 countries due to similarities in media system characteristics (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), levels of political independence and market pluralism (Brogi et al., 2020), the presence and type of populist discourse (Bennett et al., 2020), and the political rise of populists to power (Pietrobon, 2018). Like the V4 populist leaders with whom Salvini has expressed interest in collaborating (e.g., Kollár, Orbán), he has gained political power by adopting a strong anti-refugee agenda.

The original research for the selected papers was based on the premise that the personal selection of more permanently "liked" pages (contrasting with more ad hoc "Likes" used in daily communication threads) should theoretically reflect personal, political, and ideological affinity towards specific individuals, institutions (especially media sources), and particularly "alternative media" by the populist leaders under scrutiny. In general, comparing these findings contributes to the development of a theory on the relationship between populism and the usage of social media by political leaders.

The original methodology employed by the cited authors (see Školkay & Marincea, 2022) was straightforward. It involved visually identifying the public pages that were more permanently "liked" by the selected populist leaders, as displayed on their Facebook (FB) official or personal pages. This identification process was conducted using a specific digital tool. The authors conducted this analysis in April-May 2020 for most cases, and in September 2020 for the Morawiecki and Fidesz case, following initial explorations. Among the permanently "liked" pages, only those related to media or broadly understood public communication sources (of any type, including black humor pages) were selected. The methodological approach adopted by the cited authors aligns with one of the two distinct approaches to social network analysis, known as the egocentric (or personal) network approach. This approach focuses on a central node (in this case, the populist leaders) and the relationships surrounding that node. This approach was reflected in the papers' emphasis on the assumed affinity between the populist leaders and parties towards alternative media on FB. It also reflects the primary level of connections on FB, where permanently "liking" a page serves as a more unambiguous and public expression of personal sympathy towards a source, as opposed to ad hoc "liking," which may be more random in nature.

The structure of the comparative paper differs from traditional research papers on social media. The key methodological focus is not solely on social media research but on comparative research based on case studies. As a result, there is no

extensive discussion on methodology provided in the paper itself. However, the original theoretical study (Školkay & Marincea, 2022) includes details on the methodology employed in each individual case study. Additionally, a discussion on the pros and cons of the comparative research approach or the research methodology used in individual chapters has been included in the paper.

In contrast to what is expected from the standard structure of the research part of the study, we expanded the part on the alternative media for the reasons explained further. Thus, the structure of the paper is as follows: firstly, we further outline the significance and conditions of comparative research, grounded in specific examples. Secondly, we briefly discuss political communication and populism in the V4 countries and Italy. The focus is on a general broader context since this background information has no particular explanatory relevance, as we document further. In general, as will be shown below, there is a common trend in the increased use of social media. This actually puts higher scientific value on our research. Thirdly, we discuss the issue of alternative media. This concept is often considered to be self-evident and normatively seen negatively, although the reality is far more complex. Fourthly, we discuss the FB "Like" Button. This provides descriptive information that is useful for those not familiar with this tool. It also serves as interesting information for the future since it was a constantly evolving tool—no longer in use under its original name "Like" (but as "Follows") since January 2021. This highlights, in retrospect, the historical importance of the initial exploratory research by the five cited papers.

What follows is the key part of this paper: comparing findings from the case studies. As an extension to the previous key section, the interaction of alternative media and populists is discussed. This assumed (and expected deeper) interaction was of our special research interest. We found some secondary but interesting findings which we also mention.

The authors' contribution that extends the results presented in the case studies is, therefore, not only in comparing the individual case studies' results but also in challenging the existing assumptions of alternative media as simply "junk news." Moreover, the challenges of the initial case selection and the rather divergent results seem to contribute to a better understanding of the need to be cautious about overstating the role of social media in the political communication of populists.

2.   STUDY

2.1.   The Challenges for the Comparative Research from the Case Selection Perspective

In this part, we discuss the importance of and categories for carrying out comparative research. Challenging theoretical thoughts is supported by examples from the country case studies. We compare the findings of the five cited case studies, which provide "units of analysis" understood as the social media profiles of populist leaders

(with the exception of Morawiecki, who arguably is not a typical populist leader but has been included as a Prime Minister) from the five analyzed countries. The case study method is closely related to the comparative method (Lijphart, 1971). Comparative analysis is central to theory-building and theory-testing in social studies (Peters, Fontaine & Mendez, 2018; Berg-Schlosser, 2001), especially when it is based on an analysis of socio-economic phenomena in relation to their institutional and socio-cultural settings (Hantrais, 1999).

The drawback of the comparative method is that it attempts to generalize based on relatively few empirical cases. Out of the four suggested specific ways in which this methodological difficulty may be resolved, we prefer to focus on comparable cases (as discussed, carefully selected countries, and then specific politicians) and tackle the key variables, specifically the media sources in general and the alternative media in particular.

Admittedly, the investigation of the FB "Likes" gives limited information about the (media) networks and affinities of the populists and their FB pages. It is an initial step in the inquiry but nonetheless an important one because it allows us to see the connections that are formally acknowledged by the populists in different countries and therefore the degree of normalization of, for example, alternative or fake news media, or hyper-partisan and usually right-wing sources. In that sense, this investigation may be more revealing about the populist leaders than just ad hoc "liking" or sharing of day-to-day information sources or opinions.

As put by Gerring (2007, p. 4), a case-based method rests on in-depth knowledge of the key cases, through which general points are elucidated and evaluated. For Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 6), case studies are important for developing a nuanced view of reality. However, it becomes complicated when one decides on the selection of cases. We would like to show this complexity and sometimes contradictions in defining the country selection. As it is known, case selection is of paramount importance in case study research, and even more so in comparative research. Seawright and Gerring (2008) offer seven case selection procedures that focus on typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, most similar, and most different cases. The primary selection by the cited authors reflected most similar cases from the perspective of cultural-historical legacy (the V4 countries). However, as mentioned, the V4 countries, together with Italy, also form typical case studies from the perspective of the importance of populism in current politics. Therefore, the inclusion of Italy is relevant (in particular, it may exclude the variable "post-communism").

Perhaps confusingly, Bogaards (2018, p. 1482) states that "Hungary is a deviant and exemplary case" among the countries that initially moved towards liberal democracy. Thus, alternatively, Hungary can be seen as a deviant case-selection from the perspective of democratization theories. This can be actually said about the Czech Republic as well since it is arguably one of the "least-likely cases" for populism to succeed, due to, for example, its strong middle class (Buštíková, 2018, p. 303). Again, this is a useful theoretical-empirical discussion and finding since using deviant

cases allows identifying the features that are present but may have no effect on the researched subject. It can also point to the ways in which the concepts can be introduced or rearranged (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010).

Moreover, the importance of social media as a relevant source of news shows that these cases are actually rather diverse (Slovakia and Hungary being in one group, Poland and the Czech Republic in another group, and Italy somewhere in the middle) (Eurobarometer, 2017-2019). However, Table 1 shows a different picture. Czechia and Slovakia are actually in the same group with respect to FB usage by an identical part of the population, while Hungary is again a relatively deviant case (having the highest FB usage), with Italy being somewhere in the middle (the data for Poland were incomplete). These contradictions or differences suggest how much it matters whether one selects more general data for comparison (e.g., social media) or makes a further selection from these more general data (e.g., FB).

This theoretical-empirical discussion about case selection and their categorization from a theoretical point of view highlights possible exploratory and interpretative perspectives that can be used in the present and follow-up research. The discussion shows the richness of our sample from the theoretical as well as empirical perspectives. Finally, it also weakens possible counter-arguments as to why this sample was selected and not the other. This sample is rich in its multidimensional analytical features, while at the same time, it is based on solid core characteristics that were used during the initial selection process. We acknowledge that this approach may seem too complex for classical, rather simple, or one-dimensional approaches to case selection. However, it shows methodological challenges that often remain unnoticed. Ultimately, a one-dimensional approach to case selection determines the quality of research results and their interpretation, as we can see in the debate above.

