

# Analyzing the Participation of Young People in Politics: An Exploratory Study Applied on Motivation in Croatia

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**Abstract**—The application of marketing to the domain of politics has become relevant in recent times. With this article the authors wanted to explore the issue of the current political engagement among young people in Croatia. The question is what makes young people (age 18-30) politically active in young democracies such as that of the Republic of Croatia. Therefore, the objective of this study was to discover the real or hidden motivations behind the decision to actively participate in politics among young members of the two largest political parties in the country – the Croatian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party of Croatia. The study expected to find that the motivation for political engagement of young people is often connected with a possible achievement of individual goals and egoistic needs such as: self-acceptance, social success, financial success, prestige, reputation, status, recognition from the others etc. It was also expected that, due to the poor economic and social situation in the country, young people feel an increasing disconnection from politics. Additionally, the authors expected to find that there is a huge potential to engage young people in the political life of the country through a proper and more interactive use of marketing communication campaigns and social media platforms, with an emphasis on highly ethical motives of political activity and their benefits to society. All respondents included in the quantitative survey (sample size [N=100]) are active in one of the two largest political parties in Croatia. The sampling and distribution of the survey occurred in the field in September 2016. The results of the survey demonstrate that in Croatia, the way young people feel about politics and act accordingly, are in fact similar to what the theory describes. The research findings reveal that young people are politically active; however, the challenge is to find a way to motivate even more young people in Croatia to actively participate in the political and democratic processes in the country and to encourage them to see additional benefits out of this practice, not only related to their individual motives, but related more to the well-being of Croatia as a country and of every member of society. The research also discovered a huge potential for political marketing communication possibilities, especially related to interactive social media. It is possible that the social media channels have a stronger influence on the decision-making process among young people when compared to groups of reference. The level of interest in politics among young Croatians varies; some of them are almost indifferent, whilst others express a serious interest in different ways to actively contribute to the political life of the country, defining a participation in the political life of their country almost as their moral obligation.

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However, additional observations and further research need to be conducted to get a clearer and more precise picture about the interest in politics among young people in Croatia and their social potential.

**Keywords**—Croatia, marketing communication, motivation, politics, young people.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE question what makes young people politically active remains unsolved despite the numerous researches, debates and studies conducted in recent times. The same is valid for the Republic of Croatia and its young democracy. The authors of this study wanted to explore the level of political participation of young people in Croatia, as well as their motivation to do so. What motivates them, what moves them forward to participate in the life of their chosen political party? Orientation-wise, such as being politically “left” or “right” and the like, simply does not matter in this particular case and was not in the author’s focus of interest for the purpose of this article. The authors are asking questions on what encourages and motivates young people to participate in the political life of the country (if so)? In other words, are young people in Croatia politically active at all? Are they connected to the world of politics out of some specific, individual, personal reasons and/or needs or is there a “higher” purpose, a “higher” sense for their political activity or abstinence which might be dealing with the issues of ethics in their behaviour and in their motivation for participating in any kind of political activities? The authors strive to discover the real motivation among the young members of political parties in Croatia for their political activity, asking the question – If there is an ever decreasing interest among young people for the world of politics, what is ultimately, in this case, the future of politics, if the situation remains as such? Another issue is that it seems that young people simply do not vote or that they are not interested in any serious participation in political life. It seems that they are not interested in politics at all [1]. And yet, this is not only a problem in the developed European countries, but in young democracies such as Croatia, as well. Or, at least, the vast majority of young people seem to be allergic to the ballot box [2]. But there is not only the issue of motivation to vote as a kind of active participation in the political life among young people. They are simply turning away from any kind of formal politics – in terms of voting [3], and possible membership in political parties or any other kind of political interest or knowledge [4], [5]. The authors try to

research and identify the underlying reasons, motivation and goals among politically active young people in Croatia for their political activities.

