



Methods and Techniques
of Cyberspace Research
Theory and Practice

Edited by
Luba Jakubowska



seria wydawnicza

Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Witelona w Legnicy



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Introduction

“...it is better to walk than to sit, it is better to run than to walk,
but it is even better – to surf”

Zygmunt Bauman

The internet environment provides extraordinary research potential. To exploit it fully, it is important to be conscious of its constraints as well as the possibilities offered by employing various research methods. This idea inspired the authors of *Methods and Techniques of Cyberspace Research. Theory and Practice*, which was conceived as a means to unite a theoretical characterization of ways to perform research with a practical illustration of each of them.

This volume contains a description and codification of methods/techniques of cyberspace research. We have not created new ones, but have instead adapted existing research procedures. Every author worked on one research strategy by adapting a method/technique as was required by cyberspace research while also introducing some innovative solutions.

This book is a result of the work done by a team of researchers consisting of academic teachers (mainly methodology teachers) as well as humanities students interested in methodological problems. This is an academic debut for some of them, so their conscientiousness in the pursuit of their topics deserves high acclaim.

This volume is meant for students interested in conducting internet research and academic teachers of such subjects as methods and techniques of social research and methodology of research. It may also be of interest to non-academics, for it refers to versatile and fascinating problems of people's functioning in cyberspace.

We wish you an inspiring reading experience and invite you to join discussion with the authors via email.

Luba Jakubowska

Hypertextual subjects in the process of communication. Methods of semantic and structural text analysis in the interpretation of the hypertext

ABSTRACT

The most ordinary and inconspicuous experiences from reality construct our identity and bonds with other people. The concrete live texts, (re)built and (ex)changed in the communication process, acts of everyday speaking are the carriers of senses. The interpretation of the world through language is an effect of an analysis of the speech acts, especially of the used grammar structures and metaphors. The aim of the research was finding the causes of misunderstanding in the computer mediated communication. Semantic analysis, based on numerous examples of available correspondence (e-mails, text messages, fragments of numerous statements from blogs and internet forums) was the reason for researching attempts to categorize competences which have significant influence on the perception of a message, primarily taking into consideration factors influencing false interpretation, ambiguity or statement inaccuracy.

Key words: hypertext analysis, CMC, parole, missing sense, communication competence.

Everyday reality as a field of study

Over time, the humanities and social sciences in the post modern era are beginning more and more to doubt the existence of objective, universal and evident categories. The researcher more often analyzes separate people's experiences, biographies and feelings, trying to catch the variability of everyday reality, validating in this way the role of the mere average man or woman's individual experience. An analytical category (a kind) of the root, best fitting to this kind of the research is everyday reality, in which the subject could be settled or displaced. Everybody experiences the everyday reality and everybody is altered by it – *ipso facto* – universal and relative categories are melting into one, about which we can write various interpretations, but it cannot be separated into two.

The most ordinary and inconspicuous experiences from reality construct our identity and bonds with other people. Narrations, discourses and symbolic practices get their extraordinary value of sacrum in the process of the validation of meaning, given by the participants in social interaction and by the users of the language, rebuilding the meanings and defining the boundaries of semantic fields [Kordys, 2006].

If we accept the fact that the subject is always defining itself in a kind of social relation and (philosophically speaking) in any kind of relation to other entities, the text should be treated as a symptom, which tells about the (un)consciousness, the level of development, the

concept of self. Language or rather the concrete live texts, (re)built and (ex)changed in the communication process, acts of everyday speaking, parole (in the meaning of de Saussure) are the carriers of senses, in every case connected to living people, contradictory to the the emasculated and artificial language of science [de Certeau, 2008].

Text/discourse/conversation analysis as a method of extraction of meaning

There is a lot of different text definition in the humanities and in the social sciences. This diversity means original, different and specific understanding of text analysis as a research method (very often called content or discourse analysis, depending on the way in which we think about the text and on the way in which we would like to do the analysis).

The quantitative approach is characteristic for (sic!) media studies. R. D. Wimmer and J. R. Dominick – the authors of the popular handbook in Poland for methodology of media research quoted 3 characteristics (defined by F. N. Kerlinger in the year 2000), which describe content analysis as a method of researching and analyzing of information systematically, objectively and quantitatively for measure variables [Wimmer & Dominic, 2008]. In like manner M. Lisowska-Magdziarz defines discourse analysis as a method of text and speech interpretation, used in real situations, particular communication and defined context [Lisowska-Magdziarz, 2006].

The communication is analyzed at different levels, according to its aim, function, social role of the author and (most important) to the social and psychological cognitive mechanism. In one case the research process is focused on the wisdom, stereotypes, and ideology of the language community and groups, in the other case we are concentrating on the cognitive mechanisms in the idiolect (individual, specific language).

Also very important is dynamic of the “parole”, associations and dependences between and on its various elements – grammar structure and semantic units.

The qualitative approach stresses the fact that we are working with unsolicited data, existing naturally, which should be classified by the researcher. The concept of conversation analysis, developed by H. Sacks, is focused additionally on the problem of the sequence regularity of the speech and on the structure of interactions [Peräkylä, 2009].

There is no need to distinguish so many methods of analysis: conversational, discourse, text, narration and there isn't any methodological reason for it [Konarzewski, 2000]. In every case the material for analysis is a text, even if it is a living dialog – it should be registered on the tape or on any electronic carrier, transcribed and finally analyzed as a written text.

There is also a specific cognitive approach to text analysis. The interpretation of the world through language is an effect of an analysis of the speech acts, especially of the used grammar structures and metaphors. There is a kind of belief/conviction that “the grammar is the image” [Korwin-Piotrowska, 2006].

The cognitive approach starts research with the analysis of the grammatical forms and metaphor but the goal is reaching the nature of relations between beings and phenomena out of the language grammar – it is the reason why we can define all kinds of text/conversation/discourse analysis as the same goal, operating with the similar methods, even if the matter seems to be different... only in the eyes of the researcher.

Preliminary statements

The aim of the research was finding the causes of misunderstanding in the computer mediated communication (CMC), in which various objects were used (computers, mobile phones) and various programs (sms, emails, communicators, internet forum).

We analyzed the cases, in which interlocutors were able to communicate fully meaning that the recipient had a chance to send an answer to the sender and the meanings could be agreed or appointed. The most interesting were the cases, when the misunderstandings were caused by the specific medium, meaning that we could assume the same conversation in the real world wouldn't be so complicated and be without any mistakes or misunderstandings.

The effect of the research process was a preliminary classification of the categories of the mistakes in CMC.

The conversation in the real world is accomplished by much additional non-language data, which build the context. It could be facial expression, body language, tone, interruptions and hesitating and a lot of other elements, which could build one important variable – cohesion.

Additional situation data is interpreted not only as dependent on the spoken word, but most of all on interlocutor's presuppositions and implications, which the text includes [Wilkoń, 2002]. Moreover, one is related to the other, for example the presuppositions, as a kind of preliminary knowledge about the interlocutor's Machiavellian personality, will cause a particular cognitive attitude and a kind of tendency to seek in his/her words this kind of implication (sentences with a subtext, double meanings or unclear statements), which could lead to additional interpretations, reinforcing our assumptions. It is very important in cases where we have to face the problem of avoiding communicational cooperation/or apparent cooperation.

Another characteristic of the personal CMC is mixing of conversation and talk. In talking we have natural, spontaneous discourse, non structured themes, variety of styles, everyday/existential topics. In conversation we use artificial and sublime language – sometimes the dialog is for us a field for game and fun. Usually there is only one topic and the code is exclusive/hard to understand, rich in subtext. The themes are usually connected to the culture phenomena [Wilkoń, 2002].

In virtual communication there are elements of both talking and the conversation. We move from one style to another very often, causing the effect of mixing codes, contexts, levels and sometimes it is very hard to distinguish when the serious talk starts and when the playful, sublime, ironically sarcastic conversation finishes. It can lead to the over – interpretation or misinterpretation.

In virtual communication the elements get deeper significance, which additionally assist in defining the situation, for example:

- a) cognitive deixis – sayings in context or in relation to the reality [Stockwell, 2006];
- b) language fortypes, through which we can recall the general regularities, rules, meanings [Kleiber, 2003];
- c) consciousness of the idiolect – of the specific individual language, used by the concrete person [Barthes, 2009].