Now, we turn to providing a general overview of political communication and populism in the countries under comparison. This may help us frame or possibly explain our findings. We do not extensively discuss social network sites and political party leaders' communication strategies/behavior. This topic is discussed at length in the country case studies. Therefore, instead of expanding on a micro-perspective, we prefer a macro-perspective. Moreover, we are interested in FB as a connection to legacy or other media. It should be mentioned that we could not cite or refer to every single fact we relied on. This would make this study too long and involve too much cross-referencing. Instead, we prefer a synthetic analysis and, only when necessary, provide additional explanations or references to sources.

2.2. The Social and Legacy Media and Populism in V4 and Italy

Although television broadcast is still the main provider of news and political information in all analysed countries (Eurobarometer, 2019), the influence of the social media and its usage as a source of news has been on the rise and there are reasons

to believe this process will continue. The general data on the social media usage and trends in the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Social Media Usage in Selected Countries. (January 2020)

Country	Number of Users (in Millions)	Change (April 2019-January 2020, in %)	Penetration (%)	FB Reported Advertising Reach Compared to that of Population aged 13+ (%)	FB Usage (in millions)
Slovakia	2,8	+6.6	51	53	2,5
Poland*	19	+7.8	50	n.a.	17
Hungary	6	+5.9	62	66	5,6
Czechia	5,7	+6.7	53	53	4,9
Italy**	35,8	+6.4	58	59	31

Source: https://datareportal.com/reports/ , *Data for 2018, **Data for 2019

The data is rather similar across these countries in terms of social media usage and penetration trends, with Hungary and Italy slightly leading. This strengthens the validity of our comparative perspective. However, as mentioned above, the relevance of social media as a source of news suggests that there are significant differences. Yet, social media does not serve exclusively as a source of news but also for political socializing or simply discussing politics. Social media increasingly serves as a source of information and opinions, as well as material for analysis.

As already discussed, from a comparative perspective of social media reach, Hungarians can be most extensively reached by Facebook in relative terms, followed by Italy, with Czechia and Slovakia being on equal footing. Be that as it may, surprisingly, as shown in Table 1, these data have no exploratory usefulness for our findings. In other words, the data do not provide any clue as to why a certain populist politician used more permanent "Likes" or why they did not use them on their Facebook pages at all. Neither does the initial period of inclusion of social media in political communication shed more light on this issue. Some countries had an earlier onset of the electoral influence of social media in their national politics than others. For example, the "social media turn" first happened in (or around) 2010 in Czechia and Hungary's general elections. By contrast, in Slovakia, social media is held to have first had an important electoral role as late as the 2016 parliamentary elections.

Yet, the national case studies from Czechia, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Slovakia show that, despite the national specificities, there are some important similarities in the social media strategies employed by the populist leaders and parties. One of the main and most obvious common features that unites many of these parties and leaders is "self-mediatization," which implies a personalization of politics built around star leadership that often goes hand in hand with a form of tabloidization. There was a consensus (until social media expansion) that the dominant, usually "charismatic"

leaders, are typical of populist policies and populist parties, although it is unclear what the cause and effect are here (Barber, 2019). Apparently, populism and leadership constitute phenomena that are both complementary and distinctive (Viviani, 2017). More specifically, leadership explains the chameleon-like nature of populism (Soare, 2017). Currently, there are populist leaders that can be better described in academic studies as "provocateurs" or "drunken dinner guests" or as "entertainers" (Nai, Martínez i Coma & Maier, 2019). Clearly, social media, especially FB, played a key role in the success of some populist politicians and parties. This does not mean that there is no populism without FB or other social media. Yet, social media facilitated the rise of a specific type of populist leaders affiliated with certain political parties.

Other strategies by some selected populist actors involved building their own party-affiliated media or creating more or less transparent media relations with different media owners. This has been the case for populist parties and leaders in Italy (Lega and Salvini), in Hungary, as well as in Poland (Perrone, 2019; Lipiński, 2021). Once in power and with a consolidated position, we see some of these populists capturing the media through legislation or different unfriendly and secret takeovers in order to ensure their support or just to destroy critical media voices, like Fidesz and Orbán have done in Hungary. This media capture extended logically, especially in Hungary, to the part of online media. This seems to become a real threat in Poland too, with the public service media (PSM) already turned into a propaganda channel. Moreover, attempts seem to be made to take over large parts of the private media sector in Poland, similarly to what happened in Hungary.

Despite the ongoing digitalization (allowing free access to media content), coupled with the economic pressures, especially during or after periods of financial crises (like the one in 2007-2008), only a minor part of legacy media has become an occasional instrument of the political and economic status quo in Czechia and Slovakia. Moreover, the PSM and the key commercial mainstream media seem to be able to maintain balance. On the other hand, a larger part of the media sector in Czechia and Slovakia was seen as being guided by liberal ideology, while in Hungary, as well as in Poland, the combination of left and liberal attitudes, had been seen as dominant among journalists/media. This was the case before Fidesz or PiS came to power in 2010 and 2015, respectively, and moved the political part of the media spectrum significantly to the right. In Italy, the specifics of the media system are even more pronounced – there is a sort of osmosis between politics and journalism, with journalists entering the field of politics and politicians becoming journalists (Mancini & Matteo, n.d.; Perrone, 2019).

Despite rather different developments or causes, the resulting situation of the media landscapes and political communication spheres often implies that challenger parties or politicians have little access to the mainstream media in Hungary (or, in this particular case, increasingly, the opposition parties), the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, as well as Italy. Therefore, they have to rely on different strategies to access the

public. One of these is to turn to "alternative" media channels like FB pages/groups and independent websites because online media, being newer and less regulated channels, depending on much fewer resources for the production and distribution of information, but also with less access to the public than established media like television, tend to be less captured by the state and political or private actors. One consequence of the perception of captured media has been the rise of "alternative media" in Czechia and Slovakia in particular. As mentioned, the key research question was whether there is any clear link between "alternative media" and populism. However, this answer partially depends on what is meant by "alternative media." Yet, this is a rather controversial and not fully academically explored discussion in most of these countries.

2.3.   The Conceptual Difficulties with the Alternative Media

As for the definitions of "alternative media" in each country, although there are national specificities, some overall commonalities can also be discerned. There are two main, somewhat different sources of conceptualization of alternative media: the scholarly literature and the popular discourse – whether it is how journalists and mass-media organizations themselves talk about alternative media, the general public, politicians, different authorities, or the various initiatives of media monitoring and debunking that have sprung up in the past years. These different conceptualizations might prioritize different aspects of "alternative media" that they deem important (e.g., the accuracy of information over the political/ideological bias). As the cited studies show, the concept of "alternative media" remains very fuzzy within and among countries in theory, as well as in practice. Nonetheless, we can distinguish a few categories that can be extracted from the varying definitions and operationalizations. These are: a) based on substantial features of their content: disinformation, misinformation, and/or malinformation (often called alternative, controversial, or disinformation media by their opponents); arts, literature, community, and school media; alternative politics (e.g., Pirate parties, Green parties, or social movements); b) based on the type of professionalism of their producers: professional media, semi-professional media, amateurish citizen journalism (blogs, video, Twitter news, FB messaging). As the definitions vary, so does the perception of their impact and nature, ranging from mostly negative assessments to sometimes more positive ones.

Obviously, there can be, for example, disinformation media sources with a semi-professional level of production, or professional media with misinformation (e.g., captured PSM). Thus, these conceptualizations allow reflecting on the fluidity or transformations of particular media systems.

