

Edukacja dorosłych w Polsce i na świecie

Elżbieta SALATA

Modern media – opportunity or threat to students?

Współczesne media – szansa czy zagrożenie
dla młodzieży?

Key words: the media, Internet, opportunities and threats, young people.

Słowa kluczowe: media, Internet, szanse i zagrożenia, młodzież.

Streszczenie. Dla coraz większej liczby młodych ludzi Internet staje się często jednym z podstawowych źródeł zdobywania wiedzy. Dlatego też tak wielkiej wagi nabiera zagadnienie kształcenia do świadomego i krytycznego korzystania z nowych mediów. Celem opracowania było zebranie opinii uczniów gimnazjum na temat roli mediów w ich życiu. W pracy przeprowadzono badania ankietowe wśród uczniów. Według ankietowanych najważniejszą rolą mediów jest dostarczanie rozrywki oraz dostarczenie nowych informacji. Z analizy wyników badań wynika, iż najwięcej uczniów wykorzystuje Internet do komunikowania się z innymi osobami.

Introduction. The media have become an indispensable part of contemporary societies. We are now living in the era of the Internet, television and cinema. New technologies are changing our system of communication. Today we can quickly transmit information. The way people think is also changing. Due to the media we have good cognitive abilities. However, they also incur a number of risks associated mainly with the use of the Internet.

The aim of the study was to collect the views of junior high school students on the role of media in their lives thereupon a survey was conducted among them.

Characteristics of modern media. Media is a means of information transmission, which contributes to the creation of a person's view of the world and the choice of his way of life. Media have an impact on the development of technology

(Everet, Caldwell, 2003). The interaction between people is today perceived as a particular medium conveying information (Juszczuk, 2000, pp. 194). Universally a medium is viewed as a means of communication. Goban-Klas says that a medium in the most general sense is an instrument transferring information in time or space. The language as a system of signs – written, spoken or expressed by gestures or facial expression – is an instrument relaying information (Goban-Klas, 1999).

One of the media is the press (newspapers and magazines). It describes current events, presents reports on research. The press includes commonly available printed periodicals that reflect, inter alia, current political events and processes of political, social, economic, scientific and cultural nature.

The use of radio waves as a medium of information, marked the beginning of a new era in the field of interpersonal communication. The radio was invented and in the late thirties of the last century this invention was followed by another medium, i.e., television.

The reach of mass media is constantly expanding as they are an important instrument of public power, social control and management. They present domestic and foreign political, economic and cultural issues. They are often the key to fame and attainment or reasserting the status of a celebrity. Mass media provide people with the most common form of entertainment and leisure activities (Goban-Klas, 2008, pp. 24–25).

In turn, the Internet is one of the fastest growing technologies both in Poland and throughout the world. It transforms our reality in all possible areas. New Internet technologies grant access to unlimited information resources (Kędzierska, 2004, p. 9; Ziębakowska-Cecot, 2012, pp. 650–666; Teeler, Gray, 2000).

They are available on the Internet, influence attitudes and popularize certain values. The Internet creates unlimited opportunities for gaining various kinds of information; contributes to the development of a string of psychophysical functions such as reflexes, motor coordination and the ability to concentrate. In addition, it broadens knowledge and stimulates interests. The Internet enables its users to do networking. However, it also imposes certain constraints. Unrestricted access to a huge source of information makes it difficult for its user to make a choice. At the same time the Internet is a medium that is always ready to work and creates a unique opportunity to repeatedly return to the same content. Moreover, it provides an effective way of learning. It is a medium that several years ago was the exclusive domain of scientists' activity and is now becoming available to an increasingly larger number of users, among whom young people constitute a significant group (Siemińska-Łosko, 2006, p. 74).

Opportunities and risks arising from the use of media. Media have become a kind of peculiar didactic measure. They are a source of knowledge and experience that have an impact on the development of interests and attitudes (Juszczuk, 2000, pp. 129). The rapid growth of information and prompt doubling of scientific knowledge together with the need for continuous training pose new challenges for education (bánesz, 2007, pp. 370–373). It implies the necessity to master fast and effective learning skills, including the ability to use available information. It is important to master the latest information technology and the ability to selectively and critically

receive the media. Media is a treasure trove of knowledge, which, when used in the right way, can contribute to the development of humanity.