Psycho-linguistic specificity of the virtual communication

The statements above lead to the conclusion that in internet communication we very often find a kind of mixture of styles, genres, types and levels of discourse. It is an effect of rather lax/liberal treatment by the interlocutors, the rules of language, which should serve as a means of expression – not as a goal in itself, as it very often is in the literature, when the chiselling of the form is vitally important. In the case under discussion the form is selected carelessly, except if we are deliberately “playing with language”.

The next characteristic is a specific characteristic of Goffman's idea [Goffman, 2006]. As a result of lack of data, which could confirm or deny our presuppositions about the interlocutors' intentions, we build an imaginary construct of the intentions; in some cases we try to define not only characteristics of the personality (which could sometimes be justified) but also his/her appearance, biography, experience, expectations. We build a kind of interlocutor's simulacrum [Galimberti & Riva, 2009]; we believe it to be true and sometimes we fall in love with it, but in the fact it is only a play with our own imagination and just an excuse for building our own, best fitting simulacra. The meeting in the reality could be painful. The main question must be – Is it full communication at all?

Also characteristic for the virtual communication is treatment of communicates as a hypertext. Not talking about the domination of the concept of hyperlink in such a kind of definition [Pisarski & Mochola, 2003], we can assume, that every virtual communication should be treated as potentially linked, even though there is no explicit link. One reason is enough: the wide definition of the hypertext. Review of the texts before and outside of the current communicative situation help in the process of redefinition of our presuppositions.

One huge problem exists in lying and role playing in the virtual communication [Green, 2007]. The experienced player manages to construct the communicative situation as non clear, troubled, and only he or she is able to define what is true and what the game is. This kind of situation is rather rare, for example when the subject is interested in creating special personal impressions or in building virtual attractiveness, as in the case of dating or marriage services, internet forums, comments to internet articles.

The problem of playing with identity does not exist where (or when) the interlocutors know each other well and have frequent contacts in the real world – the email and communicators are used first of all for the exchange of information – we are aware of the image of the interlocutor, which we had created before and every communication is fitted to our presuppositions about the personality and intentions of the other.

It could be assumed that, as in the communication in the real world, there are some main differences in the structure and interpretation of the communication, depending on gender – for the men the main goal of the communication process could be information' exchange, for the women – maintaining of contact.

Categorization of communication competence

Communication, is as can be seen, just a “tricky game”. It is no use having an extensive knowledge and collected experience because we are often left in a situation in which the true sense of communication is a big problem for the recipient and also no little challenge.

Semantic analysis, based on numerous examples of available correspondence (e-mails, text messages, fragments of numerous statements from blogs and internet forums) was the reason for researching attempts to categorize competences which have significant influence on the perception of a message, primarily taking into consideration factors influencing false interpretation, ambiguity or statement inaccuracy.

One of the most intriguing semantic problems is polysemy, i.e. the phenomenon of ambiguity/multifunction of terms. Krylow's rule states that half of the vocabulary in each natural language is ambiguous (25% are lexemes of two meanings, 12.5% of three etc. following a geometric progression). Due to that fact a language is able at the same time to be sufficient and functional enough to be used as a tool for describing the world in all its aspects [Wika 2006, s. 1]. It also justifies the fact that if there were not word ambiguity, communication would never be so rich and extraordinary.

The first competence to be examined is – **language** which apart from the knowledge of basic rules of spelling, punctuation or rich lexical supply consists of other no less important elements, e.g.: reality knowledge, presence of jargon or lack of specialist terminology. Language competence consists also of the aforementioned ambiguity both the potential (the less “harmful”) and the one with the greater logical-language meaning which can influence the whole statement; so – called valid ambiguity. Let us take into consideration this example:

A: Mum, has been there any problem with the lock lately? I can't get in!

B: I don't know anything about it my dear! When I went out this morning, there was nothing wrong with it.

It can be seen that beside the ambiguity of the word *zamek* (in Polish it means both “lock” and “castle”), the expression was used in an unambiguous way and it does not have any influence on potential mistakes in interpretation of the message. It refers to the potential ambiguity, which does not always refer to the change in meaning of the whole statement. The supporting element of virtual communication is undoubtedly the interlocutors' knowledge of context and its reference to common experience.

There are various opinions concerning the issue of ambiguity. However, it is mostly valued because of its useful aspects and many possibilities of use., a witty play on words based on ambiguity can be an excellent form of language joke. The joke is not always intentional as it is in the case of so called school-notebook jokes [...]. In general we like wordplay, it is one of the most interesting poetical tricks [Milewska-Stawiany, 2005, s. 1].

A lot of attention when discussing language competence should be devoted to the matter of designation, which can be interpreted by every person taking part in the process of communication, in different ways depending on presupposition of real or imaginary intentions.

A: Hey, can you check if I left an index at your place?

B: No, It is not in my car

A: I mean in your apartment.

Phrase *u Ciebie* (in Polish means both “at your place” and in any other place connected with the person we refer to) acquires a completely new meaning. In the above dialogue one can notice that for each of the parties the phrase carries a different meaning which leads to ambiguity and consequently to different conclusion. *U Ciebie* designates a place or places, in which a given person usually stays or that are ones property and are somehow assigned to this

person. There can be few places like this. Therefore referring to common experience being a context of the conversation, similarly to the previous example in which communication, is undertaken, it seems to be logical that we would not communicate with everybody in the same way. It is important to be familiar with the person to whom the message is directed in order to avoid potential misunderstandings.

A: I feel terrible today. It's probably because of the weather outside. Is it the autumn blues? Tell me, do you feel the same?

B: Yeah, swizz. Grey, wet. Ugh!

A: The climate of my soul is as in November, I can even sense the winter chill.

B: Stop grumbling. Get over this Weatheru! It's weird to read, what you've written!

Nature of mistakes can be dubious:

a) unconscious, being the result of ignorance or because the interlocutor is not well informed (solecisms or hypercorrectness)

b) conscious when an expression used by communicating subject is not accidental, in order to colour a statement or to give it an ambiguous context deliberately (barbarisms, spoonerism)

The second competence – **personal**, refers directly to reality not only lingual but also emotionally-psychological. It consists of all the personality characteristics, in which presence or absence has an influence on the value of a message's interpretation, and also of all the emotion-causing factors, which may significantly effect the interpretation. An introvert will look at information from a different point of view from an extravert or the person of Machiavellian personality; moreover expectations of the three presented types can definitely differ from each other.

An Introvert, an extravert and a manipulator manifest differences in sense of humor, the way they operate irony or sarcasm. Something that is funny for one temperamental type is not necessarily read in the same way by the other two types.

B: I will let you know about Monday as I am not sure yet. I am seeing your wife on Tuesday anyway, so, in the worst case, she can check the fruits of my scribbling.

A: Marta is not a scientist.

B: I know, I know, it was supposed to be a joke.

An Important role should be assigned to a voluntarily made contact and a possible influence of external factors on an interlocutor. This refers to manipulation or other different causes making a casual, undisturbed flow of information, impossible. Such a disturbance can be for example censorship, internal censorship, fear of social exposure.

An ambiguity – previously mentioned while describing the language competence, can be also looked at in a context of personality competence. Often used consciously, in order to colour up a statement and often enough completed with suspension points, it is absorbing analytical material.

A: Yes, let's go to the Island Slodowa, it is so beautiful there, especially at night!

B: Oh yes, I agree. Discovering islands, especially those that are unknown and unexplored, is best made by two ... ☺

A: ... ☺

A few weeks of Internet research and analysis of users' statements on social networks, forums and blogs, lead us to the web sides, on which the leading topics were emotions.

A facebook group with a funny but reasonable name “Do not write if you are drunk!” became an analysis base. In a result, users' anecdotes became confirmation of how often our own emotions, other impulses and emotional factors cause misunderstandings in communication. “Funny thing is that mostly drunk people have most to say...To tell the truth not always smoothly and correctly, but... almost always there is a bit of truth in it. The truth we don't have the courage to write or say when we are sober, looking straight in the eye. Is it cowardice ? Or maybe just lack of inhibitions, which is not easy to find in everyday life? – states Daria. “A man doesn't think about what he writes. Seize the moment!!! You write because that is the only thing you want at the moment. You regret it the next day and you promise yourself that you will not do this again because normally you would not” – comments Agulina. “Ah, and all the explanation the next day” – adds Slawek.

Similarly, as it was with the previous competence, a nature of errors, within the bounds of the one we are speaking of now, is double-sided: consciously or unconsciously – made intentionally by an interlocutor.