It is precisely this conceptual fuzziness that has raised issues not only theoretically but also in practice, leading to a change in terminology. In Czechia and Slovakia, the websites that were listed by one of the fact-checking initiatives complained about

having suffered economic repercussions due to such allegedly questionable classifications. This led some Slovak fact-checkers and disinformation activists to change the terminology to avoid subsequent legal complaints, using "controversial" websites instead of "disinformation" or more specifically "hoax" or "fake news," which is easier to claim and provide proof for. In Czechia, Hájek & Carpentier (2015) suggested abandoning the "dichotomy of alternative and mainstream media" and instead proposed the concept of "alternative mainstream media." In the majority of currently discussed and analyzed cases (however, this does not mean that the majority of alternative sources possess such characteristics), "alternative" or "controversial" media are associated with disinformation, misinformation, unverified information, or "fake news." For example, in Slovakia, controversial websites also include those related to alternative medicine or the far-right party Kotlebovci-LSNS. It may be relevant to observe that there is a relative consensus among scholars that the benchmark for mainstream, quality media tends to be the liberal and PSM media, which can indeed be shown empirically to provide the most accurate content in terms of the information delivered (see, for example, European Media Systems Survey). However, this should not necessarily be seen as an ideologically completely neutral and factually always objective position of analysis, especially when one analyzes the bias of different media outlets.

In Czechia, such "alternative" content was mainly promoted by marginal, non-mainstream media sources, while in Hungary, on the other hand, disinformation came directly from the pro-government media (Lupion, 2019). As the author of the Hungarian case study shows, this was also done by the government authorities themselves, starting in 2010. Similarly, as in the case of Slovakia, where among the top "controversial sources" there is the FB page of a Member of Parliament - Ľuboš Blaha, which can also be a sign of incivility and misinformation (from the populist left) being normalized and legitimized throughout society.

In Hungary, Czechia, and Slovakia, "alternative media" are sometimes defined as those that challenge the traditional structures of media production, giving access to media content production to ordinary people, not just media professionals, and to marginal interests and voices that would not otherwise have access to the media. However, in Czechia and Slovakia, alternative media can be seen as "alternative" to the dominant liberal media and discourses. Moreover, the captured PSM in Poland and Hungary try to portray themselves as the "alternative mainstream media," fighting the liberal and liberal-left ideologies and discourses. Italy is another specific media environment, located somewhere between these two groups of countries, with low trust in the mainstream media.

Finally, this leads us to support the idea that there is a more complex relationship between alternative and mainstream media among populist parties (and populist leaders) on FB than simply antagonism and exclusivity (Haller & Holt, 2019). This can be transparently seen in the use of the FB "like" button.

2.4.   The Facebook "Like" Button

There are three essential ways to interact with content on FB: liking (or reacting to a post or page), commenting, and sharing. The most prominent of them is the "Like" button, which was introduced in 2009/2010. In 2016, FB launched a new set of icons indicating emotions in addition to the Like button. As mentioned, "liking" is a way to give positive feedback and connect with others. Users could (until early 2022) like FB pages and can still "react" to posts, status updates, comments, photos, and links posted by their friends or strangers, as well as ads, by clicking the "Like, Love, Ha Ha, Wow, Sad, or Angry" buttons at the bottom of the content. However, a user could also use the "Like" button for more or less permanently "liking" or "following" a certain FB page. This means they could sign up for a specific type of relationship with that page, as put by Alperstein (2019), a parasocial interaction with digital media or imaginary social relationships. Users who have "liked" a FB Page were called Fans/Followers. Liking a certain page is also a form of public endorsement of that page.

Faucher (2018) believes that social media profiles and their connections can be seen as a form of "virtuosic score." This means that active social media users, whom he calls "virtuosos," are performing a kind of production by furnishing new content and acting as cross-syndicators who distribute the content of others over the network. Egebark and Ekström (2018) argued that one can see this as a specific sub-type of political distributed gatekeeping. While distributed gatekeeping was defined as "story-placement choices made by a large number of readers" (Schiffer, 2007 cited in Walczak, Meina & Olechnicki, 2017), political distributed gatekeeping can be seen as a more permanent selection of individuals, institutions, or resources by a political institution (politician, political party). In particular, liking articles and media on the web could help build online reputations (D'Costa, 2012).

Blassnig & Wirz (2019) found that both populist messages and populist actors foster the perception of an FB post as populist, but only populist messages are drivers of user reactions. The effect of populist communication on user reactions is moderated by the recipients' populist attitudes. Users with strong populist attitudes share populist messages more often than they share non-populist messages. However, populists seem to be eager to activate anger in their FB communication (Jacobs, Sandberg & Spierings, 2020). In the next section, we turn to the findings obtained in the five case studies.

2.5.   The Comparison of the Case Studies Findings

As mentioned, the following findings are determined by the available materials and their mutual comparability. We compared findings from Rétfalvi (2022), Winiarska-Brodowska, Piontek, Dzwonczyk & Jabłońska (2022), Školkay, Laczko, Havlíček & Žúborová (2022), Školkay & Daniš (2022), Školkay & Marincea (2022), and Marincea (2021). In line with the qualitative comparative method, we used the

heuristic method (variation-finding comparison) – finding and comparing similarities and differences with a focus on their relevance for political communication. The priority was given to finding and explaining the presence or absence of alternative media sources among more permanently linked FB pages. However, some additional findings worth mentioning – if they help us to clarify or contextualize findings - are also stated. These additional findings may be explored in the future.

First, we focus on the general context. There is the Polish exception - Kaczyński (not considering the special case of Morawiecki), and Slovak half-results (one leader – Kollár - is more popular than his party, while another one – Matovič is, or used to be until he became the Prime Minister for a short time - less popular than his movement). In all other cases analyzed, the party leaders were more popular on FB than the party or movement. However, both of these less popular leaders (Matovič, Kaczyński) did not have their official FB pages, just unofficial ones.

The leader in popularity, by far, was Matteo Salvini, with a following of 4.8 million, while his party's FB page "Lega – Salvini Premier" had over 1 million followers. Hungary's Viktor Orbán had over 1 million followers on FB, while Fidesz had over 300,000. Czechia's Andrej Babiš had over 250,000 followers, while his party ANO had only around 100,000 followers. The least spectacular difference between the party leader and party popularity was found in Slovakia, where Matovič led with almost 270,000 followers, while his party OĽaNO had around 230,000 (but there was a huge impact on winning general elections in February 2020). Kollár was followed by almost 150,000, while his party "We are a Family" had almost 120,000 followers. Jarosław Kaczyński was the least popular leader on FB among these populist leaders, with under 20,000 followers or likes. In contrast, PiS had almost 300,000 followers and/or likes. These results show a clear personalization of politics and centralization of power – typical of populists, including at the level of information production and distribution. However, Kaczyński's case shows that this may not need to be supported by active communication on social media. In addition, Matovič's case suggests that winning elections may radically change the number of followers.