The Internet offers quick access to the world opening the door to rapid exchange of data and information (Livingstone, Haddon 2009, pp. 1–15; Livingstone, 2003, pp. 147–166). Its phenomenon lies in the fact that it overcomes two fundamental communication barriers – barriers of time and space. A large number of Internet users have established new friends in the network and are active members of the network communities. The Internet plays a positive role in maintaining relations between people separated by a long distance. Today, it is difficult to imagine the world without the Internet. The virtual world draws its users, has a huge impact on the behaviour of people and, at the same time, provides access to knowledge, entertainment and assistance in everyday situations.

The dynamics of changes in the modern world necessitates continuous improvement and training. The Internet provides opportunities for permanent and fast access to current information in an attractive multimedia format facilitating the search for information and asserting its topicality (information on the website is updated on a regular basis, or very often, in contrast to printed editions of books). Low call costs as opposed to the price of books, magazines and the fact that the Internet combines different types of media such as text, image, animation and sound are its great advantages. Using the Internet, we can take a virtual walk anywhere, see the objects, museums and monuments in different parts of the world. There are many sites on the Internet offering a meeting with literature. There you can read the texts of many prominent writers, study the compositions of famous musicians and enjoy the rich collection of virtual libraries. On no account should the Internet be neglected as a source of information

The media influence personalities of young people by showing them specific role models, today called idols. The mass media are more and more powerful educational institutions influencing the attitudes of children and young people who are not able to select, value and assess the submitted content. Children imitate aggressive behaviour they have seen in films and video games; then elaborate and transfer it to other situations.

Using the new technology is connected with several dangers which mainly concern the Internet (Janicka-Panek, 2012, pp. 45–55; Nowak, 2014; Polce-Lynch, Myers, Kliewer, Kilmartin 2001). Since the very beginning the Internet has been stigmatised for its inability to solve the fundamental problem of the dissemination of inappropriate content dealing with, among others, eroticism, racism, violence, drugs or sects. Using various types of communication platforms is particularly dangerous for children who may fall victim to seduction attempts or become the target of cyberbullying.

The Internet is one of the most attractive media where you can endlessly move from page to page, get to know new people and talk to them in chat rooms, forums and through instant messengers. However, network games in which many players can participate at the same time may also consume a lot of time. Another disadvantage of frequent use of the Internet is the danger of addiction, which consists in spending more and more time online to the detriment of family life and social or school duties. Excessive access to the Internet may lead to a situation in which the user minimizes

interpersonal contacts in the real world in favor of those that take place via the Internet (Bobrowicz, 2006, p. 72; Molga, 2016, pp. 52–62).

The Internet makes its users addicted by offering them substitutes for reality. Without leaving the house we can explore distant places, meet new people and collect information on interesting topics. Continuous being online leads to the reluctance to exercise, and the conviction that the time spent outside the network is wasted (Andrzejewska, Bednarek, 2009).

A number of elements determine the drawing power of cyberspace. These include: the reduction of sensory experiences (the senses of taste, smell and touch are suppressed), the lack of space constraints, equality in terms of social status or ability to communicate with many people (Majchrzak, Ogińska-Bulik, 2010, p. 68).

The Internet can change our civilization, but it is worthwhile to use it within reasonable limits. For a growing number of young people, the Internet becomes the exclusive main sources of knowledge – especially for those who have limited access to libraries and cultural institutions. It is therefore important to teach conscious and critical use of the new media, all the more so as the risk of threats to the safety of children and young people will grow together with the popularization of the Internet.

The role of media in the opinion of the surveyed students. The aim of the research was to gather junior high school students' opinions on the role of media. A survey was conducted among the students. Two hundred and four students' responses were analysed.

The media are institutions that aim to convey world information of different importance to the recipients of such messages, i.e., us, the society. They are said to be the so-called "fourth power". Primarily, they are carriers of information which reach the recipients in different ways. They affect all aspects of our life. By watching television, surfing the Internet, listening to the radio and reading newspapers we get the information about what happened in the world and in Poland. They provide us with entertainment and relaxation. The most significant ones are television and the Internet. What young people think about the role of the media is presented in the chart below. They were allowed to choose more than one category.

