



# The relationship of voter party preference, communication channel trust and profession credibility in Hungary

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper is to look at voter party preference and put its effect into the context of communication channel trust and profession credibility. A lot of factors, including the brand of the sender, the spokesperson, the type of message (textual, verbal, audio-visual), the communication channel, sociocultural background and noise, all have an effect on the credibility of the message. From this perspective, two factors will be analysed according to political party preference; first, communication channel trust, seven of them, and second, the profession of the spokesperson, ten of them. The article explores components influencing credibility and trust and proposes a complex multifactor framework that defines source prestige. The research measures political party preference according to three “freedoms”: 1) Political, 2) Personal, and 3) Economic, based on the subjective value judgment of the respondents using a primary quantitative questionnaire study. Credibility was measured on a 6-point Likert scale in case of communication channel and profession trust. Some of the main findings include a bias in communication channel trust and profession credibility according to political affiliation.

Keywords: **Marketing communication, political marketing, credibility**

## INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this research is to show the relationship that politics, and with it, ideological affiliation, has on communication channel based on trust and professional credibility. This information is useful internationally, because it identifies some key factors and patterns that influence message trust, that can be adapted to local sociocultural attitudes, especially during public service information propagation. The 2015 MERS outbreak in South Korea, or the global COVID-19 crisis has shown, how important it is, that the public not just receives news and messages, but that it also evaluates them as authentic and credible. This trust can be the basis of publicly expected form of behaviour.

During the MERS outbreak in South Korea, public service providers and governmental bodies communicated with the public, but research suggests that these communication practices were lacking in effectiveness (Jang & Baek, 2019), because the expectations of the receivers (general public) were not met. Some of the key findings include insufficient information, a lack of real-time news on the subject, lack of public trust towards the spokesperson and ineffectual usage of communication channels. Other research in the case of COVID-19 identified an alarming rate of fake news, especially online and a general lack of trust towards public service information (PSI). Trust is a multifactorial issue, that is based on the information itself, the attitude of the receiver, the brand of the channel and the organisation that shares the news (Goldsmith et al., 2000). Although the article is not focused on PSI and health information, these examples show the vast effect that profession and channel trust have on information proliferation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides the literature overview aimed at highlighting the most relevant research aligned with the scope of our paper. Thus, the survey covers the following four topics: trust, credibility, ideology and communication.

The research of political communication is very important nowadays and concerns both researchers and readers regardless of nations (Gan et al., 2021). Discussions about “social media” such as Facebook, YouTube or Twitter have, in recent years, been examined in relation to power. Castells (2007) defined power as the structural capacity of a social actor in imposing his or her will over other social actors. Power relations according to him however, are conflictive due to the diverse and contradictory nature of society (Kasmani, 2019).

The credibility and popularity of different communication channels depend on several factors. Following Tóth (2009), we distinguish between source prestige and source power, whereby the number of people reached by a channel is called power, while its credibility and perception is called prestige. In accordance with the literature on the subject, the prestige of the source can be understood as a multidimensional framework, which is influenced by: 1) the source of the information, 2) the communication channel used, 3) the credibility of the person delivering the message, and 4) the credibility of the underlying brand (Dobó, 2021). If we project this trust on health-related news and information, we find a close correlation between trust credibility and source-based trust (Heideker & Steul-Fischer, 2017). Research has shown that in terms of trust, positive judgments are influenced by cognition, while negative attitudes are influenced by emotion-based decisions (Maathuis et al., 2004). This perception can be strongly influenced by social media, with sophisticated algorithms, monitoring, targeted advertising and message optimisation, which actually optimise persuasiveness in this way (Crain & Nadler, 2019). Regardless of whether the

message is more superficial or deeper, an important question in the case of content is how well the target group can identify with the message, what feelings it generates in them and how believable they feel (Szakál & Józsa, 2018).

The consumer's political orientation is linked to the individual's personal value system, and he judges the content based on this. In this regard, political orientation can have a similar effect on other demographic variables, such as age, gender and level of education (Bayo-Moriones & Sánchez-Tabernero, 2015). Several studies have shown that this has an influence on the perception of the quality of the message. Other research has concluded that voters do not primarily judge politicians based on messages, as they take into account the institutional constraints that the actor faces and focus on the policies implemented by the candidates rather than the direction the candidates take (Tomz & Houweling, 2008).