## II. MOTIVATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE

Over the last couple of decades there has been a more than obvious market increase in research into marketing's relevance and its possible application to the fields of politics [6]-[10]. Unfortunately, we have very little knowledge about what motivates actors to engage politically and what animates and drives the political behaviour [11], and particularly what motivates young people to engage politically [12]. It appears that young people and political participation present an unlikely and perhaps incompatible combination [13]. Young people feel an increasing disconnection from formalized politics. Political parties and their leaders, together with the managing directors of their political marketing campaigns and public relations experts, are using different elements of marketing mix in order to raise attention, strengthen public awareness, build a political party or its candidate's image and win the political elections at the end of the day [14]. But, is this sufficient to attract young voters? And if so, are there any particular hidden motives? Political researchers quite often conclude that young people are not sufficiently engaged in politics [15], [16]. Young people do not vote. If and when they vote, they do it rarely. During the 1990's, media speculation and academic debate have been increasingly exercised over the alienation of young people from British political life. The notion that young people have low levels of political interest, knowledge and behaviour has been well documented [17]-[20]. Some research on political attitudes and behaviour of young people in politics has tended to confine its focus to the disenfranchisement of particular sub-groups, such as unemployed young people [21]; or has restricted investigation to narrow age bands, such as 15-16 year olds [18]; or are interested in young people's social attitudes and set of values, as well as their political attitudes and beliefs [22], [23]. Recent concern, however, has focused on whether today's young are more disenchanted with politics than their predecessor generations [24].

Young people very often simply have a negative view of politics, they do not have any trust in politicians, and they believe that politicians do not represent them in a way they want, resulting in a rather low level of political participation and any kind of political interest among young people. Young people are also less likely to participate in political activities because they do not feel attracted to politics. It sometimes seems that young people and political participation present an unlikely incompatible combination. They are trying to find new ways to express their opinion and concern regarding problems that bother them or problems that they see in society around them. They do not see any sense, any good reason for their political activation.

Additionally, young people are more likely to participate in a more radical kind of participation in political life, they tend to participate in protest, but this has in recent years received

more support in relation to the argument that young people are leading the shift from formal political participation to the 'new' [25]-[27]. Why is that so? Concrete reasons are unknown. It may be connected with changes in their lifestyle and complete set of values, lifecycle, employment or unemployment, marriage, etc. Anyhow, it looks like that there are so many factors in the contemporary world which withdraw attention of young people from politics, and they consider it less and less important for their everyday life. However, it has to be said that this "phenomenon" is not only present with young people, since contemporary researches point and notice an almost similar kind of political indifference among adults, as well [28], [29]. Even though, young people have different attitudes and expectations from politics than older people. This is a generally present issue, not only the case in the young Croatian democracy. Based on the article published in the *Independent*, following the situation in the UK, according to the Electoral Commission, the past four general elections have recorded the lowest ever voter registration rates [30]. Simply, some studies showed that young people are less likely to be members of political parties, express party identification and show interest and knowledge about politics at all [31], [4], [5].

The voluntary and political dimensions of their participatory activities most describe participation as "just something that they do" – a form of cultural and personal expression [32].

Some authors cite many possible reasons to account for the low levels of political participation among young people before concluding that there is no single over-whelming deterrent [33].

Since a common conclusion for this kind of young people's behaviour on a political scene, having them in role of voters or active member of a political parties, is not unfounded - in almost every election young people are least likely to vote, and these participation rates are continuously declining [34]-[36].

Some researches show that the youth membership of political parties is dropping [37]. Besides all this, it seems that young people are simply less concerned with politics, less politically knowledgeable, they do not participate in social and/or political activities, they are more apathetic, and show a rather low level of political interest, among all [16], [38].

The Whitlam Institute Study from the University of Western Sydney distils key research findings connected with behaviour of young people in regards to democracy which can be easily related to any other country in the modern world, having in mind the available researches and the total process of globalization which can be applied to the field of politics, as well.

