

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN THE FREE TIME OF CONTEMPORARY POLES

Jacek J. Bleszynski¹ & Malgorzata Orłowska²

¹Professor, Department of Education Sciences, Speech

Therapy Institute, Nicholas Copernicus University in Torun, Poland, Europe

²Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, the Faculty of applied Social Sciences,

University in Dabrowa Gornicza, Poland, Europe

ABSTRACT

The Internet is used by people in their free time. The content of the attempted discussion is an analysis of the profile of Internet use by contemporary Poles in the context of their interests and preferred activities performed in their spare time. The conclusions drawn refer to educational directives of digital competences.

KEYWORDS: *Free Time, Quality of Life, Internet, Digital Participation*

Article History

Received: 03 Oct 2018 | Revised: 11 Oct 2018 | Accepted: 26 Oct 2018

INTRODUCTION

The experiences of social participation in the countries of the European Union are very different. Lack of access to research and language barriers do not provide valid information on the quality of life in specific countries. Meanwhile, comparative studies can determine social change trends and serve as a basis for exchanging experiences. Hence, the idea of the authors to share the information with others about the quality of life and the exclusion - in this case the digital exclusion- of a large part of citizens of united Europe. Especially so as the studies conducted by Euro stat do not provide such detailed information and stop at a certain level of generality that does not allow for an in-depth analysis. An example of this is a kind of discovery made by the co-author of the reconsiderations, which reveals various types of preferred behavior in free time depending on belonging to a specific category of countries. The residents of the so-called old EU more often spent their free time in social meetings than in front of the TV. Whereas those from newly admitted countries rather watched TV than took part in social life. (Aliaga 2004, Orłowska2007). This example encourages authors to publicly present their analysis of the exclusion in Poland.

Leisure has become one of the essential elements of the quality of life of modern societies. This thesis is confirmed by research conducted by institutions dealing with the analysis of the quality of life, such as CSO or Eurostat. This interest stems from, among other things, the fact that traditional monetary measures - e.g. the GDP indicator - are no longer sufficient to determine the quality of life for the needs of the implemented social policy. Thus, the need arises to seek and build more complex measures referring to the variables which are known to significantly affect the quality. These include gender (hence the GDI index) or poverty (hence the PDI index) (broader Orłowska, Bleszyński 2018). However, multi-element indicators are used more frequently. These indicators take into account the entire spectrum of human behavior, including free time activities with their detailed components: social life, mass media, sports, and

recreation or using the Internet.

The authors mentioned this issue in their earlier articles (J. J. Bleszyński, M. Orłowska 2017), as well as works devoted to people with disabilities (M.Orłowska, J.J. Bleszyński 2016, M.Orłowska, J.J. Bleszyński 2017, J. Bleszyński 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The basic research question is how much and in what way contemporary Poles use the Internet and computers in their free time, crucial for the quality of life. To what extent participation in it involves inclusion, and to what extent exclusion. One of such elements of social life is the use of and access to the Internet. It is a measure of contemporary digital literacy societies - perceived as the foundations of social participation. The research material consists of the analyzes carried out by the Central Statistical Office. Its choice was supported by a high methodological reliability based not only on the manner of collecting and processing data (according to Eurostat standards) but also on the size of the population.

The analyzed research material to a large extent refers to the general population of adult Poles. Such a methodological approach will allow, with a high degree of probability, to define areas of social participation (vs. digital exclusion) and the place and role of the Internet in individuals' free time.

The Importance of Free Time in the Experience of the Contemporary Poles

Graph 1 The level of satisfaction with various aspects of life among Poles aged 16 and older (in%)

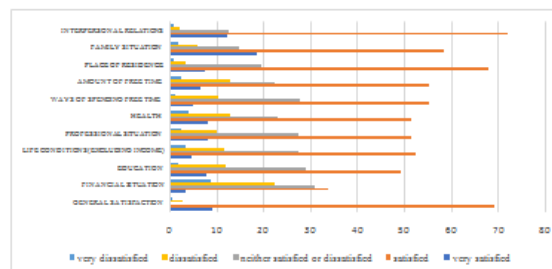


Figure 1

Source: Jakość życia w Polsce w 2015 r. Wyniki badań spójności społecznej (*The Quality of Life in Poland in 2015. The Results of Social Integrity Research*) (2017), s. 196.

The research material presented in Graph 1 reveals that the amount and manner of spending free time are of great importance for the quality of life for adult Poles. Only values such as place of residence, interpersonal relations, and family situation precede them. It is obvious that these two notions are constitutive of human life and relate to the fundamental value of the family. The next spot, just after them is occupied by free time as an important element of well-being. It should be noted that free time is ahead of health, professional and financial situation or education naturally related to them. And although these aspects are essential for survival, they are still below in the hierarchy. It can therefore, be concluded that free time is an important value for all Poles and places high in their life satisfaction rankings.