The effectiveness of public communication can be undermined by three key barriers: a) verbal barriers, i.e., your language, for example, the use of too much technical terminology and expressions unknown to the receiving party, b) non-verbal elements, see body language and, c) external distractions, e.g., noise of any negative effect. Credibility and trust are particularly influenced by body language that contradicts the content of the message, such as stance, confidence, gestures, as well as tone and intonation, speaking style, words and speech structure in general (Busa et al., 2015; Gnambs, 2019). Putting it in context, it should be emphasised that during political communication, it is necessary to interpret events on a broader horizon. In addition to what is said during public participation, verbal and non-verbal communication, the ability to meet consumer expectations and the elimination of communication disorders will be the determinants of credibility (Orosdy & Héder, 1997).

Knowledge of the factors influencing credibility — communication habits, demographic data, and other cultural aspects — are important for a skilled opinion maker (Chan & Misra, 1990; Midgley & Dowling, 1978). Opinion seekers are influenced by opinion leaders who use various communication channels, including online and offline channels, and word-of-mouth (Vigar-Ellis et al., 2015). There is a misconception that opinion leaders tend to use higher quality information sources (Roch, 2005). Opinion seekers assume that opinion leaders, thanks to their position and connections, have access to non-public data that may be important when investigating a topic, although some research points in the opposite direction. Related to this, is the fact that there is a negative correlation between trust and opportunistic behaviour, and there is generally a positive relationship between trust and cooperation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Thus, a political actor may basically have lower credibility in the eyes of the public, since his goal is staying on the function (opportunism).

If we examine the relationship between credibility and the channel, we find that the judgment of the users will be the decisive factor and not any characteristic that determines the source (Gvili & Levy, 2016). This channel credibility is the result of a complex evaluation of consumers, which may be based on the channels' informativeness, entertainment ability and associated negative qualities that disturb the consumer (noise). In some cases, 9 out of the 10 links shared on social media platforms — mostly Facebook — are fake news (Waszak et al., 2018); thus, this is one of the types of noise that the general public today usually experiences. Knowing that users — regardless of the content — are biased and react cynically towards a source they consider untrustworthy (Weidner et al., 2020), it is also necessary to take into account which of these channels, the party or politician's own sympathisers can find, which are followed and which are evaluated as authentic. Credibility is also influenced by how well the voter knows the given organisation (Kéri & Szabó, 2005).

In summary, the voters examine which party and from whom personally the message came, in what form and through which channel, and then compare this with their personal preferences, and based on this, they make their trusty decision to accept or reject.

Ideology is not only a basic belief system, but also a form of behaviour, a discourse and a common mode of communication (Schull, 1992). In summary, a system of thoughts and beliefs that determines the way of thinking and behaviour of the groups that claim it as their own, and their attitude towards social life. A set of philosophies that define homogeneous groups that can thus be distinguished from each other (Cranston, 2014; Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Oxford English Dictionary, 2023; Schull, 1992; Sciličić & Maldini, 2013; Mazzoleni, 2002).

Ideology has a decisive role in the way of thinking, which also influences the decision-makers themselves. This can be observed not only in the way of thinking, but also in the discourse and behavioural norms, as well as in the symbol system used by the organisation (Gould-Davies, 1999; Kritzer, 1978; Schull, 1992; Sciličić & Maldini, 2013). This ideological image is communicated through different communication channels, and the credibility of the communicated image itself partly depends on the effectiveness of the communication (rhetoric, form, populism) and the communication involvement (willingness) of the recipient (Gerstlé & Nai, 2019; Winchester et al., 2013). Examining ideology on the “left” and “right” can show interesting practical differences. Some research shows that sympathisers of the “left” ideologies can be mobilised better when general societal issues arise, while those on the “right” side when the potential impact of a decision will affect them or those around them (Silagadze et al., 2022). Further research has reached a similar result, in the ideological sense; those with a more “liberal” approach tend to care more, while the more “conservative” tend to care less about others (Balliet et al., 2018). So, the functioning and impact of ideology is not a negligible issue.