The third distinguishable competence, so-called technical – organizational, depends on skill in computer literacy and software necessary in the process of media communication. This competence will also consist of skills to cope with all sorts of faults and system errors, whose results can be found in the quality of hypertext.

An example of those conflicts and defects in the process of communication can be: a message containing spam that does not reach the addressee; a message sent to the wrong addressee – for example, to a mailing group instead of one of its members; a fragmented text – when servers do not recognize Polish signs and replace them with other codes.

In general, such problems have external conditions with which interlocutors cannot control because of too low technical experience, or do not apply to the basic rules of netiquette – simple instructions like “read this before you send”.

How many times have we been victims of failures or unexpected software or hardware problems such as lost data, incorrectly configured settings, lack of accesses to the files we need, or improper software incapable of working the text as we want it? These are just a few of the problems which can be encountered when speaking of technical aspects affecting faulty reading of hypertext.

A quite interesting phenomenon of special interest among the younger users of mobile phones, is the use of the popular T9 dictionary function for faster and easier communication. Indeed, assuming that desired words are in the dictionary database, and immediately after selecting a sequence of numbers – messages are created much faster, and thus the whole process of texting is faster and simpler for most users. The T9 dictionary has also an option for entering words that do not yet exist in its database.

Not every user realizes, however, that it can be a trap and is one of the main sources of confusion in the field of this particular competence. The reason for this lies in defining by programmers of the most popular words (based on the statistics of frequency of use in everyday conversations), and proposing them as the words to be sent in a text message in the first place. For example, sequentially pressing the combination of the following numbers: 5872

makes the T9 dictionary create at least 4 words straight away. These words are *lupa* (a magnifier), *kura* (a hen), *Jura* and *kupa* (a pile). We must therefore carefully observe whether the appropriate word is selected and whether the final form of a text is correct (a reread text: will not cause unnecessary trouble in the future)

Communication, at both the real and virtual level may be quite risky. In the latter case, however, it is worth noting that lack of direct contact between interlocutors and a number of other factors discussed by us impact on the quality and effectiveness of the correct understanding of information.

Internet communication is neither better nor worse than other forms of communication – there are just other psychological traps and other reasons for organizing meanings, mostly due to the naturally greater synergies.

A study of hypertext allowed us to determine a group of the most frequent communication errors, resulting from both the lack of presuppositions and the limited competence of interlocutors, and the reverse, resulting from knowledge big enough to allow the interlocutor to create an ambiguous statement that manifests itself in a manipulative way of building a message, or over-interpretation.

Hypertext is a fairly specific field of research and electronic text, often typed under the influence of emotions, by people without any linguistic or philological background or even without any studies and not complying with even the rules of netiquette, is more similar to oral expression (in terms of lack of accuracy and of specific syntax) rather than written text.

Existing theories of text/statement/discussion should be used with great care and comprehensive sense, depending on the specifics of a particular case. For this reason, the effectiveness of analytical techniques used by us in the research is, so far, difficult to measure. We were also unable to define it precisely for the time being. Nevertheless, the interpretations we made, referring to particular competences can be useful in the process of minimizing misunderstanding and undoubtedly are educational in nature because they enrich our understanding of communication by using hypertext.

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Joanna Golonka

An internet travel journal as a biographical document as exemplified by selected blogs hosted on travel websites

ABSTRACT

For a few years the use of biographical method in the field of pedagogical research has been the subject of huge interest. Nowadays, because of the technological revolution, it is possible however to perceive a new movement of scientific reflection connected with employing the biographical perspective in internet research.

This text is an attempt to engage in a discussion on internet biographical research. In this article I am going to reflect on the topic of perceiving an internet travel journal as a biographical document, as exemplified by selected blogs hosted on travel websites.

The essay consists of four major parts. In the first part of the article I am going to present the most important methodological issues concerning qualitative research and employing a biographical perspective in pedagogical research. Next, I will describe and analyze my research methods. Then I am going to try to answer this question: to what extent may an internet travel journal be treated as a biographical document? The paper will be concluded with general reflections concerning the possibilities and constraints in using a web journal in biographical research. All the considerations are going to reference the theory of biographity.

Key words: social research methodology, pedagogical research, qualitative research, internet research, biography, biographical methods, biographical research, biographical document, social websites, travel, travel website, internet travel journal, blog

Biographical research conducted on the grounds of social science generates a still vivid discussion about their legitimacy and methodological identity. Nowadays, because of the technological revolution, it is possible however to perceive a new movement of scientific reflection connected with employing the biographical perspective in internet research¹. This

¹ In social science, internet research is becoming an increasingly legitimate research approach. However, this raises many questions and problems of a methodological nature (including questions connected with employing methods and techniques of social research in internet research). A reflection of this sort is of general character and refers to different research perspectives (not only the biographical perspective).

problem is significant because “regardless of whether the internet is researched as a social structure or used as a research tool, internet technology changes the research scenario” [Markham, 2010, p. 218]. This leads to crossing the boundaries of traditional communication and moving beyond interpersonal relations [vide Markham, 2010, p. 218].

In this article I am going to reflect on the topic of perceiving an internet travel journal as a biographical document. Typical web diaries (blogs) hosted on traditional blogging platforms (e.g. WordPress, Blogger) are not going to be the subjects of this analysis, but travel journal (blogs) hosted on social websites aiming at a traveller and tourist audience [www.geoblog.pl].

In accordance with the rules of this volume, in the first part of the article I am going to present the most important methodological issues concerning qualitative research and employing a biographical perspective in pedagogical research. Then I am going to try to answer this question: to what extent may an internet travel journal be treated as a biographical document? Afterwards I am going to refer to the possibilities and constraints in using a web journal in biographical research.

Among qualitative research...

Methodological reflection is an indispensable element of every research process, regardless of the topic and research environment. Where the object and aim of the research is concerned, an important stage of planning which requires considerable care from the researcher is the choice of a research strategy. A conscious choice of a research method and technique is related to the awareness of the theoretical and philosophical assumptions of different strategies employed by researchers as well as knowledge regarding the possibilities and constraints of each practice. On the other hand it is worth remembering that “science as it is in fact practiced is a question of negotiation and practically oriented procedures having the features of a handicraft” [Szmátka, Lovaglia & Mazur, 1991, p. 60]. Thus, a research process is to be treated as a creative process entangled in numerous questions and decisions which the researcher has to face referring to theories which are accepted by the society of the learned.

“In the methodology of pedagogical research high priority is given to the procedure of cognition and research, which is related to the humanistic approach expressed as empirical and qualitative research [Palka, 2006, p. 75]. Nowadays, in times of global, intensive and conscious advance in qualitative methodology, it is hard to define qualitative research unambiguously, for it “no longer is simply »non-quantitative« research, but has acquired an identity of its own (or perhaps several identities)” [Rapley, 2010, p. 11]². Thus, the term “qualitative research” refers to different research perspectives, often having varied philosophical and theoretical assumptions and procedures for data processing. However, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln have proposed a preliminary, general definition, which

² Most methodology course books raise the question of defining and understanding qualitative research. Frequently we attempt to discuss qualitative methods of collecting and analyzing qualitative data (vide Denzin & Lincoln, 1997; Konarzewski, 2000; Pilch and Bauman, 2001). What is more, there are also books available on the Polish market which are exclusively devoted to qualitative methodology (Urbaniak-Zajac and Piekarski, 2003; Silverman, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2009; Flik, 2010).

says: “qualitative research is a situated activity, which locates the observer in the world. It is composed of interpretative complexes, material practices which make the world visible. These practices transform the world. It is transfigured into a series of representations, such as field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and personal notes. On this level, qualitative research means an interpretative, naturalistic approach towards the world. Thus, qualitative researchers survey objects in their natural environment, trying to assign a meaning or interpret the phenomena using terms used by the researched people” [Denzin & Lincoln, 2009, p. 23]. However, it is important to notice in that in this definition the social world is understood as interpersonal relations, leading to qualitative research being, among its other features, individual and subjective.

To understand the concerned research strategy it is vital to note the basic ontological, epistemological and methodical assumptions in qualitative research, which are listed in table 1.