The centrist (Babiš and ANO, Matovič and OĽaNO) or right-wing (Salvini and Lega) or socially conservative populists (Orbán and Fidesz, Kollár and We are a Family, Kaczyński and PiS) most often have a leader-driven communication strategy centered around a charismatic, star-like, and even show-like politician who runs the political/electoral process like a "show." However, this show and rhetoric (and often policies) can have either a religious-patriotic/nationalistic nature or, as put by some, a core of "platonic xenophobia" (Kaczyński and PiS), or a patriotic-quasi-religious nature with a strong (but occasional) dose of nativism - xenophobic nationalism – like the case of Orbán and Fidesz. Others may display non-religious characteristics with a strong dose of nativism - xenophobic nationalism (Salvini and Lega) or rather a civic-anti-corruption substance (Matovič and OĽaNO) or a civic-hope-installing substance (Babiš and ANO). At least in the latter two cases, there was actually no direct attack on liberal democracy. In any case, this implies that much of their party structure is evidently hierarchical and highly centralized, sometimes apparently

unidirectional. This tendency can also be observed in their communication on social media, as well as in their tendency to either associate (if at all) only with favorable media outlets and party media or to capture and centralize the media outlets once they are in a position to do so. As mentioned above, in Hungary, for example, we have seen a significant centralization of the media by the government in power, which has entirely transformed the media market into one dominated by pro-government media outlets (at least in the fields of political reporting and investigation). Nonetheless, as the empirical studies of the V4 countries and Italy show, these preferences towards hierarchical and highly centralized structures (including, as mentioned, leaving empty space for "liking" which is particularly visible in the case of Orbán) are also reflected in the way these populists use social media, particularly FB.

Second, despite the differences among the national contexts and specificities, some further commonalities emerge. The populist leaders in the countries under study are in most cases the producers of information, the main creators of content which they distribute to their networks of followers (which often include other party members, party supporters, and selected media), who often become amplifiers of these messages. They are in a central role, a position of leadership whereby they rarely publicly acknowledge other media sources (and when they do, these tend to be the friendly media or party media – like in the case of Lega and Salvini or PiS and Kaczyński, although there are exceptions discussed further) or even other politicians from their own party (PiS and Kaczyński, OĽaNO and Matovič, etc). The communication follows a rather unidirectional pattern (similar to allocution), not an interactive one, which strengthens the perceived position of authority. This type of communication follows the lines of "self-mediatization."

Third, normatively, even among the "Like" button users, only exceptionally some leaders and parties liked the "alternative" sources usually perceived as having a negative impact on public discourse, such as in the case of the Italian leader Matteo Salvini. Others, like the Slovak populist leader Matovič and the Czech leader Babiš, actually preferred the quality mainstream media (either national or international). In fact, only exceptionally, like in the case of Morawiecki, one could find the "alternative" media source in a normatively negative sense, while for Babiš, an example of the "alternative mainstream" media source was found. Kollár and Orbán did not provide any guidance in this regard on their FB. However, Kollár made it clear that he is not particularly interested in the "alternative" media. Rather, he was interested in interesting and relevant content. We discuss this issue further in the next paragraph.

Fourthly, a form of "decentralization" apparently resides in the public endorsement through the "Likes" of the pages of other politicians from the same party at the national, local, regional, or municipal level. This was typically the case of Salvini, Kaczyński, and Matovič. These public endorsements or lack thereof might reflect hidden dynamics within the party that are played out, strategically or unintentionally, at the level of social media.

These "Facebook politics" of networking through "likes" bring forth questions

like: Why do populist leaders like only certain party members and not others? Why do they sometimes prefer public linkage with/endorsements of local politicians or local media over the national or international ones and vice-versa? These contradictory tendencies, observed in the Polish and Slovak case studies, launch research questions for possible further empirical study.

2.6.   Results: the Alternative Media and Populists

It has emerged from the majority of analyzed case studies that populist leaders are connected, either directly (at the first level) or at the secondary level, with "soft-news" types of content. This typically includes sports, TV shows, different personalities, humor-related pages (including political humor), and a preference for local/regional media sources. An exception to this was observed in the cases of Matovič, Kaczyński, and Babiš, who showed a preference for national media sources. Populist leaders, such as Viktor Orbán, Andrej Babiš, Matteo Salvini, Boris Kollár, Igor Matovič, and Mateusz Morawiecki, employed self-mediatization strategies, often relying on video messages and allocutions. As mentioned earlier, they produced their own media content rather than relying on external sources. This may partially explain their reluctance to publicly endorse other media channels, especially those categorized as "alternative media." Jarosław Kaczyński was an exception as he mainly liked media outlets strongly engaged in politics with a conservative profile and promoting the values of the Catholic Church. However, the majority of these "liked" media were niche media.

Public endorsement of other (alternative) media channels implies less control over the content and can also generate controversy. It is a less secure transparency policy in the long-term perspective, which is why creating their own content that then becomes viral can be seen as a better strategy. This approach provides more control, especially when there is limited access to mainstream media. Not associating publicly with alternative media can also be a way of avoiding criticism regarding the distribution of "fake news" and maintaining an anti-system, challenger identity by not aligning with mainstream media. There are exceptions, such as Matovič, who didn't mind being associated with a major mainstream liberal media outlet, and Babiš, who liked one alternative news media source, although it was not a typical "fake news and disinformation" source. Kollár initially self-mediatized through commercial media reporting and TV shows before turning to Facebook.

While these populist leaders create their power positions and clear hierarchies, being the central figures who are followed rather than following others, they employ slightly different strategies. Salvini, Babiš, Matovič (partly), Morawiecki, and Kaczyński displayed more closeness to the people through their direct links and endorsements of various social causes, soft news, and popular sources. Orbán and Kollár, on the other hand, showed a more formal style of populism on social media, without direct endorsements of other media or politicians. All V4 political actors

under study, including Italy, created rather centralized, top-down, and in some cases, isolated networks, reflecting their party structures, with themselves placed in the middle, consolidating their charismatic leadership self-branding and their "anti-system" image. This resembles propaganda structures, but further research is needed to determine if the usage of social media by populists stems from such a perspective or from other potential factors, such as lower interest or lower literacy in using social media for political communication.

The comparative case studies show that disinformation can be promoted either directly through FB pages and groups or more frequently through websites that are distributed via FB. These websites often employ tactics to bypass monitoring and may change names frequently, making them difficult to identify (typical for Hungary). While most populist leaders and parties avoid direct and public association with such sources, this does not necessarily mean there is no connection or preference. Avoiding such associations may be a tactical communication option to maintain credibility. Further analysis, including content analysis of the media sources shared on their profiles, is necessary to determine if there are indeed no connections. It should be noted that Kaczyński's FB permanently liked a few ideologically close media outlets but unexpectedly did not capture the "public service" media. For Kollár from Slovakia, the message, not the messenger, mattered. Some populist leaders do not mind endorsing or citing controversial sources if they support their agenda or beliefs, as seen with Kollár from Slovakia or Salvini in Italy. Their willingness to do so reflects the degree of normalization and acceptance of right-wing attitudes and unverified information in society, resulting from increasing distrust in traditional media and politics.

There were also mentioned a few leaders who preferred to associate themselves with liberal media generally perceived as "quality" and/or "mainstream." This was the case for Slovakia's short-lived Prime Minister Igor Matovič, Czechia's Prime Minister Babiš, who endorsed several quality economic business magazines and journals, and Jarosław Kaczyński to some extent. On one hand, a limited or occasional preference for established media sources might indicate a lower degree of populism (as reliable, high-quality resources should lead to more rational and fact-based decision-making). On the other hand, such associations can be employed in political contexts where the respective leaders have not yet consolidated a sufficiently strong power position or where centrist populism is largely frowned upon. Associations with mainstream elite sources can give the impression of legitimacy and credibility, making them a strategic choice, especially in contexts where alternative media are viewed negatively, and where political leaders may want to avoid association with them.

3.   CONCLUSIONS

The key research question was whether there is any clear link between alternative media and populist leaders. Our tentative answer, based on a comparison of

the country case studies, is that there was no clear-cut and prevailing connection. This finding is surprising since it is commonly assumed that populists, representing "alternative politics," would have some affinity for "alternative" media. However, this answer partially depends on the definition of "alternative media," which is a controversial and not fully explored discussion in most analyzed countries. The term "junk news," as used in the Oxford Reuter's Institute study (Narayanan, 2018), is not helpful either. Additionally, while alternative media are often viewed negatively, there can be mainstream PSM that are biased, as seen in Hungary, Poland, and Hungary's captured majority of media.