The authors have chosen to highlight those findings, which taken together, offer guidance on how governments, educators and others might better promote, acknowledge and nurture the active citizenship and political participation of young Australians [39]:

- 1) Young people express a quite high level of motivation to be involved in different decision-making processes,

connected with politics. Political parties should use this fact to offer them proper possibilities to do so and to integrate them into the lives of their political structures in order to strengthen their influence on society.

- 2) Young people estimate and feel that their participation in politics, as well as in any kind of political processes within the country and political parties they have chosen, is simply not taken as relevant. This can be a source of serious frustrations among this particular population.
- 3) Political parties definitely should acknowledge the contribution that young people can make to the political life of the country. This should be taken especially seriously from the perspective of new communication technologies and social networks usage.
- 4) Education programs, in general, have failed to encourage active participation of young people in political life of the country. There is a visible lack of knowledge and experience which can be strong enough to motivate young people for active participation in political and democratic processes within society. This has to be changed in the near future.
- 5) Political parties need to express a much higher interest in understanding the interests in politics young people exert. Additionally, they should seriously consider any possibility of a possible participation among young people in the political life of the country and democratic processes.
- 6) Political and even civic participation of young people in the political life of the country can have a strong influence on structural changes in the society, as well as on the changes in the economy of the country.

There are plenty of studies and books which deal with theories of motivation, consumer's motivation, voter's motivation, as one of the main factors that moves the contemporary world of economy, political and business, as well as many theories of motivation which can be applied to the world of politics as well as to the motivation of young people to actively involve themselves in the world of politics [40]-[42]. Motivation is the driving force within individuals that impels them to action and this driving force is produced by a state of tension, which exists as the result of an unfulfilled need [43]. Acquired needs, such as needs for self-esteem, prestige, affection, power and learning are generally psychological and considered as secondary needs. They all can be connected with political motivation. On the other side, goals are sought-after results of motivated behaviour. The degree to which a person is willing to expend energy to reach one goal as opposed to another reflects their underlying motivation to attain the goal [44]. One study distinguished between two types of goals: [1] *ideals*, which represent hopes, wishes and aspirations; and [2] *ought*, which represents duties, obligations and responsibilities [45]. Many theories have advanced to explain why people behave the way they do. Most share the basic idea that people have some infinite amount of energy that must be directed towards certain goals. A conceptual distinction has been made between goal setting and goal striving [46]. The question in this concrete case is what is

really the hidden goal or motive behind political engagement among young people in Croatia? What is the real motivation behind their political activities or their individual abstinence or involvement? Since involvement can be defined as a person's perceived relevance of the object based on their inherent needs, values and interests [47], there is a question of relevance of politics among young voters or consumers on the political market. Is there something that can change this situation; can anything motivate them at all? Is there something that marketing in political communication can do? Can social media help engage young people in politics with its interactive nature? Is this a possible key? It has been claimed that online political communication may increase citizens' political engagement by bringing politics closer to citizens, that is, through interactivity and personalization [48]. Barack Obama's presidential campaign clearly expressed the power and the potential of online communication technology [49]. The current new media trends in marketing communication are related to social media and mobile communication technologies [50]. In any case, this should be used for communication with young voters in Croatia and for motivating them to participate actively in the political life of the country, since we are talking about the technologies they understand very well, they have access to them and use them frequently in everyday life. A growing international body of empirical literature confirms that social media afforded potential for interaction between the electorate and political actors is only marginally utilized [51], [52].

### III. CURRENT SITUATION IN CROATIA

To discuss the motivation among young people in Croatia to get actively involved in the political life of the country is not possible without taking into consideration a couple of relevant economic and demographic factors that, based on researches previously mentioned in this article [21], [30], influence young people's political behaviour in Croatia.

In 2016 the Croatian population is projected to decrease by -15.112 people and reach 4.217.807 in early 2017. The number of deaths will exceed the number of live births by 11.133, so the natural increase is expected to be negative. If external migration will remain on the previous year's level, the population will decline by 3,979 due to migration. Looking closer on the age structure, as of the beginning of 2016 and according to estimations of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division – Country meter [53], Croatia had the following population age distribution:

- 15.1% - population under 15;
- 68.1% - population between 15 and 64;
- 16.9% - population 65+.