Table 1. The features of contemporary qualitative research

Research sphere	Basic assumptions
Ontological sphere (the structure of social reality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the social world is created, exists and changes in the continuous process of human interactions, – the social world is equipped with sense and meanings – they are conveyed and constructed in the interaction process, – a person is an active being (an actor), who interprets situations and other people's acts and uses this as the basis for their own acts
Epistemological sphere (the source and kinds of cognition; the criterion of truth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – every cognition depends on the perspective, there is no universal way of cognizing the world – understanding is the means of cognizing the world
Methodical assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – it is useless to search for a universal research method – a method is to be adequate to the object and the aim of research – every sign which aids interpretations has a <i>contextual meaning</i> (in everyday life as well as in scientific research) – research is an interaction – the participants affect each other (this cannot be eliminated), the researching and the researched are of a reflective nature (a consequence of assuming that a person is an active being)
Common methodological guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the principle of openness (no initial hypotheses, a circular selection for the research sample or analytical induction)

Source: Urbaniak-Zajac, 2008, pp. 9–10.

On the one hand, reflective reading of the above helps, I believe, in understanding the specific character of qualitative research. On the other hand, it allows for a conscious choice of the qualitative strategy as the best way of reaching the research subject and realizing the research aims. After making that decision it is possible to begin the next stage of the research procedure, which is the choice of research methods and techniques.

A biographical perspective as a research procedure

A few years ago in the field of pedagogy (especially education of adults) a certain fascination with biographical research became apparent. It manifests itself in the growing number of andragogical biographical researches (often referring to the problem of biographical learning), as well as the intensive advances in methodological reflection concerning a conscious employment of a biographical perspective in pedagogical research.

As a result, biographical research is seen as the most proper way of studying an individual's experience. However, biographical research concerns two dimensions: the individual and the social. On the individual level biographical research allows for a "better understanding of human beings, their psyche, consciousness and motives" [Dróżka, 1997, p. 28]. On the social level "it allows us to look at history, society and culture" [Altheit, 1999 as cited in Dominicé, 2006, p. 59]. Thus, its employment leads to interpreting reality from different points of view. What is more, "reconstructed biographies or autobiographical material in their unprocessed form are for social science a source of knowledge which aspires to scientific universality and objectivity" [Lalak, 2010, p. 133].

The biographical approach is "a theoretical and cognitive orientation created as a specific movement in the research of social reality, covering many different methodological orientations, whose common denominator is biography³ as a theoretical construct" [Lalak, 2010, p. 15].

A common question for education researchers is also the perpetual redefining of the pedagogical biographical perspective. Solving definition issues (including such terms as: biographical method, biography) and presenting diverse methods of conducting biographical research is also considered important. It is understood as an attempt to search for certain regularities in research in order to create general methodological guidelines.

Describing the biographical method is difficult because despite there being many publications devoted to it, it still raises some controversy. It is now increasingly often assumed that "there is no single biographical method, but there are many. Thus, a researcher's declaration: »I employ the biographical method« carries no information that would allow one to retrace their research process, which would help to assess the credibility of the results" [Urbaniak-Zajac, 2008, p. 1].

That is why characterizing the biographical method is in this case a problematic task. Early in the defining stage the ambiguities become apparent (the so-called "definitional chaos"). The following terms are found in literature: biographical method, biographical research method, biographical research, auto/biographical approach, biographical paradigm [Dubas, 1998, pp. 33–34], autobiographical document method, personal document method [Lalak, 2010, p. 240]. The character of biographical research renders usage of the term "biographical method" arguable⁴.

In social research methodology the term "method" means "a specified, repeatable way of solving a problem" [Nowak, 1970, p. 235], "a regularly employed procedure leading to an assumed result" [Okoń, 1975, p. 167], or "a set of theoretically justified conceptual and instrumental procedures covering generally all of the researcher's actions in the course of

³ In subject literature different views on the term "biography" are introduced. This problem is going to be discussed later in the text.

⁴ This problem has been discussed in detail by D. Urbaniak-Zajac (2008).

the attempt to solve a certain scientific problem” [Kamiński, 1974, p. 65]. This means that this understanding of the term “method” is not in accordance with the nature of biographical research, which has the following features: flexibility, subjectivity, individuality, versatility, lack of exact procedure (at the stage of collecting empirical data and when analyzing the material and presenting results).

The ambiguity of research practice causes the biographical method not to be considered a system of predefined actions. What is more, even assuming the stance that the character of the method is rather to be defined by the subject of interest still does not solve the problem. In biographical research (in the vast majority of projects) the subject of research is biography. However, the name »biography« may refer to different theoretical constructs [Urbaniak--Zajac, 2008, p. 6].

In the context of these ambiguities D. Urbaniak-Zajac proposes to “speak of a »biographical research perspective«, in which different methods are possible, for the sake of language clarity” [Urbaniak-Zajac, 2008, p. 7]. Assuming the author's view, in my considerations I abandon the term “biographical method” and replace it with the term “biographical research perspective”.

The above considerations illustrate that it is important to solve the basic terminological issues. The definition of biography assumed by the researcher affects their research procedure, the character and context of the conducted research.

The word “biography” in itself means “a description of life” (from the Greek *bios* – life and *grapho* – I write), at the same time a text and life in its real sense. However, in biographical research “biography” is usually understood as “a virtual construct arranging the personal experience of an individual, who searches for the meaning of the events which they have experienced” [Dubas, 2009, p. 110]. A similar definition is proposed by W. Marotzki, who defines biography as a subjective structure of life experiences [Marotzki, 1990, as cited in Lalak, 2010, p. 107]. The method of defining biography also depends on the perspective of the discipline of science to which the research is related. Theodor Shultze has named several such perspectives: biography as a text, written either by the subject of the biography (auto-biography) or by another person (writing someone else's biography); as life – BIOS; as the forming process of a person; as a social structure – the idea of a “normal” biography, typical of certain social layers, cultural work groups, as a form of communication [Schultze, 1999, pp. 39–40, as cited in Urbaniak-Zajac, 2008, p. 6]. Thus, the researcher's task is to define the perspective which is as close as possible to their research assumptions, in a more detailed manner.

The researcher is also obliged to make a decision concerning the opposition: “biography as a topic” vs. “biography as a means”. In the former case the biography is treated as a problem in itself. In the latter, biographical information is collected and is supposed to provide answers to the stated research questions [Helling, 1990, p. 16].

Defining the type of biography which the research concerns is also vital for the organization of the research process. In this case it is possible to distinguish: a complete biography, which is the data concerning the whole life of the researched person(s) or groups, a topical biography, where the data concerns a certain area of life (e.g. free time) or life phase (e.g. childhood) [vide Helling, 1990, p. 17].

An important problem is also to define the range of biographical material (data), which radically helps to plan the subsequent phases of the research process correctly. The awareness of the character of empirical material facilitates the decision concerning the research technique, and also performs a key role at the data analysis stage.

There exist different definitions of what is to be understood as biographical material. The most general description of such material, according to Jan Szczepański, are the ideas of “a biographical document” and “a personal document”. In a broad sense personal documents are “not only autobiographies, diaries and memoirs of different kinds, but also letters, explicit statement transcripts, interviews and all the other documents which contain projections of a person's state of mind” [Szczepański, 1973, p. 624]. However, in a narrower sense they are “written statements, which report the writer's participation in a social situation and also contain the author's personal view of this situation, a description of the events which took place and of the author's behaviour” [Szczepański, 1973, p. 624]. In the subject literature there can be found varied classifications of biographical material. They are based on different criteria.

Based on the form we can distinguish written material (diaries, memoirs, journals, autobiographies, and letters) and different oral statements, acquired in the form of conversations or interviews.

Another criterion for dividing biographical material is intentionality. According to this biographical data is divided into: elicited data and naturally acquired data (non-elicited) [vide Peräkylä, 2010, p. 325]. This means that in the former researching intentionality is observed and in the latter personal intentionality.

The group of elicited material includes different kinds of interviews (e.g. narrative, in depth, concentrating on the problem), conversations initiated by the researcher, but also different written forms and visual material created at the researcher's request or for specific research projects (e.g. diaries collected for competitions⁵, photographs taken according to the researcher's guidelines). Non-elicited material is that which was created based on personal, internal inspiration of the individual (e.g. letters and personal diaries, memoirs, personal photographs, family albums), but also different kinds of course books, newspapers, local church journals. In other words they are all the material which exists regardless of the research and their initial meaning is related exclusively to their personal or social dimension (and not a research dimension).

All biographical material may be treated as complementary or auxiliary material in different kinds of research (1), as the basic, sufficient and exclusive source material (2) or together with other documents of a different kind (e.g. official, legal documents) and empirical material (interviews, surveys) as research material of equal significance (3) [Lalak, 2010 p. 298].