The finding that the Facebook "like" button was not used strategically in most cases, but rather ad hoc, is also noteworthy. In some cases, such as Viktor Orbán and Boris Kollár, it was not used at all. Analyzing Orbán's "likes" in isolation would be futile since it does not provide useful data for deeper analysis. However, it is valuable to note when something is not used as a tool for political communication or other purposes. This finding is relevant and demonstrates a biased preference for "positive" findings in science. Furthermore, our research findings suggest that the use of the "like" button includes a diverse range of cases. Viktor Orbán and Boris Kollár, as the only exceptions, refrain from liking any other FB pages. Meanwhile, Kaczyński's presence on social media and his "liked" connections were influenced by his negative attitude toward social and legacy media. This unexpected finding supports the use of counterfactual examples and "most different" cases to establish their respective range of external validity. Additionally, there is a need for research on the conceptualization and analysis of the meaning of "alternative" sources and discourses in individual countries. The emerging research on the psychological aspects of "liking" certain pages is also noteworthy. Populist leaders' public endorsements through page "likes" can provide insights into their alliances, values, and interests. This presents opportunities for research in political psychology and political marketing.

It is worth exploring this topic periodically since politicians and parties may not have fully realized the potential of tools available on FB and other social media platforms. Preferences and "likes" of populist leaders and parties can evolve over time, while older preferences fade from public and researcher attention. Furthermore, the shift from "likes" to "followers" on Facebook has different psychological implications. The use of the "follow" button for designating "preferred" international partners can be revealing.

Our research approach also uncovered the controversial or uncritical use of data in social media research. The data we have documented have no explanatory value within the current analytical context, but they are seen as a standard part of such research articles. Regarding limitations, direct answers from political leaders on how they perceive the "alternative" or legacy media can be revealing, as observed in the cases of Kollár and Kaczyński. Another interesting comparative approach is to analyze the "liking" behavior of associated political parties compared to their

leaders. This analysis was considered but could not be included in this study due to space limitations.

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WHY DO WE ALL LOVE PODCASTS

MATĚJ SKALICKÝ

McHugh, S. (2022). *The Power of Podcasting: Telling Stories Through Sound*. Columbia University Press. ISBN 9780231557603, 396 pages.

It has been an alluring academic conundrum for the past couple of years: where did they come from and why does everybody love them? Living in the interconnected, information-flooded, and super-fast digital world of the 21st century, it's impossible to miss at least the occasional mention of what's been called the harbinger of the audio revolution: the podcast. The liquid barriers of our converged media universe now allow anyone to start producing podcasts, and the trend expanded rapidly over the internet: the White House has one, your local store definitely has one; actors and actresses, historians, police officers, politicians, celebrities, and journalists, they all eagerly joined the podsphere. Making a podcast can be fun, or it can be a great responsibility. Podcasts are the new flagships of leading media houses around the globe, and everyone is wondering what is the secret of their seductive allure. Siobhán McHugh, a long-standing audio researcher, podcast enthusiast, creator, producer, and honorary associate professor in Media and Communications at the University of Sydney, allows the readers to understand the appeal and reveals the mesmerizing, and enthralling power of telling stories through sound. McHugh's latest book *The Power of Podcasting* aims to uncover the magic of podcasting over the course of ten thematic chapters followed by an appendix of podcast recommendations and reviews. It attempts to sum up theoretical as well as practical knowledge of the riveting phenomenon of podcasting.

The book is mainly intended for a broad audience of media-interested readers, which is clear from the beginning. The first chapter welcomes everyone who is new to the field by answering the basic questions: who, why, and what. It provides a basic overview of the podverse, showing the plethora of possible podcast genres, while also debunking the prototypical motivations for doing a podcast. Following the boom of the blogosphere and the rising power of social media, casual people now have the opportunity *to be heard* (p. 19). From hobbyists to professionals, podcasters such as the ones affiliated with *The Daily* from *The New York Times* look for the most suitable genre or medium for their storytelling. All you need is to have the passion for it and to be ready to let the cat out of the bag. McHugh (p. 24) invites you to *harness* the power of podcasting by saying: "Is it a story you're bursting to tell, an undying obsession, maybe a biopsy of your own life?" McHugh is aware of the perks of podcasting for narrative storytelling. In one of her previous papers (McHugh 2016, p. 27), she already concluded that podcasts are not just a delivery mode for audio content, but that they might change the way the storytelling genre is perceived, e.g. by making it possible to experiment with the form or embark on other creative

adventures (ibid., p. 13). There is also one more and similarly important facet of liking podcasts: the host. Establishing friendship or a para-social relationship with the podcaster is a repeated motif in the book, rigorously elaborated on in the following chapters.

The entire aesthetic of storytelling in podcasts ultimately goes back to radio. As already noted in the prologue, the sound is elemental (p. 16), and podcast is a "flirty first cousin of radio" (p. 5). McHugh sums up the beginnings of radio production and looks for the pillars that form the backstory of the radio and the podcast: intimacy and empathy (p. 40). The process of crafting a podcast requires sound handling skills that have been developed in radio, as recently studied by Lindgren (2021), Adler Berg (2021), and others. Additionally, the prologue and the final subchapter emphasize the role of emotions in podcasting, as illustrated by two different personal stories in which McHugh shows the power of storytelling in podcasts. Everything is based on the development of classical linear radio broadcasting and its programming. The historical chapter is quite thorough, even though a European reader might appreciate a deeper delve into the context of non-English-speaking countries. Nonetheless, it was the digital revolution in the US that lead to experiments with storytelling through sound (e.g. *The American Life*), which in turn transformed the way audio is used as a medium.

Previous academic research on the processes of remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) and convergence (Jenkins, 2006; Jakubowicz 2013) laid the basis for understanding the genesis of podcasting: it started with RSS and first on-demand content right after the millennium; then came time-shifted radio and the first native podcasts (for the distinction between catch-up radio and native podcasts, see [Newman & Gallo, 2019, p. 9]). Surprisingly, the amateur beginnings of podcasting are an echo of the first non-professional steps of radio – the only variable that had changed was the power of the internet which allows people to share, download and listen wherever and whenever they want to. McHugh (p. 62) ingeniously uses the metaphor of "kissing cousins" to connect the radio and podcasting eras, underscoring the huge impact of Sarah Koenig's true-crime podcast Serial which was a major factor in the rise of the podcasts. In 2013, because of Serial, the world of audio fell in love with podcast storytelling. Intimate listening creates a bond between the host and the audience, and in some sense, helps establish a para-social relationship. Targeting a younger audience, changing the language used in broadcasting, being able to talk freely about sex or minority topics, and many other aspects enable podcasts to be "to radio what series on Netflix are to live TV" (p. 67). Here McHugh comes with another burning question: how to deal with the episodic format, and could some of the topics be more intriguing in podcasts than on the radio? She answers by sharing her own story about a "crystalline, linear storytelling" radio feature about women's experiences with abortion laws in Ireland, and discusses the possibilities of doing a multi-episodic podcast of "labyrinthine depth". While

this is still audio storytelling, there is a rather marked difference in how the story is told.