Additionally, the number of people who married in Croatia in 2013 was the lowest in the past four decades [54]. In 2013, 19,169 couples said 'I do', 5.7% fewer than in 2012, whilst the number of divorces in Croatia of 5,992 broke a record which has stood since 1986, according to the statistics of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics. Obviously, young people in Croatia are significantly changing their lifestyle. One of those factors is

the unemployment rate. According to Trading Economics 2016 [55], the unemployment rate in Croatia, as reported by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics in 2016, decreased to 13.6% in June of 2016 from 14.4% in the previous month, reaching the lowest level since December 2008 [56]. The unemployment rate in Croatia averaged 18.2% from 1996 until 2016, reaching an all-time high of 23.6% in January of 2002 and a record low of 12.2% in July of 2008. On the other side, youth unemployment rate in Croatia, reported by Eurostat in 2016, remained unchanged at 30.1% in June from 30.1% in May of 2016 [57]. The youth unemployment rate in Croatia averaged 35.2% from 2000 until 2016, reaching an all-time high of 54% in January of 2013 and a record low of 22.8% in October of 2008. The difference in comparison with the average unemployment rate is significant. Looking closer on another factor – wages, as reported by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics in 2016, which increased to 5,706 HRK/month in May from 5,633 HRK/month in April of 2016. Wages in Croatia averaged 3,774 HRK/month from 1992 until 2016, reaching an all-time high of 5,855 HRK/month in November of 2015 and a record low in January of 1992. The data on the wages also do not give much confidence to young people into the promises given by the politicians during the last decades when democratic processes in the country have started. Going further and looking on the results of the survey of the world's largest info news portal for global prices Numbeo, which was carried out in 118 countries and 355 cities in 2013, Croatia is the sixth highest ranking country in the world by cost of utilities and regular monthly household costs. Norway, Slovenia and Luxembourg are in the top five and Croatia is followed by a number of much richer European countries [58]. However, there is an obvious and huge disparity between the wages and the cost of living. This is one of the facts which should be added to the list of factors which directly influence the young voter's behaviour and participation in the political life of the country. Additionally, according to the European Commission's Country Report for Croatia in 2016 [59], in 2015 Croatia finally came out of its six-years-long recession and by 2017 the GDP growth is forecast to attain 2.1%. In the long-run, Croatia faces the challenge of lifting its low potential growth, the unemployment rate remains very high, especially for youth and the low skilled. The inflation rate in Croatia, reported also by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, averaged 2.5% from 1999 until 2016, reaching an all-time high of 8.4% in July of 2008 and a record low of -1.8% in May of 2016. According to the data available on the official website of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) [60], one of the two largest political parties in the country, it has established the Youth of the Croatian Democratic Union, abbreviated to MHDZ, in September 1990, so that young people will have the possibility to express their interest among the political life of the party. MHDZ is the youth organization of the Croatian Democratic Union, and it has launched in 1996 its own website [61]. There is no data available on the actual number of members of MHDZ, but only the information that the age of their members is between 16 and 34. The information on the overall members of MHDZ can be part of a

further primary research among the party members. The Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP) is the second-largest political party in Croatia. The official website of the party [62] provides information on the SPD Youth forum, with a direct link to the Youth Forum, if one wants to become a member of it or pose a question. The SDP Youth Forum is the youth organization of the Social Democratic Party of Croatia. Further information about the SDP Youth Forum membership will be part of the primary research of this article.

#### IV. EXPECTATIONS

Based on previous research, we expect that young people in Croatia are also not very much interested in an active participation in the political life of the country, aiming to discover the real motives hidden behind their decision for an active participation in the political life of the country. We expect to hear answers from young respondents, members of these two political parties in Croatia, as an explanation for their political activity, such as: "It will be easier for me to find a job", "I can have connections with the important people in the society who might help me one day", "It will be easier for me to get a better job or to be promoted", "I might be able to help my relatives, peers and family members", etc. We expect that this is due to the poor economic and social situation in the country where young people basically see no real future possibilities or real hope. We expect to find a huge and unexploited potential of possible usage of social media in order to motivate and to strengthen the activation among young people into active participation of the political life of Croatia.