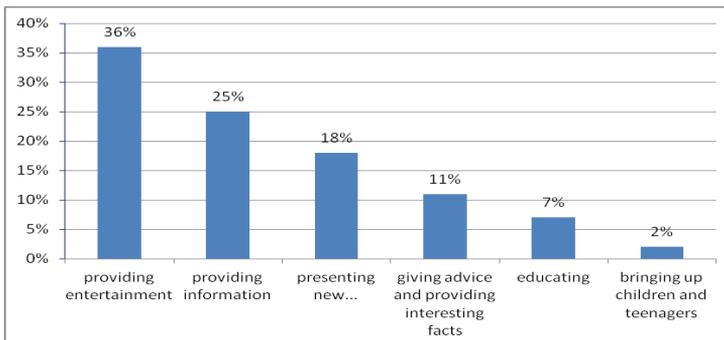


Fig. 1. The role of media in the opinion of junior high school students

According to the respondents the most important role of the media is to provide entertainment (36%) and new information (25%). Currently, we are witnessing the rapid growth of media as illustrated, in particular, by the example of television and the Internet. There we deal with a sharpened screen image, intense colours; the message is dynamic. A similar phenomenon is to be observed in the press. Tabloids with aggressive graphic design attract young people. There we are often provided with the so called easy entertainment and there is no need to contemplate the message of the text or image. Entertainment includes a good movie, a television show or a cultural event; this is what the public expects of the media. Besides providing us with entertainment media are associated with supplying information. There are a lot of programmes whose titles contain the word 'information'. Turning on the radio or television; or web browsing we involuntarily find the information about the weather on this day; e. g., whether it will be sunny or rainy; or we get to know about the events that have taken place. Young people often obtain such information using mobile phones and other electronic gadgets. Another category that was marked by the survey respondents was presenting new trends in fashion (18%). Considering the age of the surveyed teens this category is important to them. They browse glossy magazines and tabloids in search for information about fashion, outfits of stars and celebrities. They look for similar information on TV or the Internet. For 11% of the surveyed students media are a source of advice and oddities. It is puzzling why so few students have indicated the category of education (7%). Being an intellectual tool, modern media offer people incredible chances and opportunities to understand various phenomena. The fewest respondents perceive the role of media as having an educational influence on children and young people.

The role of the media in acquiring knowledge and education cannot be overstated. Therefore it is necessary to promote media education. Media have a strong impact on the system of social and moral values and attitudes.

Since the vast majority of surveyed students (over 80%) identify the media with the Internet, the results of the survey presented below will refer mainly to this medium. The research aimed to determine what the Internet is used for by young people. The pie chart below shows the details.

From the analysis of the test results, we can conclude that the majority of students use the Internet to communicate with others (30%). Communication via the Internet is different from the one we deal with every day. Typically, we cannot see our interlocutor online. Internet communication is very peculiar. Nowadays it is one of the most popular forms of information exchange between people. No charge for conversations – regardless of whether they are text chats, voice or video calls- is one of the advantages of such communication. Skype, Gadu-Gadu, oxygen, Facebook-Messenger and Xfire are the most common instant messengers that are used by young people not only to communicate with a colleague from a neighbouring street, but also to be able to speak freely, regardless of the distance and without costs. Among the respondents, 28% use the Internet to find necessary information. The information they seek most often concerns homework and the materials they need to prepare for their lessons. Sometimes they search for information connected with their interests. What can the Internet give students? Speaking about the educational applications of the

Internet, we mean some kind of a big, multimedia textbook that helps a student to discover new information, to learn about other cultures, and realise that the same thing can be viewed differently. These are the positive aspects of using the Internet that aid the development of thinking and the ability to perceive problems. For 22% of the surveyed students the Internet is associated with various forms of leisure activities. Having free time students would rather sit down in front of their computers searching for interesting films, music or games than spend leisure time actively doing sports or pursuing their artistic passions. Instead, they spend many hours in front of a computer screen. Spending free time often involves developing their own passion. 15% of the survey respondents referred to this category. Students come together in groups which share the same passions. They seek information that is important to them and exchange objects which remain within the circle of their interests.

