

Online Colloquium Emotions and Democracy

2nd session 27th March, 12-13 CET

Microsoft Teams Meeting:

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Cringe-Based Hostile Communication and Its Democratic Consequences in Hungary's 2024 Campaigns

Cringe is the new cool and increasingly, a new political weapon. This paper examines cringe communication as a distinctive mode of hostile political discourse that blends ridicule, emotional manipulation, and partisan mobilisation, transforming political attack into shareable media spectacle across digital platforms. Cringe is conceptualised as a performative configuration of moral emotional content in which vicarious embarrassment, contempt, and laughter interact and reinforce one another. Vicarious embarrassment signals norm violation, contempt stabilises moral judgement by marking targets as inferior and unworthy of respect, while laughter converts discomfort into pleasurable ridicule. Crucially, cringe-worthiness is not merely detected but strategically attributed: content creators actively frame opponents as cringe to capitalise on the power of moral emotions, humour, and platform-native (often Gen Z-coded) aesthetics to maximise visibility and mobilise audiences. Empirically, the study presents an illustrative single-case, single-actor analysis of the Patrióta-Trombi Roast YouTube channel within Hungary's highly polarised political environment. Financed by Megafon, a government-aligned influencer incubator that trains and amplifies pro-government communicators, the channel represents a hybrid infrastructure linking political campaigning and influencer culture together. The data has been collected during the 2024 European Parliamentary and concurrent Hungarian municipal election campaign. The paper develops a multimodal coding framework capturing cringe as a sequential process linking expressive cues, emotional reactions, rhetorical devices, and audiovisual features to delegitimisation and in-group bonding. Through double-coded qualitative analysis, we provide a nuanced description of a video series designed to be provocative, bold, and unconventional, often pushing boundaries to capture attention and trigger intense reactions. The findings indicate that humour-driven hostility contributes to the normalisation of contempt, diffuses scripts of moral degradation, and reinforces exclusionary dynamics in contemporary political communication.

Author



Gabriella Szabó, PhD, is a Senior Research Fellow at the **ELTE Centre for Social Sciences** and working in the team of the **MORES project**. Her research focuses on political communication, moral emotions, and victimhood discourses, with particular attention to emotional language, polarisation, and social cohesion in Central and Eastern Europe.

No prior registration is required. For any inquiries, please contact the organizers: [Dr. Beatriz Carbone](#) and [Janna Fischer](#).



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