#### V. RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION AND METHOD AND RESEARCH RESULT

This paper and its research have been focused on the active young participants in the political life of the country, i.e. the members of the two major political parties. A cross-section of young people, aged between 16 years and 34 years, has purposively selected from a diverse range of backgrounds and circumstances in Zagreb, Croatia. This means that all respondents are active members of one of the two largest political parties in the country - HDZ or SDP. Young people in Zagreb, who are politically active, as the literature on political engagement has pointed out, form a minority of the general population [63], [11], [28]. For this research, all of those who are being surveyed are members of one of those political parties, but it will be explored whether their motivation patterns and motivation background are somewhat different.

The results presented here are based on the data collected. In total there are 100 respondents from the two largest political parties – HDZ (68 respondents) and SDP (32 respondents). There is an almost equal split between men and woman in the sample (54 male respondents as a slight majority).

There is a slight difference in the age distribution among the respondents. Namely, most respondents fall in the 28–30 years

group. With regards to their marital status, unmarried respondents are in a large majority.

Additionally, with regards to social class, on overall there is a majority who identify themselves as middle class (76), followed by upper middle class (24). This is based on an individual perception of the respondent's own social status. Furthermore, 53% of all respondents are employed, while 41% are still studying. In all, 37% of all respondents have a university degree. Out of the respondents who are already working, most of them fall in the group with an average monthly net income of 5,001 HRK – 7,000 HRK (41%), followed by the group with an average monthly net income ranging from 7,001 HRK – 9,000 HRK (32%). This is comparable with the level of the average monthly salary in Croatia. Furthermore, there is a significant difference in the amount of money available on a monthly basis to the unemployed respondents. The overall majority of the unemployed respondents fall in the 1,001 HRK – 3,000 HRK category (53%), followed by the group of unemployed respondents with an amount of money available on a monthly basis ranging from 3,001 HRK – 5,000 HRK (22%). A clear majority of all respondents (54%) became a member of the political party of choice in the very early age between 16–18 years. This group is followed by the persons becoming party members at an age of 19–21 years (35%). It seems that those young people in Croatia who decided to become a member of a political party made such a decision at a rather early age.

TABLE I  
MOTIVATION TO DEFEND MY INTEREST

Fully agree	40%
Agree	46%
Neither agree nor disagree	9%
Disagree	4%
Fully disagree	1%

Additionally, in order to discover any family-related influence on the respondents' decision to become a member of a political party, we have find out that 67% of the respondent's family members (parents or brothers and sisters), are members of a political party, and for a large majority (76%) this is the same political party like the one the respondent is belonging to. There is a huge influence of friends like a reference group on the respondents' decision to become a political party member. In total, 69% of the respondent's friends and colleagues are members of a political party and 66% of all the respondents admitted a strong influence of their friends on their decision to become a member of a political party. Additionally, 61%, and thus a majority of all the respondents, have been approached directly by their friend to become a party member. Obviously, when it comes to the decision to join the party and become an active member of the political life in the country, there is a significant influence of word-of-mouth communication within the group of friends, considered as a group of reference on the young people's final decision to join the party. This group is followed by the influence of advertising [14], political parties' social networks and online activities, Facebook, web pages etc. [10] and family [9]. It

seems that social media influence on young people's behaviour when it comes to the moment whether to join or not a political party in Croatia has a huge and unexploited potential. The research has shown that the group of friends, as a group of reference, has the strongest impact on young people's decision to join a political party as compared to other groups of reference such as family or as compared to other social media or traditional advertising media. The tables show the distribution of the motivations variable and indicators for different motivations. The questions were phrased in such a way that the respondents indicated their agreement or disagreement on all types of motivation measured by a Likert-type scale.