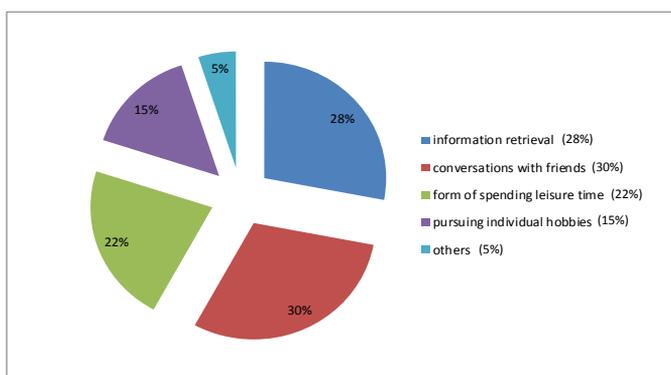


Fig. 2. The purpose of using the Internet by young people

The role which the media play in the life of modern man, especially in learning and education, calls for satisfying the need for universal media education. It turns out that the media particularly strongly shape our attitudes and socio-moral values we believe in.

Many of the other mentioned above categories related to the use of the Internet should be treated as having a positive impact on students. Virtual reality allows you to gather and assimilate information. It helps to develop the imagination and fantasies of children.

However there are also disadvantages. We surrender to the media believing in their good intentions. Meanwhile, they often fool and enslave us, offering an escape from everyday life and moving us into the world of fiction and fantasy. Teaching children to use the media we should be aware of their negative aspects and do it skillfully.

The media can be a source of knowledge, as well as addiction. There are sites that offer an escape from everyday life by moving the user into the world of the unreal. Children begin to identify themselves with this world, and the consequence of this process is alienation from the real world. In the course of the research young

respondents spoke about the negative impact of information. Most often they remarked that it falsifies the picture of reality and provokes aggressive behaviour. There were also statements that information is used to manipulate public opinion. Such information makes its recipient less sensitive to human misfortune and often leads to disturbances in emotional development. In extreme cases it provokes the need to follow the negative behaviour patterns. Young people believe though, that the influx of such information can be averted through critical selection of websites, preserving a skeptical attitude to the presented content and confronting it with different media. It is also important to use the media reasonably in order to avoid addiction.

Students were then asked to specify the amount of time they spend using the Internet within a week. The graph below shows the details.

Most students use the Internet for up to two hours a day. Over 50% of respondents use the Internet for up to three hours a day. The people who spend a huge amount of time using the Internet are a matter of concern. As many as 14% of them do this for more than 43 hours per week. They can certainly be described as addicted to the Internet. Young people use the Internet anywhere and at any time of the day. They do it in the classroom, in their free time, while doing homework and at night. Such situation often causes the weakening of both family ties and ties with peers. Children feel best in the virtual world. Unfortunately, it is harmful to their physical health. They develop health problems such as faulty posture or insomnia. A significant amount of time spent online leads to the negligence of school duties and truancy as students cease to be active both physically and socially. The fact that too much time is spent by young people in front of their computers is often associated with their playing aggressive computer games which leads to the transfer of improper patterns of behaviour to the real world.

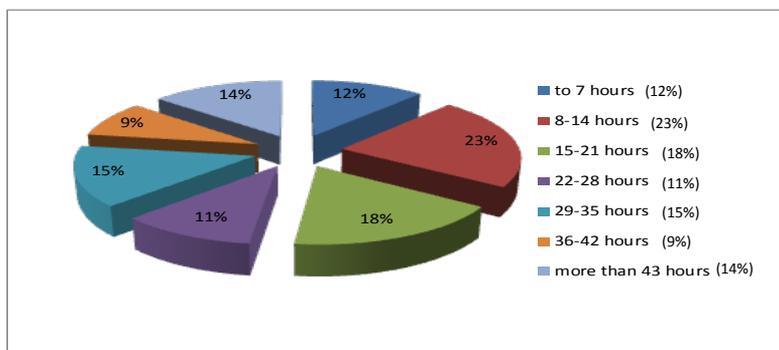


Fig. 3. The weekly amount of time spent by the students on the Internet

Conclusion. The collected research material allows to state that students perceive the risks of using the Internet. The biggest threat is the addiction to the Internet. Due to excessive and long-lasting use of the media junior high school students are exposed to disturbances in family life and mental health disorders. The risk of threats to the safety of young people is expected to increase with the popularization of the Internet.

However, using the media also has some advantages. Young people have the opportunity to develop their own interests, broaden their knowledge in various fields and develop positive social attitudes. Contemporary media have an effect on the personality of young high school students. Everything depends on how well the young are prepared for using the media.

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dr hab. Elżbieta SALATA, UTH prof.

University of Technology and Humanities in Radom

Faculty of Philology and Pedagogy

Department of Pedagogy and Psychology

e.salata@uthrad.pl