Two main approaches may be observed concerning the means of reaching and collecting empirical material. The first is a reactive procedure, characterized by bidirectional contact between the researcher and the researched. In this approach the data acquisition techniques include: interviews (of different types), group discussions, participating observation. The second approach is the so-called nonreactive approach, in which the researcher works on the biographical material already available [Marotzki, 2006 as cited in Lalak, 2010, p. 300]. In pedagogy, an apparent interest in the former method is observed, for this method allows direct contact with the researched person, which considerably affects the quality of research.

At the research material processing stage, there are also two approaches: structured and unstructured. The former is closely related to the methodological methods of text analysis described in literature. “There are many methods of text analysis, from which the researcher may choose. They vary in the degree of precision in defining the set of research procedures that need to be realized before beginning the analysis” [Peräkylä, 2010, p. 327]. In the latter

⁵ Vide Skibińska, 2006, pp. 67–82, 106–116.

case the researcher may develop his/her own principles of working with the biographical material: “reading the empirical material repeatedly, they attempt to find the key topics and through this to outline the assumptions and meanings which constitute the cultural world, of which part are the analyzed texts” [Peräkylä, 2010, p. 326]. In such a situation the researcher should provide a thorough description of the process of creating the report. Alfred Schutz proposed a method of biographical analysis which incorporates the language-related features of the content. It distinguishes narrative, argumentation-related and descriptive data elements [Schutz, 1982 as cited in Helling, 1990, p. 31]. The analytical procedures characteristic of the biographical approach have also been identified by J. Szczepański. He described: the constructive method, the exemplification method, the content analysis method, statistical processing, typological analysis [Szczepański, 1986]. Here it is worth noting that reliable knowledge of the methods for analyzing biographical material is provided by publications which contain reports presented in periodicals as well as books [e.g. Skibińska, 2006].

The methodology of this research

The subject of this research was internet travel journals created and presented on social websites devoted to travellers and tourists, considered as biographical documents. Therefore, the conducted research refers to topical biography.

The main aim of research was identifying the character of an internet journal as a biographical document. The main aim of research was identifying the character of an internet journal as a biographical document. Purposive sampling was employed in the described project. Selected blogs created in one of the social networks most visited and recommended by travellers *Geoblog.pl* were analysed. The choice of this website and of the travel journals (blogs) was based on criteria such as: high-rated attractiveness and functionality of the website/blog (as assessed by visitors); high level of interest in the website/blog (high number of visits and comments); full access to the presented content (including access for users not being members of the website); a clear structure of the presented content (e.g. structuring posts, assigning dates and locations); a wide variety of documentation functions (ability to assign photographs as well as audio and video recordings to posts, an automatically generated map with the journey route). Additionally, the researched blogs were the only ones listed on the homepage of the website, included in “most popular blogs” or “recommended blogs”.

In this research I attempted to answer the following research questions.

The main problem: To what extent may an internet travel journal be treated as a biographical document?

Specific problems:

1. What is the structure of internet travel journals? (blogs)
2. What is their aim?
3. What kind of data appears in the content of internet travel journals?
4. What elements of a biographical document are apparent in internet travel journals?

The research model was constructed according to the qualitative orientation (humanistic research model) in accordance with the assumptions of the interpretative paradigm. In my research I employed the biographical research method. As the research technique I chose qualitative content analysis. The analysis of collected material was performed according to the following procedure:

1. Repeated reading of the selected internet travel journals.
2. Identifying the fragments which contained answers to the research questions.
3. Organizing the material. Creating analytical areas corresponding to each research question.
4. Detailed analysis of the content of each analytical area.
5. Formulating the findings and further problem questions.

The research material consisted of three travel blogs hosted on the Geoblog.pl platform.

The following considerations are not to be treated as a full illustration of the researched project, but more as a concise report from the conducted research. The character of this publication (concentrating on the problem of employing research methods in internet research) this section of the article is of a rather presentational character.

A travel blog as an internet travel journal

Geoblog.pl is one of the largest and most often visited Polish social networks for tourists and travellers, which allows for the free creation of travel documentation in real time. “Geoblog.pl lets you arrange notes as journals, consisting of posts assigned to specific geographical localizations. The user identifies where they currently are or what place they want to describe by choosing one of the 7 000 000 places in the Geoblog.pl database or by pointing to the location on the map. Using the Google Maps technology, the route is automatically drawn, the mileage, journey time, etc. are calculated basing on the defined points. The authors can also illustrate their posts with photographs and audio-visual recordings. The posted photos are automatically formed into a gallery for each journey, which can be viewed independently.” [<http://www.geoblog.pl/onas>, 28.08.2010].

That is how travel blogs are formed⁶. Their components are the same as those of a traditional journal. They include: systematic reporting of everyday experiences, “day after day”, which provides a certain time continuum; the author's subjectivity (they decide to begin and finish a blog, choose its elements, create the presented content) [vide [http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dziennik_\(literatura\)](http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dziennik_(literatura)), 29.09.2010]. Therefore, travel blogs presented on Geoblog.pl are defined in my research as “internet travel journals”.

Internet travel journals are an example of the so-called “short journals” (an account of the events and experiences of a single journey) [vide Czermińska, 2009, p. 13]. However, because of the environment in which they function (the global network, social platform), their features include the publishing intention – the process of posting content and photographs is connected with their automatic publishing, a high level of availability – creating a travel journal requires only registering and accepting the terms of use; theoretically anyone can become a reader (however in the case of blogs created in social networks their readers are usually people who share interests or are among the author's family or friends), multimedia – the ability to choose different kinds of presented content, graphical typesetting, enhanc-

⁶ A blog in the traditional sense is a “web journal consisting of a number of separate, autonomous, chronologically orders posts, written by the owner of the blog” [<http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>, 28.08.2010]. Nowadays, the blog as an internet tool continues to transform – change its form and purpose [vide Olcoń-Kubiczka 2006, p. 153].

ing text with video and audio, the risk of content filtering – the website retains the right to deny publication of any content, removal of it, or of requiring its alteration [<http://www.geoblog.pl/regulamin>, 29.09.2010], global communicability – the ability of the content to be browsed at the same time by an unlimited number of people (being in different locations all over the world), dynamic content (interactivity) – the ability to comment, initiate an internet discussion, to modify the presented content, add new threads, open content assessment – the presented content is subject to rating (by the readers), a shared everyday experience – the ability of the author's and the reader's everyday experiences to interpenetrate (when the readers follow the author's journey via their internet connection).

An internet travel journal as a biographical document

The analysis of internet travel journals has shown that they can be successfully treated as biographical material, since we can identify in them the features of personal documents, references in J. Szczepański's definition. First of all, all the journals presented on the website are written accounts of the author's participation in a certain social situation. To illustrate this I would like to cite some selected fragments of the analyzed journals: “Ideal! It's 10 pm in Jalpaiguri so it's time for bed:). A night in the ladies' waiting room is for free:) on 3 metal chairs – and the loudspeaker for a pillow!;-) and there's a toilet and a bathroom (2 rupees) right under my nose:) Next to that there's tea for 4 rupees – great! It's nowhere near being comfortable but it's safe, cheap and you can get some sleep. Tomorrow we set off, there's no use going to the city at night (Journal 3), “On Chiloé we didn't stay long because it wouldn't stop raining. We just stopped by to a little church in Tenaún, the most colorful of all the 16 ones included in the UNESCO list. Hopped from the bus, splashed across the puddles for a photo session and then back” (Journal 2).

Secondly, internet journals contain the author's personal view of the situations, they describe the events as well as the author's behaviour. To quote one of the journals: “The heart of Amritsar is the Golden Temple, raised in the center of the lake of divine nectar, known also as the lake of immortality. Crossing the gate that leads to the area surrounding the temple, we felt as if we'd come to the land of one thousand and one nights [...]. Strong guardians with long beards and purple turbans walk by along the lake, wearing their typical orange gowns, carrying spears. We are in some other world. It is perfectly clean (on entering the temple everyone is obliged to take off their shoes and wash their feet in the water), with the glistening of white marble. At the moment when the temple becomes visible, everyone kneels and bows to it. From the temple a song of prayer is heard (the sacred book is meant to be sung) [...]. The place is so spiritual and mystical that we feel like intruders, we don't know where to stand so as not to cover the view of their place of cult to the kneeling people” (Journal 1).

Considering the kind of analyzed material, internet travel journals may be thought of as natural material (because the reason for their creation is a personal, internal inspiration of an individual). The presented data refers to a topical biography.