In our study, we address the following research questions:

- a) What kind of effect does voter party preference have on communication channel trust?
- b) Does voter party preference effect profession credibility?
- c) Does clustering according to communication channel trust, in contrast to classical demographic clustering, result in differences in profession credibility?

## METHODOLOGY

A primary study was conducted in February and March of 2022, that gathered the answers of 489 respondents, which were later digitally analysed using Microsoft Excel 2013, and IBM SPSS version 24. We performed descriptive statistical, Pearson’s correlation and cluster analysis (using the ward method) on the available data. During the data gathering, a snowball method was used through social media platforms, thus the data is not representative, but given the sample size, it can be considered as indicative. From the 489 respondents, some of the answers contained so much missing values, that we needed to exclude them, thus the analysis was performed on the remaining 465. It should be noted, that because of the nature of the research, and since we did not have the opportunity to collect longitudinal data, we would like to present a snapshot of the 465-item sample with a cross-sectional analysis of the obtained results.

The sample is more characterised by younger respondents (70% are younger than 35), and most of the respondents came from Budapest (39.2%). During the in-depth

analysis, we ran the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (hereinafter KMO) and Bartlett tests to examine the adequacy of data collection. Although the literature differs regarding what result the sample is considered adequate, generally above 0.5–0.6 is adequate, 0.7–0.8 is good, and above 0.8 is excellent (IBM, 2021; Sajtos & Mitev, 2007). In this case of analysis, the KMO score was 0.92, which indicates the adequacy of the sampling. In the primary study, respondents marked on a 6-point Likert scale their level of trust towards the communication channels and professions, one meaning none, and six, completely. In the case of political parties, the respondents received questions about what they think, how important certain freedoms were for the parties (political, personal and economic) on a similar 1–6 Likert scale.

## RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

According to Endre et al. (2020), in 2014–15, 17–18% of those surveyed, 20% in 2018, and 30% in 2020 stated that they spend a lot of time on researching political news. In this process, the share of television is slightly decreasing while the share of the internet is increasing. In 2020, both media were indicated by nearly 60% of the respondents as a source of information. In Hungary, we see the correlation between party preference and communication channel preference. If we examine the entire population entitled to vote, the proportion of those who would primarily get information from some kind of television broadcast (commercial, public service and news) and those who would get information from online content (internet news portals and Facebook) is roughly the same. If we separate the results based on party preference, the picture becomes more nuanced. Among pro-government voters, the share of television increases to 64%, while the share of online channels increases to 59% among opposition voters. These trends show a relationship with age and education as well.

This can be contrasted with our primary research, and similar patterns are visible. We looked at seven political parties: 1) Fidesz-KDNP (ruling party), 2) MSZP (Socialist Party of Hungary), 3) Jobbik, 4) DK (Democratic Coalition), 5) Momentum, 6) LMP (Hungary's Green Party), and 7) MKKP (Hungarian Two tailed Dog Party). We considered 10 professions: teacher, doctor, politician, tv personality, musician, economist, lawyer, engineer, policeman and fireman. Regarding the communication channels, we looked at seven channels: family and friends, public service television, commercial television, newspaper, radio, online news sources, and social media.

The Pearson correlation matrix shows a connection in more than one case. Usually weak-to-medium, but at a 0.01 significance level (\*\*). This means that the confidence is 99%. The strongest ones in the case of the ruling government party and politicians (0.407\*\*), and the police (0.325\*\*). The correlation is weaker in terms of politicians and the police if we consider opposition parties. In case of opposition parties, those professions with higher qualifications such as academics, teachers, doctors, engineers etc, have a stronger connection generally. It should be noted that the MKKP, is an outlier in this aspect, having weak or no relevant correlation with profession (see Table 1 for more details). This in practice means that if someone views the ruling party more favourably, they view politicians and police officers more favourably as well. In the case of the opposition, this relationship is seen with professions of higher education level.