Somewhere around the fourth chapter, readers will realize that the book they are immersed in lacks any consistent structure. While this may be confusing for an inattentive reader, it would be a mistake to close the book. Instead of a clear structure, it offers a mélange of major milestones in podcasting history, seminal podcasting concepts and the author's personal stories and experiences. The more you read, the more of them you discover. The next one is in the following chapter, in which McHugh deals with the artistic craft of aerobic (attentive) listening and interviewing. How should I record a podcast? What questions should I ask? How to focus on the interview, and how to make my listeners focus? McHugh shares her tips, from finding a driveway moment (p. 101; something you are so immersed in that you can't turn it off) to a symbolic moment of exchanging gazes (p. 92; the affinity or disinterest between the interviewer and interviewee). She looks for her own stories to tell that would zoom in on the everyday struggles of journalists. Using their own stories from the recording of interviews, McHugh thoroughly describes what kind of questions to ask, where and how to record the interview, and how to distinguish between truth, opinion, misinformation and lie. She also offers advice on how to get both the emotions and the story from the respondent. While there are few charts and images in the book, the author includes transcripts of interviews, lists of tips and explanatory boxes

(such as the one about the monetization of podcasts and four subscription models [p. 149]), which help the reader to navigate the world of podcasting.

For journalists who are just starting with podcasting, many of the audio-related techniques may seem to be new and different from the traditional broadcasting procedures they have been used to. To explain the differences, McHugh recounts the twenty years of development of podcasting in a chapter in which she discusses the most notable moments, from the adoption of the name "podcasting", through the advent of loquacious chumcasts (or chatcasts) to the breaking point in podcasting history that was *Serial*. The author defines two podcasting eras, one before Serial, and one post-*Serial* (p. 128), and provides a very helpful analysis of the podcast's structure by using excerpts from several episodes. Just as *Serial* was very transparent in its investigation of Hae Min Lee's murder, McHugh is perfectly transparent in her approach to analysis and interpretation. The chapter explains how *Serial* became a cultural phenomenon and talks about the post-*Serial* production that benefited from its success. The author does the same thing with *The Daily*, a news podcast introduced by *The New York Times* in 2017 and hosted by the former newspaper journalist Michael Barbaro, which changed audio journalism in general. *The Daily* has a unique style of intimate storytelling and authentic interviewing by Barbaro. For instance, McHugh notes the use of Barbaro's characteristic "hmmmpf" (sort of a verbal nod in the conversation) and his short summaries of the guests' answers as some of

the "extra flourishes" that Barbaro adds to the podcast. The Daily has become an iconic news podcast in the past few years, and today it has a "gaggle of imitations" (p. 141).

In the following chapters, McHugh concentrates on analyzing well-crafted narrative podcasts – the ones with a powerful story to tell. The first one is the award-winning series called *S-Town*, a literary journalism piece by the producers of *Serial* and *The American Life*. Over the course of seven episodes, the podcast tells the story of a horologist who asked a journalist to investigate a murder in Woodstock, Alabama. Eventually, the small remote town becomes a stage for other kinds of drama. McHugh describes the podcast's unique storytelling practice combined with the tradition of literary journalism and audio experiments. In this chapter, McHugh goes beyond standard analysis and shows a great appreciation for what she considers one of the masterpieces of podcasting. The reader can detect many similarities between the classical style of literary journalism and *S-Town* – mainly in the subjective and immersive reporting, clear structure, and omnipresent symbolism (every little detail in the story has its own meaning). For those who aren't familiar with the literary journalism style, the authors adds a brief history of the concept; European readers, however, may feel a little disappointed by a complete lack of references to the Polish reportage school.

The deeper review of *S-Town* also opens the door for a subsequent analysis of McHugh's own podcasts from top to bottom. The analysis of *Phoebe's Fall*

(which follows a homicide detectives' investigation of the death of a young lady who fell down a garbage chute), *Wrong Skin* (investigating reasons why a couple banned by traditional Aboriginal law disappeared) and *The Last Voyage of the Pong Su* (Australian police officers investigating smugglers bringing in heroin from North Korea) is the most valuable part of the book. As the adviser for both script and audio storytelling approaches, McHugh can reveal the production practices that shaped these stories into the final podcasts. She describes what could have been done better, reveals excerpts from the script, provides commented transcripts from all three successful and award-winning podcasts and includes an analysis of their impact and reception, with particular emphasis placed on The Last Voyage of the Pong Su. This podcast is analyzed thoroughly in Chapter VIII, which includes original notes passed in the team to suggest possible changes in the script and ideas for sound effects. McHugh even compares the before and after versions of the script to explain why the team made specific changes (ethical, grammatical, wording, etc.) so other podcasters can avoid making similar mistakes. In this chapter, the book becomes more of a manual drawing from experience than an academic volume.

In the penultimate chapter, McHugh discusses the topical questions of inclusion, diversity, and equality in podcasting. Even though the medium itself is open to everybody with a mobile phone and an internet connection (e.g. via low-cost chumcasts), the author reminds us that it still lacks international voices. In

this chapter McHugh briefly abandons the description of podcasting in English-speaking countries to introduce and contextualize the scene in China, Latin America and Europe. She pinpoints the lack of equality and discusses the concept of "whiteness" (p. 279) as well as the need to engage non-mainstream voices in the world of podcasting. But as McHugh predicts in the next chapter, the dominance of English-language podcasts is likely to diminish over time (p. 314). The future of podcasting in general, however, remains unclear. The podcasting phenomenon has become so huge that even podcast platforms are now buying the hosts and shows (p. 300), podcasts are being adapted as TV shows, and the debate about monetization becomes more and more intense. McHugh argues that the branding and marketing aspects are seminal by showing (once again) some of the examples of her podcasting production.

McHugh's latest book is a wonderful contribution to the global research of podcasting. In its many insightful stories about well-known podcast series, it acts as a manual of what a narrative podcast should be and how to make one. While the book eschews pure scholarly language and its lack of quotation style makes it less acceptable in traditional academia, it is ultimately also much more enjoyable to read. While the lack of a consistent structure could be a problem for some order-loving readers, it shouldn't be an obstacle for any aspiring podcast enthusiast. In some of the chapters, the content might seem too oriented on the Western world, which makes its focus a little too narrow; it

would be very inspiring if a potential sequel could expand upon this. But there are mentions of podcasting from other parts of the world, and it is true that English podcasts are still the most accessible to anyone around the world. The analysis of the author's podcast series is the most valuable part of the book, revealing the behind-the-scenes procedures of making an award-winning podcast. By showing the characteristics of intimacy and authenticity, the specifics of narrative and storytelling, the evolutionary development from radio broadcasting, and the triumph of targeting the younger audience, McHugh allows the reader to truly understand the power of podcasting. The questions of why everyone loves them so much and how to make them are not so mysterious anymore. McHugh shows the power of podcasting and allows the reader to *harness* it, as promised; everyone who reads the book will fully understand what a complex, yet flourishing phenomenon podcasting is. And what is more, as McHugh notes, it is also God's gift to ironing.

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HEALTH AND ILLNESS IN DIGITAL PARTICIPATORY CULTURES

NINA ORTOVÁ, M.A.

Throughout what some people now call "*covid years*", the press media in the Western world somehow felt obliged to present the public with daily numbers of new covid-19 infections, deaths, and eventually, recoveries and vaccine applications. This trend of providing information on a single topic practically non-stop was evident particularly at the beginning of the worldwide pandemic. However, it was not only the press that seemed obsessed with data and personal stories of the sufferers or survivors. It was also the general Western society public who demanded and then devoured news through both traditional and new media and participated in campaigns including mask or anti-mask-wearing[1], vaccine communication and "*anti-vax*" movements, and other forms of active and passive participation while dealing with the worldwide pandemic. It is precisely the time of the

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1 One example is the "How to Significantly Slow Coronavirus? #Masks4All" video by the Czech content creator (Petr Ludwig / Konec procrastinace [CZE], 2020), which as of January 23, 2023, has over 5.7 million views on YouTube and which has been shared and commented internationally. The latter saying, "I protect you, you protect me," and its alternations (e.g., "I" being replaced by "my mask" and "you" by "your mask") comes from this video that has been critically acclaimed by scientists and other professionals, particularly in the first months of the covid-19 pandemic.

first year of covid-19´s public existence Vicari begins her book "Digital Media and Participatory Cultures of Health and Illness" with. Even though the copyright stands for 2022, it was first published by Routledge by the end of December 2021 amid the above-mentioned global pandemic[2]. And it might have been precisely the pandemic itself that brought more attention to the public participation in health communication, as the main topics in public discussion before this event usually covered other themes. For instance, in case of Spain, those were social issues, the government, politics in general, or immigration issues (Campos-Domínguez & Calvo, 2016) rather than widely spread diseases. I would argue that those could apply to other European countries as well. If health was discussed, it had been usually targeted at a specific group – for instance, the elderly.