The structure of content presentation (in the considered journals) is defined by the functionality of the website. All the selected journals incorporate a map, on which the points visited by the author are marked. The number of days the journey took, the number of visited countries and mileage are also given (they are automatically computed by the system). A graphical fragment of the main page is shown in figure 1.



A graphical fragment of an internet travel journal's main page hosted on Geoblog.pl platform

Source: <http://millagreg.geoblog.pl/podroz/2775/w-drodze>

Moreover, the reader can easily survey the contents of the blog (the information is included on the main page) – the information about the number of posts, of added comments, visits, posted photographs and videos. They can also reach the information about the author of the blog and their traveling experiences. The main page also contains the route of the journey in question (a clear list of visited places in chronological order), which allows the reader to follow the journey through real-time updates. The amount of content as well as its form is however such an individual and varied issue, that it would require a separate description. Here I only wish to stress those issues which were found in all of the selected journals and which directly refer to the problem of the biographical nature of the empirical data.

On the basis of the analyzed content, two main factors initiating the desire to create an internet travel journal may be observed. On the one hand the authors of the blogs clearly highlighted their desire to keep contact with their relatives and friends (while this is not a question of reporting their journey, but upholding the emotional bond). It may be illustrated by the following passage: “P.S. We miss you all very much, we long for your SMS's (we can't always visit the blog) so please let us know about your doings” (Journal 1). On the other hand, the authors manifested their will to pass their experience to other travellers or people interested in the places they were visiting at the moment (extensive descriptions of the places, sharing practical information). That is why the following content may be found: “PRICES: rickshaw from station to hotel – 20T, EAST END hotel (room for 2 with bathroom) – 18T, tea – 8T, huge dinner (rice, vegetables, fish, pancakes) – 80T, 1kg of apples – 90T, 6 large bananas – 18T, coconut – 25T” (Journal 2), “We eat something to warm up, have some tea (you can hire a gas heater in a tourist shop for 10 zł per day) and then we go back [...] Oh,

and it's important that in order to climb you have to cross some private area and pay a toll" (Journal 3).

In every journal I analyzed some intertwining parts, which together constitute an account of the whole journey, may be observed. They are: a general description of everyday life (reporting events, conveying impressions), a detailed description of specific places, situations, meetings, etc., practical information and guidelines (concerning prices, means of transport, arranging specific issues), a description of emotion connected with visiting specific places and experiencing specific situations, reflection. Some posts also contained reactions to comments and answers to questions asked by the readers. Thus, it is apparent that an internet travel journal performs many roles simultaneously: communicative, informative, and expressive.

However, what matters most from the point of view of research problems is the fact of acknowledging an internet travel journal as legitimate biographical material. The authors of the journals give a detailed account of the events that they witnessed (or are witnessing) as well as present their state of mind and the dynamics of their experience [Szczepański, 1973, pp. 622–626].

The following fragment may be used as the last illustration to the above assumptions: "Today didn't start nicely for us. After 6h on a train, finally we reach the magical Varanasi. Here life and death are entangled. The first "image" that we see here is a corpse lying in the street. He looked as if asleep, but he was covered with flowers. It's not shocking for anyone. That's when we felt we're in India and such a sight is just an element of everyday life [...]. Standing there without any emotion, looking at their loved ones disappear in flames. Their calmness is unbelievable. I ask one off the observers, does anyone ever cry here? The answer is no, death is no reason to cry. So there I stand fascinated and shocked at the same time. Here everything is so simple" (Journal 1).

Internet travel journals (hosted on *Geoblog.pl*) can therefore be treated as contemporary equivalents to traditional travel journals. The difference lies mainly in the documenting practice (more precisely in the change in tools, which means substituting a pencil with a computer) and the destination of content: traditional travel journals are of personal and private nature, often to some extent intimate (only some of them are published in their entirety)⁷. Internet travel journals are meant to be public documents, the author's intention is to "meet the reader".

Thus, on the grounds of the above considerations it is apparent that internet technology creates new fields of research activity in the area of biographical research. It is unusually inspiring for research practice, but it also raises new questions and controversy, mainly of methodological and ethical nature.

Employing a biographical perspective in internet research. A final reflection

Internet technology increasingly creates and organizes an individual's everyday life, but it also transforms the practice of conducting social research. A certain dichotomy may be observed in designing research employing the biographical perspective. On the one hand,

⁷ In this context I rather refer to travel journals by "ordinary people", who are not famous travelers (public figures known from the media).

virtual reality is a source of valuable biographical data (which is apparent in internet travel journals). On the other hand, I believe that the idea that they may be used as a fully legitimate, basic and only source material causes some anxiety.

My doubts over the legitimacy of internet data are raised not only by the idea of working exclusively with a written text (which in the case of biographical research in pedagogy is an especially controversial issue)⁸, but also by the limited ability to verify the published data.

The main problem is the lack of direct contact with the researched person. Why? Firstly, because the researcher may never be sure who they are actually contacting. Secondly, many elements which as a matter of fact form the very core of biographical research are not included here. They are: the interaction between the researcher and the researched person (feedback), the dynamics and spontaneity in conversation, which is typical of face to face contact. What is more, communication limited to the textual sphere deprives the researcher of the perspective to reach the data connected with verbal and nonverbal communication (there is no way to observe the facial expressions of the researched person, their gestures, body position, paralinguistic sounds), which in biographical research forms an important context for the empirical material.

Thus, I believe that internet data (understood as biographical material) is to be treated as complementary or auxiliary material in different kinds of research. I am aware of the fact that as knowledge in the field of methodology of the virtual expands, my stance may be altered. For the temptation to conduct such research is very strong... Let this be an invitation to discuss this issue.

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⁸ I would like to stress that my reflection concerns humanistic research conducted on the grounds of pedagogy. I am aware that the above considerations would be deemed absurd e.g. by a historian.

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Critical analysis of online content as exemplified by a message board dedicated to the problems of motherhood

ABSTRACT

In my considerations I shall concentrate on the subject dimension of understanding the role of a researcher who deliberately and reflectively creates his own research path, which includes creating his own research method. I have decided for the sake of some selected research problems to integrate two methods/techniques¹ of research: critical discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis. I assume these methods/techniques belong to different methodological traditions – the former is connected with the critical paradigm while the latter is connected with the interpretative paradigm – and I treat them as complementary and bind them in one research cycle, referencing the concept of method triangulation of Norman K. Denzin (Denzin, Lincoln, 2009). In this context it is of special interest what advantages and methodological constraints a compound of these methods has.

Key words: critical paradigm, qualitative research, critical discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis, motherhood

“Every instrument of research is deeply rooted in the subject which it aims to explore [...]. Realising this may be the first step towards abandoning the image of a researcher as being only an executor of an algorithm without the right to methodological innovation, scholarly imagination and individual risk”.

Mieczysław Malewski [1988, p. 631]

Being a researcher, especially in the field of education, brings numerous privileges as well as challenges, which make it one of the most demanding social roles. But the rate of the privilege depends mainly on the methodological consciousness, reflexiveness and commitment of the person in that role. A researcher, defining the sequence of his research, may (re)construct his role in it differently (the subject dimension) or by assuming a positivistic research paradigm perform only the role of an executor (the instrumental dimension).

¹ The terms *method* and *technique* are used interchangeably by many authors, which is a consequence of assuming a different research methodology and referring to different classifications of research methods and techniques. I believe that how to treat and define a research method/technique should be decided by the researchers themselves. It depends on the assumed paradigm and research orientation, as well as the organization of the research process – both a method and a technique may perform different roles in research.

In the context of these considerations the researcher's attitude towards the research method, which organizes a major part of the cognitive process, seems especially important. Referencing the definition by Marian Nowak, "a method for empirical research is no more than a fixed, repeatable way of acquiring a certain type of information concerning reality required to solve a certain type of research problem, searching for the answer to a certain type of question by a broadly understood observation of reality" [Nowak, 1985, p. 55], this definition concerns a researcher who is determined by a certain research problem and gathers information by observing reality. It is crucial that this contact with reality, or the way of acquiring the information, be repeated and so fulfil the intersubjectivity requirement. Thus the researcher, whilst ensuring this requirement is met, may in different ways and reflectively create the method of making cognate the phenomena in question for it is the aim of this penetration and not the described set of rules which determines his research procedure.