**Table 1.** The Pearson correlation values of the analysed political parties and professions

	TEACH.	DOCTOR	POLIT.	TV.PERS	MUSICL	ECON.	LAWYER	ENGIN.	POLICE	FIREM.
FIDESZ	,110*	,135**	,407**	,295**	,203**	0,069	0,078	0,073	,325**	,194**
MSZP	,167**	,161**	,313**	,260**	,174**	,204**	,172**	,149**	,233**	,209**
JOBBIK	,181**	,169**	,284**	,224**	,201**	,191**	,203**	,178**	,163**	,205**
DK	,102**	,116**	,221**	,218**	,143**	,192**	,123**	0,090	,125**	,104**
MOM	,159**	,142**	,164**	,145**	,145**	,248**	,176**	,166**	0,034	,100**
LMP	,170**	,186**	,210**	,154**	,125**	,237**	,202**	,170**	,141**	,165**
MKKP	0,084	,109**	-0,036	-0,036	0,005	,168**	,101**	,192**	-0,018	,118*

Source: own editing according to the primary questionnaire study

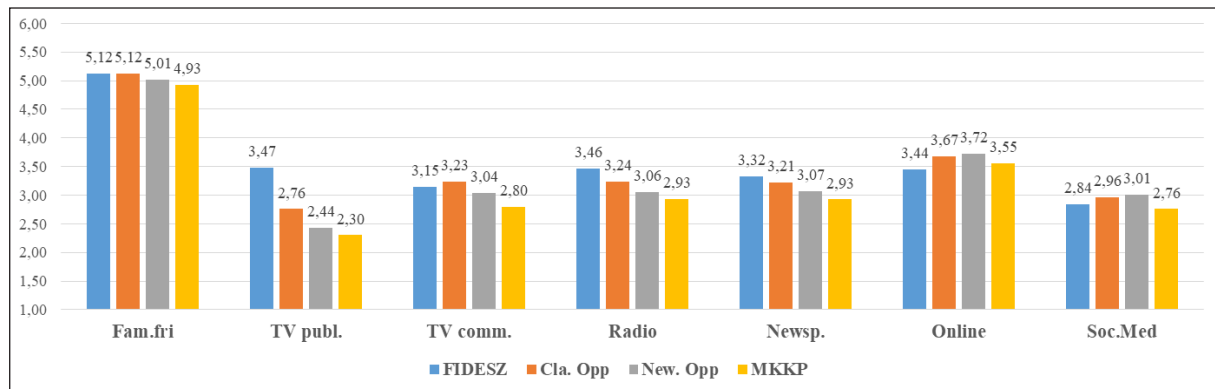
In the case of communication channel trust and political affiliation, the strongest correlation is visible in the case of the ruling party and the public service television, and opposition parties have a stronger connection with online channels and social media in general. This means that those having favourable views of the government, trust the public service provider more, while those favouring the opposition trust online channels and social media more. Again, as previously stated, the MKKP (that is considered as a “joke party”) has either weak-to-non, or even negative correlation with the public service provider, meaning that the more someone trust this channel, the more negatively it views the Two Tailed Dog Party (See details in Table 2.)

**Table 2.** The Pearson correlation values of the analysed political parties and communication channels

	Fam.fri.	TV publ.	TV comm.	Radio	Newsp.	Online	Soc.Med
<b>Fid/Kdnp</b>	,123**	,522**	,206**	,307**	,264**	0,005	0,056
<b>MSZP</b>	,159**	0,083	,232**	,142**	,189**	,159**	,207**
<b>Jobbik</b>	,120**	,103**	,226**	,151**	,190**	,189**	,191**
<b>DK</b>	,131**	0,004	,232**	,112**	,152**	,256**	,246**
<b>MOM</b>	,127**	-,100*	,187**	0,004	,117**	,273**	,263**
<b>LMP</b>	,132**	-0,036	,198**	,093**	,211**	,267**	,219**
<b>MKKP</b>	0,003	-,202**	0,01	-0,073	0,034	,189**	0,073