The results of the studies quoted above coincide with the ideas of free time theoreticians who emphasize the role of free time in achieving balance and well-being, and whose disruption leads to coercion, enslavement, and deprivation (see the footnote), and thus to dysfunctions in life. The researchers point out that this well-being concerns the intellectual, emotional and physical spheres of life. Therefore, it is important for human functioning.

The use of the Internet and the computer in studies of social statistics is usually assigned to leisure time behaviors. So, this element of life also understood as a necessary element of social participation, finds recognition in the eyes of the respondents.

Free Time and Life Satisfaction

One of the indicators of the meaning of certain spheres of life is the amount of time that the individual devotes to selected behaviors. In the sphere of leisure time, the most popular, according to how much time was devoted to the activity, was the use of mass media. Then, there were behaviors related to social life and spending time on hobbies, including the use of computer and the Internet. The last in the hierarchy were classes related to participation in sport and recreation. Those who were satisfied with the amount of their free time usually spent more time on favorite behaviors than those who were dissatisfied. It can be suggested that the use of these media is not varied depending on the satisfaction with the amount of time available. A statistical Pole devotes less than half an hour to these behaviors daily (see Table 1).

Table 1: Time Spent on Selected Activities According to the Level of Satisfaction with Free Time, Which A Person Has at Disposal (N - 74 499)

Activity	Altogether	Satisfaction with the use of Free Time	
		Dissatisfied	Satisfied
Time in Hours and Minutes			
Participation in sport and recreational activities	0.24	0.19	0.27
Walks and hiking	0.14	0.11	0.17
Sports	0.07	0.07	0.08
Social activities and entertainment	1.06	0.54	1.13
Social gatherings	0.24	0.18	0.26
Passive rest	0.19	0.14	0.21
The use of mass media	2.36	2.00	2.55
Reading (eg. books, magazines, e-books)	0.21	0.15	0.25
TV, video and dvd	2.09	1.41	2.23
radio and music	0.06	0.04	0.07
Personal interests	0.34	0.32	0.36
artistic activity, other hobbies	0.05	0.03	0.06
using the computer and the internet	0.22	0.23	0.22
computer games	0.05	0.05	0.06
games and individual games	0.05	0.03	0.06

Source: Own research based on *Budżet czasuludności (Time Use Survey) 2013, (2016)*, p. 249

At the same time, the research shows (Graph 2) that a significant number of contemporary Poles would like to increase the amount of free time available in certain areas of their lives. About 2/5 of them expect to increase the amount of time devoted to such areas as social life, physical activity or participation in culture.

The level of Internet use is satisfactory for almost 70% of respondents. 1/6 of them feel the need to have more, and 1/10 recognize that they devote too much time on it.

Graph 2 Free time preferences of Polish citizens over the age of 16 in %, N= 27 117 households

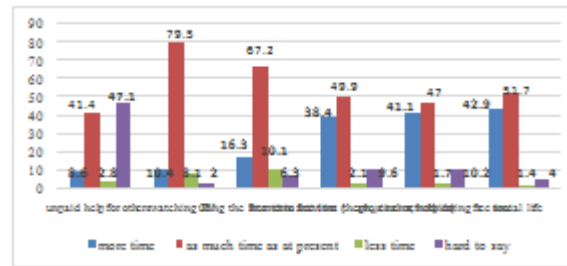


Figure 2

Source: *Jakość życia w Polsce w 2015 r. Wyniki badań spójności społecznej (The Quality of Life in Poland in 2015. The Results of Social Integrity Research)* (2017), p 68.

Using the Internet vs. Social Position

Table 2: Households Equipment. Selected Durable Goods by Income and Place of Residence (In 2015) (In %)

Appliance/ equipment	Income		Place of Residence	
	V Quintile Group	I Quintile Group	Village	Town
Computer with Internet access	81,1	75,5	55,6	63,4
Computer with broadband Internet access	70,2	61,2	68,5	74,8
Plasma or LCD TV	84,6	72,7	77,5	81,5
Dishwasher	39,0	16,9	25,7	28,0
Car	70,2	59,5	72,1	58,2

Source: Own research based on *Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych w 2015 r. w świetle wyników badania budżetów gospodarstw domowych, (The Situation of Households in 2015 According to Home Budgets)* (2016), p. 17.

Reflection on the amount of free time devoted to the use of the Internet and computer or computer games to some extent is conditioned by the possession of the equipment itself, i.e. a computer (as an instrument) and the access to the Internet. And although the percentage of people with a computer with access to the Internet is quite high, the research material included in Table 2 shows that the use of it is determined by the level of income and place of residence. The difference of about 5 percentage points between the group of the richest Poles (V quintile group), and the poorest, and between urban dwellers and the rural area inhabitants are not as striking. Higher income-related differences are revealed in the case of broadband Internet access. Here, it is important to belong to the income group (9 per cent difference). However, it does not differentiate the place of residence.