In my considerations I shall concentrate on the subject dimension of understanding the role of a researcher who deliberately and reflectively creates his own research path, which includes creating his own research method. I have decided for the sake of some selected research problems to integrate two methods/techniques² of research: critical discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis. I assume these methods/techniques belong to different methodological traditions – the former is connected with the critical paradigm while the latter is connected with the interpretative paradigm – and I treat them as complementary and bind them in one research cycle, referencing the concept of method triangulation of Norman K. Denzin [Denzin, Lincoln, 2009]. In this context it is of special interest what advantages and methodological constraints a compound of these methods has.

Method triangulation: critical discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis

Executing methodological triangulation involves merging methods, theories and data or empirical perspectives which are founded upon different paradigms and research traditions [Denzin & Lincoln, 2009]. I have decided to merge two different methods of surveying social reality because their integration will show a considerably fuller picture of the researched problems. It will also make it possible to underline the advantages of the chosen methods and on the other hand to nullify their constraints and disadvantages. I would also like to highlight that the triangulation procedure assumes not only a complementary, but also equal status of the merged elements of the cognitive process. While it is so in the case of my research, both methods still perform different roles and so have a different cognitive status. Critical discourse analysis provides one significant paradigm or a perspective of reflection over the concerned phenomena, whereas qualitative content analysis provides knowledge of the tech-

² The terms *method* and *technique* are used interchangeably by many authors, which is a consequence of assuming a different research methodology and referring to different classifications of research methods and techniques. I believe that how to treat and define a research method/technique should be decided by the researchers themselves. It depends on the assumed paradigm and research orientation, as well as the organization of the research process – both a method and a technique may perform different roles in research.

nical possibilities to process the empirical data. Below I am going to characterize the chosen methods, concentrating on those of their properties which play a key role in the research I have conducted.

Critical discourse analysis

The name critical discourse analysis (CDA) was first used by Teun van Dijk in 1993 in text *Discourse & Society* [http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krytyczna_analiza_dyskursu]. Presenting CDA as a research method is a difficult task because it does not provide well defined and unarguable answers to the researched questions [Lisowska-Magdziarz, 2006, p. 22]. It also lacks precise, solid and most notably technical guidelines for developing and analyzing empirical data. This problem has been emphasized by Tim Rapley who observed that there are no concrete rules and guidelines which would constitute a set of rules for the researcher employing CDA [Rapley, 2010, p. 28]. Therefore, CDA is to be treated rather as a way of thinking aided by some research techniques [Lisowska-Magdziarz, 2006, p. 22]. This view is consistent with the concept of my research.

The philosophical background behind CDA is the rich and versatile tradition of the critical paradigm. It is worthwhile to note here the works of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu or the contemporary Jurgen Habermas which are of special significance in the philosophy of this tradition. Each of the aforementioned critical philosophers has affected SDA, but the effect has been considerably different. That is why it has been noted by Norman Fairclough, one of the propagators of CDA: “CDA may be perceived as a family of critical attitudes towards the complicated relations between language, discourse and other elements (“moments”) of social processes” [Fairclough & Duszak, 2008, p. 8]. This leads to what CDA is precisely concerned with. Key to understanding the aims of this method is the term *discourse*, which applies to what may be said and thought as well as by whom and when it is said and the breadth of the speaker's knowledge [Foucault, 1998]. In this view discourse is inseparably bound to such categories as power-knowledge, which become apparent on different relation levels, i.e. the individual, the social, and the institutional. The researcher's task is to describe and analyze the discourse, and more importantly to look to discover “how the considered discourse reflects the relations of power, the hierarchy of aims and values, the state of knowledge, and the visible and hidden beliefs in the group in which the discourse is realized; try to reveal the hidden assumptions and unmask what is seemingly “natural”, obvious, self-explanatory” [Lisowska-Magdziarz, 2006, p. 23]. The aim of analysis is also to select some “discursive terrae incognitae” which describe the threads which have been eliminated from the discourse [Jabłońska, 2006, p. 62].

In the context of the above considerations, the researcher's ability to see the obscure sense of the analyzed phenomena seems to be an especially significant feature. But penetrating “beneath the surface” is connected with an open, critical and most of all reflexive cognitive attitude. It seems though that the critical attitude toward reality, especially towards the socially acknowledged axioms is the most important quality of a researcher. It is specifically power that is to be subjected to criticism, power which the propagators of this paradigm deem unjust, because its acts are aimed against such values as justice, freedom, democracy, equality and solidarity [Fairclough & Duszak, 2008, p. 17]. That is why CDA takes interest in the ways in which different texts reproduce power and inequalities within society [Peräkylä, 2009, p. 328]. At the same time in the process of searching for and analyzing hidden content the researcher takes into account a context as broad as possible (social, cultural, historical, economical, etc.) in which the researched content is immersed and with which it is connected.

With regard to its critical character CDA researches issues which reveal social problems such as: the status of women and minorities in contemporary societies, decline of natural environment, unemployment or the interference of free market within education and health care [Fairclough & Duszak, 2008, p. 15]. It is to be noted, however, that the aim of such research is not exclusively to criticize, but also to bring about social change [Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 108]. Thus they are a form of committed practice in the social and political sphere which aims to change the researched reality [Jabłońska, 2006, p. 57]. The researcher performs in them the role of an active advocate and defender of those who are subject to the actions of a hidden, subconscious power (symbolic) [Jabłońska, 2008, pp. 58–58]. In this context a critical factor is the researcher's consciousness of his own autobiographical circumstances which include life experience, outlook, personal values and beliefs, etc. Considering these factors in the research process allows the transfer elements of hidden knowledge to the level of openly stated content making it possible to conduct the cognitive process in a reflective and methodologically conscious way. At the same time it is highlighted by Tim Rapley that “acknowledging the significance of the researcher's knowledge in the process of guessing the sense attributed to actions by the research participants in no way contradicts the thesis that the core of analysis is researching the participants' intentions during interaction” [Rapley, 2010, pp. 182–183].

Therefore, an important factor is the technical processing of the collected empirical material, i.e. their qualitative analysis. Below I am going to characterize briefly the stages of this analysis.

Qualitative content analysis

To begin with I would like to highlight that qualitative content analysis is used as a research technique, which is a concrete way of performing the planned research. Despite the fact that it is not structured and the researcher deliberately does not attempt to formulate its aims in detail [Lobocki, 2000], the key features and stages can be distinguished.

Qualitative content analysis is employed to analyze the symbolically recognizable and to discover symbolic meaning [Krippendorff, 2004, p. 21]. It is therefore indispensable in looking to discover true meaning, acquiring detailed descriptions and analyses which allow understanding of the content of the message [Sepstrup, 1981 as cited in Kalinowska, 2001, p. 22]. A fundamental operation in content analysis is interpreting the (re)constructed data, i.e. extracting their symbolic meaning as well as assigning to it a subjective meaning by the researcher. Let me consider now what the researcher does in the consecutive stages of qualitative content analysis of the collected empirical material.

Tim Rapley presents one of the possible variants of such analysis, which incorporates practical guidelines for the person who conducts the research. The first stage is reflective reading of the collected material while noting what has been of interest [Rapley, 2010, p. 216]. To successfully identify and highlight the selected content colour markers may be used, which will later help to identify the important fragments of the analyzed text. The second stage, as noted by T. Rapley, aims to mark those chosen parts of the text which constitute a coherent piece. This operation makes it possible to execute the third stage of the analysis, which is juxtaposing and comparing the analyzed content. The analysis described above lasts until another round of reading or listening to the collected material does not introduce any new topics or threads [Rapley, 2010, p. 216].

The analysis that has been briefly described above is not a rigid procedure that the researcher would be obliged to follow. On the contrary, it remains true to the philosophy of qualitative research, which stresses the openness and flexibility of the procedures. That is why during every stage of the process to find the hidden content the researcher may modify the chosen procedure of content analysis.

The methodology of this research

For the subject of my research I have chosen the problems of motherhood that have been mentioned on an internet message board of my choice. Motherhood is in the most general sense understood as the fact of being a mother, however its emotional and empirical experience depends on complicated and interconnected psychological factors (Bartosz, 2002, p. 45). Notably, “the range of being a mother covers not only the direct events of childbirth and the later of period care for the child, but also the preceding period of pregnancy as well as the period before pregnancy, which is a time of preparation for the woman, a preparation for pregnancy, childbirth and care for the child” [Bartosz, 2002, p. 45]. That is why when analyzing such experiences it is important to take into account different factors connected with the stages of motherhood, which may be emotional, psychosocial, personality-related (on which the decision to become a mother is founded), the course of pregnancy and childbirth and the following period of time [Bartosz, 2002, p. 45].

The preparations concentrated on the following research problems.