Source: own editing according to the primary questionnaire study

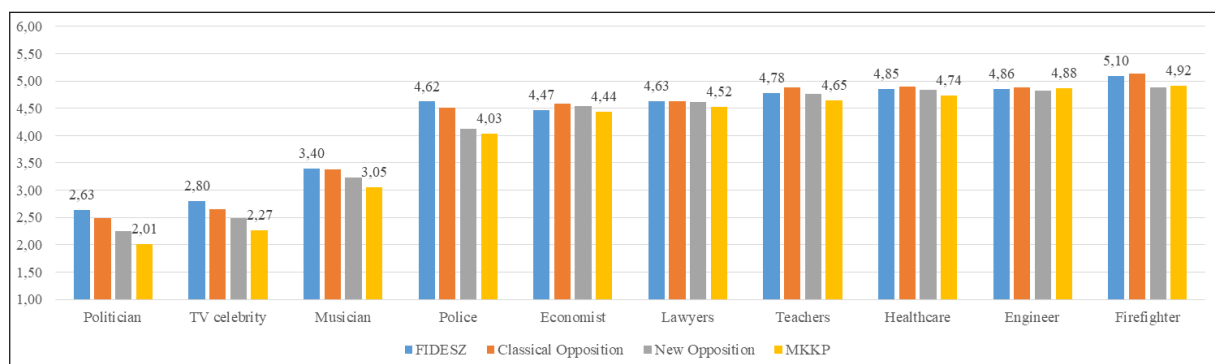
If we combine the data, we can visualise these effects in practice. Figure 1 shows the relationship of communication channel trust and political parties. Family and friends have a high trust level, regardless of political affiliation. Visible differences can be seen in the case of the public service television, radio and newspaper where the government-favouring people indicated highest trust, while in the case of online channels and social media, generally those opposition-favouring people indicated the same, although the effect is not as visible as in the case of the public service provider.



Note: Classical Opposition (Cla. Opp.) refers to MSzP, Jobbik and DK while New Opposition (New. Opp.) refers to Momentum and LMP

**Figure 1.** The trust level of the analysed communication channel according to political affiliation

In regard to professions, there are visible differences in the case of four of them; politician, tv celebrities, musician and police officers are viewed more favourably by those supporting the ruling party. At the same time, the trust level shrinks in the same order, classical opposition, new opposition and MKKP giving the lowest values in these same four cases. Differences amongst the remaining professions are small and can be considered inconclusive, as the trust values are generally close to each other. A slight trend can be identified, but with a low confidence, that usually from those favouring the ruling party, classical opposition considers the professions to be slightly more credible, new opposition slightly less credible, and the MKKP the lowest, but not in every case.



**Figure 2.** The trust level of the analysed professions according to political affiliation.

We examined the data, and did a cluster analysis of the communication channels with a ward method and found that three groups can be separated. The trust value of family and friends is the highest in all groups (4.33 to 5.42), so it is necessary to examine the other sources of information in comparison. The first group includes respondents who only trust family and friends, and not really any other channel. In the second, those who have moderate trust in all others, apart from family and friends. And in the third, those for whom, in addition to family and friends, online and social media channels are also considered authentic (Table 3).

**Table 3.** The cluster average values of the analysed communication channels

Ward Method	Fri.fam.	TV Publ.	TV comm.	Radio	Newsp.	Online	Soc.Med	
1	Mean	4,3352	1,8920	1,9375	2,3068	2,295	2,6023	1,8352
	N	176	176	176	176	176	176	176
	Std.Dev	1,25407	0,92874	0,77942	0,94848	1,02159	1,04788	0,74151
2	Mean	5,4261	3,8239	3,6136	3,9318	3,7443	3,7045	3,2330
	N	176	176	176	176	176	176	176
	Std.Dev	0,69710	0,94276	0,86760	0,83215	0,98414	1,08137	1,05681
3	Mean	5,0531	1,4336	2,8496	2,6549	2,5664	4,0708	3,1947
	N	113	113	113	113	113	113	113
	Std.Dev	0,81109	0,63914	1,29712	1,10817	1,14857	0,85269	1,02520
Total	Mean	4,9226	2,5118	2,7935	3,0065	2,9097	3,3763	2,6946
	N	465	465	465	465	465	465	465
	Std.Dev	1,08000	1,35680	1,20539	1,19894	1,23019	1,19006	1,25467

Source: own editing according to the primary questionnaire study.