Comparing access to the Internet with other goods, it can be concluded that this phenomenon is similar for other household appliances - with the exception of the dishwasher, where the level of income is decisive.

It can therefore, be assumed that the level of income is important only in terms of access to modern types of Internet connection.

Methods of Using the Internet

The most important issue is the manner of Internet use. Therefore, the question arises which of the ways is characteristic, if not for the whole analyzed population, for specific social groups.

It turned out that regardless of age, the most popular way to use the Internet is to communicate and access information (Table 3). Other possibilities of using the Internet in everyday life are much less appreciated. Participation in social and political life has the smallest number of enthusiasts. And basically, this tendency has been constant over the years. At most, the number of people choosing specific activities varies. It is obvious that young people will be much more

interested in communicating and accessing information than middle-aged people or seniors.

From the educational point of view, the relatively low percentage of people using the Internet for education or social participation is worrying. It seems that it is an open field for educational activities for all age groups. It is an important social issue, especially in the case of spatial separation or individual dysfunctions.

Another issue is not using online services, excluding platforms related to the purchase of services or goods. There is a whole range of them relating to non-economic or educational activities. And here again, an important field for action is opening up for various types of educational activities.

Table 3: Ways of using the Internet by Age Category (In %)

Ways of using the Internet	Altogether	Age		
		Pre-Productive	Productive	Post-Productive
Communications	61,2	96,8	73,4	29,1
Accessing information	57,4	84,1	68,9	29,9
Participation in social and political life	5,7	12,4	6,5	1,9
Professional development	12,1	21,2	17,7	1,7
Other online services	17,1	18,7	22,8	8,0
Education, professional and private matters	9,9	30,8	9,8	2,0

Source: Own research based on *Wykorzystanie technologii informacyjno-(tele)komunikacyjnych w gospodarstwach domowych w 2015 r (The Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Households in 2015)* - ZIP archive, unpacked size 14 724 096 bytes.(2015).

In addition to the age, features such as social status, income and the related level of education, the place of residence are important variables affecting the way the Internet is used. The analysis of the statistical material (Table 4) collected by the Central Statistical Office for the general population of adult Poles reveals that communication and access to information are still the dominant forms. It turned out that the high economic position (belonging to the fourth quartile group) and a high level of education favored these behaviors in a significant way. In these cases, there is about twice as much activity of richer and better-educated people.

These processes are less strongly linked to the size of the agglomeration in which the respondent lives. The differences between the inhabitants of rural areas and towns (the difference varies from about 10 to 15 percent) indicate the existing conditions.

Other behaviors, although different in intensity, are similar to those observed depending on the age of the respondents.

Table 4: Ways of using the Internet due to Income, Education Level and Place of Residence (In %)

Ways of using the Internet	Ways of using the Internet due to:					
	Income in a quartile group		Level of education		Place of residence	
	I quartile group	IV quartile group	Low	Higher	Town	Village
Communications	41,0	73,8	46,6	93,4	66,9	51,9
Accessing information	39,5	69,2	41,9	85,4	61,6	50,6
Participation in social and political life	4,1	7,3	4,2	11,6	7,5	2,3
Professional development	10,7	14,4	5,1	21,9	14,0	9,8
Other online services	10,3	25,3	4,9	39,8	21,9	9,3
Education, professional and private matters	7,5	13,9	10,5	20,3	11,7	7,0

Source: Own research based on *Wykorzystanie technologii informacyjno-(tele)komunikacyjnych w gospodarstwach domowych w 2015 r (The Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Households in 2015)* - ZIP archive, unpacked size 14 724 096 bytes. (2015)

It can be concluded that low age, high incomes, and high education are definitely conducive to behaviors aimed at interpersonal communication and seeking information while living in a city is less influential.

THE CONCLUSIONS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS

Undoubtedly, free time has gained a permanent place in the system of values and has become an important element of the quality of life of a modern man. An important place in people's free time is taken by the use of the Internet. It has become a more popular activity than the use of traditional electronic media, - especially television. It turns out that it is an important value for contemporary Poles and occupies a high position in the hierarchy of preferences of free time activities. It gives way only to behaviors directed at family relationships. Unfortunately, the use of it is quite heavily conditioned economically and spatially. Nevertheless, a computer with Internet access is one of the most important household appliances. It can be said that it supersedes the traditional "dominator" that once was the television.

The society does not use the Internet for educational purposes. Poles most often use the Internet to communicate or search for information. Its role in education and social participation, i.e. building social capital, is underestimated. The postulate of upbringing and educating the younger generation to use the Internet is socially desirable because of its important role and the danger of digital exclusion of large groups of society.

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