It is then primarily natural that Vicari starts her book with such a current and worldwide event that had an incredible impact on the whole of Western society and the overall participatory culture of health and illness, particularly in the digital world, since remote communication was mainly the only option left: Millions of people had to isolate or quarantine due to either their illness or due to policies that took into effect by local governments.

In her introductory chapter, Vicari showcases five "*snapshots*" of social media content concerning the novel coronavirus from regular social media users and the general public. These snapshots follow the evolution of their thinking about the pandemic: from the unknown "*Wuhan disease*" that spread back in 2019 to "*super-spreaders*", "*long-covid*" stories, data collection concerns, and eventually, "*blue hearts vs. the yellow army*" – blue hearts symbolizing the trust in science, while yellow smiley faces were perceived as a symbol of people who were anti-vax/anti-lockdown. The author, however, does not fully dive into details or the context of why she chose even to mention these snapshots. Thus, the end of the introductory chapter seems open for the reader to assume that more space will be given to in-depth research of these snapshots and the overall topic. But this is not the case. The author probably wanted to provide a more contemporary look at specific examples of online participatory culture concerning health. Nevertheless, how it is connected to the rest of the book is unclear and seems to have only attention-grabbing function.

In fact, the book deals with both theoretical and practical implications of the public participating in the communication of mainly rare diseases particularly on social media but also through technology, and the function of the connected patient organizations to these diseases. The author separated the book into three parts: (1) Theoretical Foundations, (2) Digitised and Networked Health, and (3) Platforms. Each of them includes two stand-alone chapters. This gives the book enough structure, and the parts have a logical order.

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2   The World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2020) declared the spread of covid-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020; however, the first cases appeared in the Chinese city of Wuhan in November 2019.

The first part dives into fundamental theories on participatory cultures in the digital environment, arising from citizen journalism and the case of Indymedia (p. 16) and the first digital participatory platforms such as Wikipedia and the term "*produser*" (p. 20-21). The author explains the history of the term and its connection to today's world as "the twenty-first century normalized participatory models of content production where traditional role and power boundaries became increasingly fuzzy" (p. 19). *Produser*, in this sense, is everyone who posts anything on the Internet, particularly on social media, and thus, becomes both producer of the content and its user – or consumer.

Vicari then moves on to the emergence of social media, their description, and the way they operate. Here, she asks a crucial question on whether "social media platforms [can] be considered neutral? To what extent are these platforms independent of economic and political forces?" (p. 20). Crucial – because of the business models these platforms work with. In her work, Vicari works around Apple or Google, but together with them also other major technological players offer paid functions and content which anyone can purchase. And as any company – these technological firms aim to gain profit. Furthermore, the political independence decreases with the amount of political regulation of the platforms and the involvement of politicians in the basic functioning of these companies, as well as involvement of these politicians in using the platforms and the tools provided for their own campaigns.

Vicari also focuses on activism and health advocacy from a historical perspective and looks at how they currently operate. In connection to that and through the work of Brown and Zavestoski (2004), the author highlights "*scientization*" of mostly political approaches to how information is presented to the public (p. 39). Here, Vicari makes an exception and goes back to the covid-19 pandemic, as she predicts that the role of scientific information in policymaking in different countries will be fully discovered in the coming years. She demonstrates her thoughts on the example of "*a scientific advisor*" being present at daily political press conferences in the U.K. during the pandemic. She suggests that "[scientization] often constitutes a veiled attempt to conceal the politicization of health policy making" (ibid.). While this is an important finding, the author could have dived into more reasons for scientists or physicians being present at these conferences, such as playing an essential role in fighting fake news about covid-19 that spread massively on the Internet[3]. Those professionals who decide to include themselves in such campaigns do so usually credibly due to their professional and – mostly – apolitical background. They also must hold onto the ethical standards set by the professional associations they are part of[4], which supports the idea of a trustworthy professional even more.

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3   There are thousands of research papers on fake news during covid-19 pandemic only on Google Scholar.

4   For example – in the Czech Republic, every physician must be a member of the Czech Medical Chamber.

If we, in this sense, look at politicians' actions from the ethical perspective, they usually do not have to deal with such ethical concerns to a great extent apart from their own parties' regulations, national laws, and personal moral beliefs. They can also be burdened with political affairs. Thus, this whole image might lead to the decrease of public's trustworthiness in politicians' way of communication of health topics towards the public.

Moving on, Vicari gives much space to patient health advocacy movements – mainly because of her previous research on rare disease communication. According to her, supporting groups and distinctive "patient advocacy organizations" (p. 40) serve not only as a space for "*collective illness identities*" but, most importantly, as "*partners in decision-making*" who are recognized for their expertise in specific health issues or illnesses, often offering personal stories that "allow others to comment on and offer alternative interpretations based on their own life stories" (p. 45). In their essence, patient advocacy organizations are the definition of participatory culture of health and illness because they connect the patients and their families to institutions and the public. By doing so, they give them their voice mediated not through the traditional media or state institutions but through their unique platforms (websites, blogs, social media accounts).

However, and in connection with this, Vicari discusses some potential issues in so-called "*lay expertise*". This phrase means non-scientific knowledge from people with other rich sources of knowledge than the scientific ones - such as them or their family member being ill (as part of an "experiential knowledge" commonly used in Vicari's work). These concerns come from the fact that highly scientific information, e.g., on "*genetic knowledge*", can be spread to the general public through non-professionals; and from the discussion on whether this public should be part of a broader conversation on such topics or if it does not raise ethical concerns (p. 59), as Kerr et al. have already mentioned in their 1998 work (1998, p. 41). However, Vicari argues that, for instance, in the case of rare diseases, the demand for such knowledge and participation is more than present due to "the general lack of information on rare diseases" (p. 51) – and, I would add – due to the persisting lack of interest from official institutions. Thus, rare disease patient organizations and movements are vital in health policymaking. I would argue that Vicari could break down the ethical concerns to a greater extent, particularly the topic of the spreading of misinformation. Even though people with experiential knowledge might be well-informed on their own or their significant others' health issues, their lack of professional or highly scientific background might lead to misinterpretation of data, the spread of fake news, and misinformation of other patients who may trust these "lay experts."

Nevertheless, the readers learn from this book that to enhance the connection between professional knowledge and lay expertise, organizations (in this case, rare disease patient organizations) do use various digital tools to enhance not

only one-way and two-way processes of information exchange but also "crowd-sourced processes of health knowledge sharing, exchange, and co-production" which then "provide personalized routes to health public engagement" (p. 94). They can do it through what we call "*telemedicine*", "*epatient*", "*eHealth*", or "*mHealth*", – or simply digital tools in patient-physician relations – which can "enhance the delivery of health services from providers to consumers, ... shortening patient-physician physical distances, enhancing public campaigning for behavioural change and strengthening health surveillance strategies" (p. 70) – and, from my perspective, they can be a powerful tool in immediate spreading of professional advice to groups endangered by consuming disinformation on the Internet, such as teenagers or the elderly.