Analysing the first group — family and no one else — in the case of all three freedoms (political, personal, economic), we generally see low values for all parties. From this, we can conclude that this group contains those who are most disillusioned and distanced from politics, so we can assume that they do not have a party and are hostile to the existing ones.

In the second group — family and moderately everyone — a separation can be observed between the classic and the new parties. The evaluation of MSzP, Jobbik and DK is close, this grouping can be observed at a slightly lower level, while the position of LMP, Momentum and MKKP is also close, but at a slightly higher level. In the case of all three freedoms, the ruling party is located between the two groups, with medium values.

In the case of the third group — family and online — the grouping is similar to the previous one, the MSzP, Jobbik and DK groups are at a slightly lower level, the LMP, Momentum and MKKP groups are at a higher level, but in this case, Fidesz, not in the middle but well separated, has the lowest value. Overall, in this group, we find those who have a rather negative view of the ruling party and a rather positive view of all other opposition parties. Since the previous cluster analysis showed that opposition voters prefer to find information online, this confirms the results obtained there.

## DISCUSSION

The Pearson correlation matrix shows polarisation of communication channel trust, according to political affiliation — government and opposition voters. In terms of communication channel trust, friends and family had the highest average with the lowest standard deviation, while public service television had the lowest trust based average and highest standard deviation, meaning this is the most divisive channel. During the ward-method based cluster analysis, we identified three groups, with slightly different sizes, in which all groups associate high trust levels to friends and family, thus it had the lowest explanatory power, while public service television (the least credible on average) had the highest one. The clusters show clear differences in political party preference.

The clusters were:

- 1) Trusts family and no one else, has voters that are disillusioned with politics, all parties having low ratings.
- 2) Trusting family highly and all other channels on a medium level, view new opposition parties better, the ruling (governing) party in the middle and classical opposition parties at a lower level.
- 3) Trusts family highly and also trusts online and social media channels, has critical government voters in it.

If we consider the different professions, firefighters are the most trustworthy, and politicians the least. Standard deviation (sd) shows a clear trend in the case of communication channels; the higher the trust, the lower the sd. Meanwhile in the case of profession, other patterns are visible.

If we look at the relationship of channels and professions, the more a person gathers information from classical channels or public service television, the higher the trust-based marker of politicians is, and regardless of the channel preference, firefighters are usually regarded as the most credible. In terms of political preference, the Pearson correlation shows that voters of the ruling party have the strongest positive correlation (0.407\*\*) with politicians, thus view them more positively. Public service television trust has a similar positive effect on politicians. It is important to stress, that there is one group, the sympathisers of the Hungarian Double Tailed Dog Party (joke party), that had been outliers during most of the analyses.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has made significant strides in understanding the intricate relationship between trust, credibility, and voter preference. By focusing on these aspects, it has shed light on how they shape political landscapes. However, the study acknowledges its limitation in not addressing external factors that influence political party preferences and popularity. This gap underscores the complexity of the political environment and suggests a need for more comprehensive research.

Particularly noteworthy is the study's implications for Asian markets. The research highlights how differences in communication preferences in these regions, which were once pronounced, are gradually diminishing. This shift is largely attributed to the growing influence of the internet and social media. These platforms are fostering a more unified communication culture, leading to emerging patterns and trends that resonate not just in Europe, but on a global scale. This convergence suggests that the findings of this study could have broader applications, offering valuable insights into political communication and voter behaviour worldwide.

Looking ahead, there are fertile grounds for further research. One promising avenue is the exploration of cognitive dissonance in voter communication channel preferences. Such an investigation could reveal how voters reconcile conflicting information and preferences in a politically charged environment. Additionally, internationalising the study could provide a deeper understanding of how sociocultural differences impact trust in both communication channels and political entities. This expanded scope would not only enrich our understanding of global political dynamics, but also offer practical guidance for political strategists and communicators in crafting more effective and resonant messages across diverse cultural landscapes.

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