TABLE II  
MOTIVATION TO EXPRESS MY VIEWS

Fully agree	61%
Agree	34%
Neither agree nor disagree	5%
Disagree	0%
Fully disagree	0%

TABLE III  
MOTIVATION TO PUT PRESSURE ON POLITICIANS

Fully agree	27%
Agree	32%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%
Disagree	9%
Fully disagree	8%

TABLE IV  
MOTIVATION AS MORAL OBLIGATION

Fully agree	32%
Agree	35%
Neither agree nor disagree	28%
Disagree	2%
Fully disagree	3%

TABLE V  
MOTIVATION TO REPRESENT YOUNG PEOPLE

Fully agree	64%
Agree	27%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%
Disagree	1%
Fully disagree	0%

TABLE VI  
MOTIVATION TO WORK

Fully agree	4%
Agree	9%
Neither agree nor disagree	35%
Disagree	31%
Fully disagree	21%

TABLE VII  
MOTIVATION TO BE PROMOTED AND GET BETTER SALARY

Fully agree	2%
Agree	3%
Neither agree nor disagree	11%
Disagree	39%
Fully disagree	45%

When it comes to the motives to join a political party among young people in Croatia, the research has clearly shown a strong motivation to defend their own interests, as well as a motivation to express their own views. Nevertheless, there is also an obvious motive present to put additional pressure on the politicians, since it looks like young Croats share a mutual view with other young people around the globe, namely that they consider that the politicians simply can and need to do much more for the society and for the country in comparison to what they are doing for the time being. Additionally, the vested majority of the respondents fully see the motivation to join a political party as their moral obligation (67 respondents agree or fully agree with this statement). The possibility to be able to represent young people also plays a significant role as a driving force among the respondents.

TABLE VIII  
MOTIVATION TO GET TO KNOW IMPORTANT PEOPLE WITH GOOD SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Fully agree	9%
Agree	33%
Neither agree nor disagree	28%
Disagree	18%
Fully disagree	12%

The initial expectation in regards with young people's motivation for participating in politics has not been fulfilled, since the majority of the respondents denied any motivation to join a party to get a job, 52, or motivation to be promoted and to get better salary, 84. Yet a rather high percentage (35 of all respondents) needs to be mentioned also, those who remained neutral with the statement that their motivation to join a political party was simply to get a job. This is to be analysed in more detail in future researches. Nevertheless, the motivation to join a political party to get to know important people with good connections in society has a significantly high percentage of respondents who agree with this statement, at 42.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The authors have tried to research and determine the reasons, motivation and goals among politically active young people in Croatia for their political activities. They have tried to find out what motivates them to do so? The research wanted to discover if there are any hidden motives behind their involvement in the active political life of the country. Are we facing, here in the Republic of Croatia, an example of positive or of a negative motivation for participating in the political life of the country? The study was driven by a desire to understand why young Croatians decide to participate in the democratic life of the country and how they imagined democracy might work better for them. The study showed that we facing a lot of challenges in front of us in regards of the connection between young people in the Republic of Croatia and their political activity.

A review of the quantitative analysis demonstrates similarities among young people's behaviour towards politics in Croatia with theoretical findings. Young people do not escape from their political responsibility. The study also discovered a huge potential of political marketing communication possibilities, especially related to the interactive social media platforms and channels, since it seems that the influence of social media on young people's decision to become a political party member is still far behind in comparison to the influence of friends as a group of reference. Research undertaken in this project has delivered interesting conclusions regarding the motivation among young people in Croatia to actively participate in the political processes in the country. Additional observations are needed to get a much clearer and more precise picture about the overall market and the social potentials. To answer the question why young people Croatia, in particular young members of the two largest political parties in the country - HDZ and SDP, are politically active, further data collection and analysis needs to be conducted in order to ensure a better level of their motivation understanding. A future survey should include other indicators that could perhaps help explain the background of their motivation for political activity. For example, one needs to include more detailed open ended questions asking why they decided to participate actively in the political life of the country and to join one of two largest political parties.

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