Nevertheless, such tools can also work through various *platforms*, which Vicari dedicates the final part of the book to. By the term, the author means various digital participatory platforms for the public – social media or mobile or Internet applications/PC programmes. Looking first at mainstream social media, specifically Twitter, Vicari presents her earlier work on posts mentioning BRCA rare disease on this platform – especially when the movie celebrity Angelina Jolie announced her being the BRCA1 gene carrier and, with it, her decision to undergo a series of surgeries which immediately became a controversial topic in the media. Around the same time, there was another controversy over Myriad Genetics' human gene patents which "increased the price of BRCA

genetic testing, reducing its accessibility" (p.104) and the connection between Angelina Jolie raising awareness and the price of the testing was much discussed on Twitter, but the question was how the specific patients could get to this information to even get the chance to participate on a story set by a celebrity. The author presents the results of her Twitter posts studies which took place a month before, during, and after Angelina Jolie's op-eds in both 2013 and 2015. On these, Vicari explains two dimensions that she identifies as "extremely relevant to digital participatory cultures" – curation and framing practices. With curation, the author identifies that the platform – again, Twitter in this case – uses algorithms that already act as curators of the content, but at the same time, the users themselves can curate the content by many functionalities of the platform, such as tags or retweets (p. 101-102). These practices can influence the dynamics of topics discussed on a particular platform both short- and long-term. The discourse can also be influenced by framing – using hashtags to frame topics – but in her work on BRCA tweets, Vicari found that the role of framing tends to be relatively short-term. Overall, the practices mentioned above do immediately affect whether the topic is widely discussed among the public, as these practices use tools that are easy to understand and can get to a wide range of people who follow a specific topic.

Another two dimensions – storytelling and epistemic dynamics are discussed in the presentation of the author's further research on BRCA

tweets from 2017. Here, I would high-light mainly the storytelling part, which is one of the most relevant to the whole digital participatory culture in the con-text of this book and the most exciting part to this point. When Vicari navi-gates through the relationship between the public sphere and social media, she pays attention to the fact that "people do not necessarily engage in campaigns or activists' debates on social media and elsewhere because of their political party affiliation or as members of a pres-sure group (e.g., Greenpeace); they do so because the campaigns or debates reso-nate to their life story" (p. 27). And for that to happen, storytelling is essential. It can demonstrate even complicated issues through personal experience, and personal storytelling narratives can be helpful in many areas of human inter-est – from translating science or hard news to the public (as mentioned by, e.g., Avraamidou & Osborne, 2009; or Ekström, 2000), to active including of the public in creating or communicat-ing a problem. A personal story might allow the public to draw attention to a problem, even without the "hard" data. In this sense, storytelling is a part of the infotainment culture, which we can also see in influencers' content on social media platforms. Here, I see an interest-ing twist as Vicari mentions that a third person published most of the stories shared on Twitter, and not a first person. For example, Pachucki et al. found that "first-person compared to third-per-son storytellers significantly increase engagement on social media" (2022, p. 1703). Even though these research-ers conducted their research around

storytelling in destination marketing, I would argue that their conclusion could also be applied to current health com-munication. It is then a question to what extent does the fact that Vicari focuses mostly on rare diseases play affect this, as the patient organizations often work as a mediator.

While reading through the part on storytelling, however, I questioned the principal decision to include Twitter as a primary platform in Vicari's research. In the European environment, Twitter is not usually a platform for storytelling but rather for "*hard news*" – for instance, in Norway (Kalsnes & Larsson, 2018) but also in Czechia. I acknowledge Vicari's mentions of other scholars claiming that Twitter is a storytelling platform (Papacharissi, 2016; Rogers, 2019). I argue that this highly depends on the geographical placement of the discussed culture. Here, the culture of Anglo-Saxon countries is only a part of West-ern culture in general, and in its essence, it is very different from the continental European culture. It is interesting that later in this part of the book, Vicari men-tions "storytelling units using external sources" (p. 122) in connection to Twit-ter – these could be links to websites and other social media. This to me indicates that Twitter does not serve as a primary social medium to share the primary news story but rather as a tool in a com-munication mix for spreading it to as many people as possible. Moreover, in the introduction to the "*storytelling*" part of the chapter, the author says that "this research is providing in-depth explo-rations of the development of non-tra-ditional forms of storytelling, where

visual content plays a key role" (p. 112). While I do agree with this statement, I am not sure whether a social medium site like Twitter applies to it, as at present and even back between 2017 and 2021, the period in which apparently Vicari's book was mainly written, we could find other platforms that rely primarily on visuality, such as Instagram, Snapchat or Tiktok. Moreover, Twitter is widely perceived as a micro-blogging site with various limitations, such as the number of characters the users can use, which now stands at 280. It was even half of that before November 2017 – and those characters reduce when the user adds any medium – a picture, an emoji, or similar. Altogether, Twitter has a difficult position in terms of storytelling, as it does not really provide the suitable environment for such activities.

Just before the conclusion, Vicari also mentions other platforms different from social media that can be used in participatory cultures which we could connect to eHealth/mHealth tehnologies. She distinguishes four platforms according to their purpose and provides an example for each of them. These are as follows: *Fitbit* (tracking platform), *23andme* (self-diagnosis platform), *ParentsLikeMe – PLM* (patient experience exchange platform), and *CareOpinion* (feedback platform). Through these examples, she provides eight propositions on digital health platforms – from my point of view, the most important ones here being commodification of the collected data, digital platforms as dataveillance systems, and data provided to users as a means for resistance. However, Vicari does not further develop

these propositions but only summarizes her findings and the purpose of this section is, thus, unclear.

This development of ideas or any criticism is not present even in conclusion, giving the whole book a more positivist approach by stating facts and presenting her previous or other researchers' work (e.g., with Cappai in Vicari & Cappai, 2016) rather than using a strong topic like this to build new and unique arguments and discover emerging issues concerning ethics, for example. I particularly awaited a stand-alone chapter dedicated to ethical issues because, as mentioned above, ethics are an essential part of health communication in general – this applies to professional communication by medical practitioners but also to political ethics and moral values when communicating false or unrealistic hopes for the patients (see, e.g., Moravec, 2020). I would also welcome a part where Vicari would talk about disseminating fake news in digital space available to anyone particularly during the covid-19 pandemic. I would appreciate it if, for instance, Facebook groups or pages focusing on an alternative approach to covid-19 medication or prevention would be at least mentioned in this book. It is also precisely the covid-19 pandemic that, although present in this work at the beginning and boosting up the introduction part, is very much ignored later (with one exception). Generally, the focus is more on rare diseases rather than illnesses, pandemics, and other health issues concerning the whole society. While I understand the focus on rare diseases and dedicated patient organizations as they provide excellent

and specific examples of participatory culture of health and illness, the book would benefit from expanding the introduction about covid-19 to another stand-alone fourth part of the book; or at least a single chapter.

On the other hand, Vicari presents a very structured work backed by an impressive amount of research. Despite my criticism, this book provides an essential insight into the participatory culture of health and illness, not just because of the covid-19 pandemic. The Western culture has been turning towards a highly profound health-based approach in all aspects of life. That is, doing more physical activities, self-tracking various health indicators, caring for mental well-being, or raising awareness about the connection between health and environmental threats – for instance, through vegetarianism and veganism or even through participatory culture, such as sharing a personal story to raise awareness about health threat; or just to set an example to others when sharing food diaries or exercise routines. I believe some of the findings in this book could be applied to other pandemics as well. In my research I focus on obesity pandemic and obesity communication in the media, and I do see a prospect for comparison of the participation of people struggling with overweight in body-positivity movement on Instagram with rare diseases communication on Twitter. Thus, this book serves as a solid ground for future research development from which other scholars can benefit.

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