The main problem: Which problems of motherhood are discussed on the message board?

Specific problems:

1. Which problems are not discussed on the message board?
2. What view of motherhood arises from the posted content?
3. What knowledge-power relationship is revealed in the content?
4. Which people, groups or institutions (authorities) take interest in the functioning of such a message board?
5. Which people groups and institutions have not been allowed to take part in the discussion?

The research material was a discussion board featured on the *Interia.pl* website, entitled “Motherhood is BS” (initiated by popular Polish pop-rock singer Agnieszka Chylińska's article from *Machina* magazine). The last post was registered on 20th July 2010. I would like to point out that the subject of my analysis was not the content of the article, but the discussion about motherhood which it began. People interested in the article as well as the discussion board should refer to the internet bibliography I have included where they will find the internet addresses of websites to visit.

The researcher's “self” – an autobiographical thread

The choice of research problems is related to my personal experience. Being a recent mother, I experience many situations connected with motherhood in different areas of my life. Undoubtedly these experiences have shaped my viewpoint and system of values, as well as scholarly interest. However, among the many autobiographical³ factors the most impor-

³ Autobiographical circumstances, covering the author's self and autobiographical factors such as his life account, culture, language, experience, geographical and social localization, are an element of

tant role is played by my experience of the (un)commonness of being a mother. This experience has differed from the vision I had had before pregnancy. This vision had been filled with positive emotion related to motherhood. My personal experience is however not entirely positive, as for example the joy derived from the deep emotional and physical relation with my daughter. It also contains difficult and often negative psychological states such as the fear of performing a new role, physical pain, helplessness against the child's weeping. These experiences have induced my critical reflection over the discourse dominant in society, which supports specific knowledge of the motherhood experience. That is why through analyzing a message board which deals with such problems I have decided to look at some visions or thinking schemes related to motherhood which shape this social discourse.

The philosophical background behind my research is **the critical paradigm**, whose assumptions I have already covered while discussing CDA, and **the interpretative paradigm**, which I refer to in qualitative content analysis.

The type of research which is in accord with the mentioned paradigm and first of all allows the search for the answers to stated problems is **qualitative research**.

Finally, the method I have chosen is **critical content analysis** which is formed by merging critical discourse analysis with qualitative content analysis.

Results

In formulating the results of my research I am going to refer to the mentioned research problems. However, I would like to note that because of the formal constraints on this text I will only present some selected results.

The first problem referred to the difficulties in motherhood which are discussed on the considered message board. A frequently mentioned problem is a generally difficult everyday life of a mother. It is apparent in the following post, whose author stresses how problematic this situation is.

“Cool down, maybe you don't have children? It's just a part of your present life – if you have a child you either don't remember or you won't admit that there were moments you thought of murder:-) And you still love the child, it's just that the situation is sometimes a bit difficult and hard to bear and you can't get any help” (mama).

Another quote refers to the previous post highlighting the aforementioned difficulty of everyday situations and mentioning another motherhood problem. It is caused by functioning in a society with an unauthentic or false vision of the motherhood experience.

“...the woman's right. A kid is 1 000 0000 problems and 0 pleasure and that's through most of its existence. Chylińska doesn't say she doesn't love the kid but that she's been cheated by this ‘child mania’ and being a »Polish mother«⁴. She can't cope and she's trying to tell us about it in the way she's able to. And that she doesn't say ‘oh my sweet little baby has made another nice poopoo and vomited, that's so fantastic... oh I'll give him my breast, I don't care

(self)knowledge together with intellectual and axiological factors, and they contribute to the so-called philosophical workshop of the researcher.

⁴ A term used in Poland to refer to a traditional idea of an ideal mother: one who sacrifices all her life for the sake of her child (translator's note).

if it's terribly painful. Because this is all so sweet' doesn't change the fact that that motherhood is REALLY overrated [...]. Obviously I wish everyone an easy delivery, unproblematic pregnancies and great kids” (LiSa).

“...the whining again..., did anyone tell you this was going to be easy? TV, women's magazines? You should've asked your mother or read about it and you'd know..., motherhood, family, children – it's all hard work and you better take it up if you're ready for some sacrifice and love your wife/husband...” (mężczyzna, mąż, ojciec, czasem i)

The poster who calls herself LiSa says this is unauthentic when compared to actual experience vision of childhood is “child mania” and “being a Polish mother” and illustrates it referring to positive words (e.g. using diminutive forms such as “little baby” and “nice poopoo” or a positive adjective: “sweet”). A conclusion of this description is the author's opinion about the dominant social vision of the motherhood experience. She notes that “motherhood is really overrated” and so points to the problem of its falsification. In the second post the author points to the sources of this unauthentic vision of motherhood, i.e. television and “women's magazines”. At the same time she calls to disillusion and presents a different vision of the considered experience. In this vision motherhood brings hard work and the difficulties of overcoming everyday challenges.

In the context of the presented quotes and the reflection presented in them I would like to highlight which problems of motherhood are not considered on the message board. While reading the posts I didn't find the answers to the following questions which I was interested in: How can you cope with the everyday difficulties of motherhood? Where can you get help in this situation, i.e. receive social, psychological and medical aid? What are the experiences of women and mothers in Poland? What are the similarities and differences in these experiences?

Another researched problem was the vision of motherhood seen in the posts on the message board. Answering this question I will also refer to the question of knowledge-power relationship, or the discourses re(constructing) the motherhood experience which are apparent in the posts. An analysis of the posts reveals at least two different visions of motherhood. The first is a result of accepting the picture painted by the author of the article which initiated the discussion, describing explicitly and directly the everyday motherhood experience. The text describes these experiences as difficult and bringing negative feelings. At the same time she criticizes the popular opinion that motherhood brings mostly positive experiences and no difficulty or problems.

“Do you have children at all? I suspect EVERY mother thinks like that sometimes, because basically everyone will come across such an experience, but you won't admit or you forget:-) Which of course doesn't make it impossible to love the baby as strong as anything:-) Best wishes to all the mothers!” (też mama).

“Finally someone's told the truth! I felt exactly the same as you, I just didn't tell anyone so that they wouldn't say I'm a bad mother and a bad woman! I have 2 kids and I felt the same each time!” (ki).

The authors agree with the vision of motherhood presented by the author of the article. Moreover, the posted content points to another important problem, which is the existence and support for a specific discourse of thinking about motherhood. It results in a vision or a scheme of thinking about performing the role of a mother and a woman as well as experiencing it. The authors observe that despite the difficulties they experienced they were afraid to speak about them publicly. It seems that it is this discourse that not only obliges people to think about their experiences in a certain way, but what is more, it does not allow for any other visions of the motherhood experience. It is revealed in the following phrases, used by

both authors: “but you won't admit or you forget” (też mama), “I just didn't tell anyone so that they wouldn't say I'm a bad mother and a bad woman” (ki). The way of speaking about their own experiences is also significant, because neither of the authors describes any of their own difficult experiences. Perhaps it is because of their fear of social exclusion and of the social pressure from the defenders of the traditional discourse.

The other vision of motherhood found on the message board is a result of negating the experiences and reflection presented by the author of the article.

“I can understand that you might not have any maternal instinct although it's hard to imagine, but what I can't understand is how you can describe motherhood like this. Mrs. Agnieszka, you are an extremely primitive and vulgar person and it's probably better if you renounce you rights as a parent now, because I fear for the kid” (zszokowana)

“It's funny how stupid you can be. If you'd paid attention at school you'd know that life is not only about getting banged but also about the consequences. And you thought that after you have a baby all the world will bow before Chylińska? You're too primitive! And this article is nothing more than a provocation. To be a mother you need some sense and you just don't have it. I'm sorry for... the child” (szpilka)

These posts negate the author's experiences and support the discourse which tells them to criticize the vision of the motherhood experience that has been presented in the article. The authors don't name any features or acts that would be acceptable in their discourse and in accord with their idea of motherhood. That is why their criticism is unoriginal, aggressive and intensifies their conflict with the people who accept the article author's experiences. The reason why they choose to criticize so aggressively may be connected with the fact that they are discussing a serious social problem – the motherhood experience which inspires their imagination and induces strong feelings among those who participate in the discussion. Finally, the presence of aggressive criticism shows the strength of the dominant discourse, which is used to defend certain values and ways of thinking about society.

In this context it seems interesting to consider who takes interest in the presence of such a message board – what people, groups or institutions? It is worth noting that the way of speaking about the problems of motherhood is one of aggressive criticism, cynicism and irony and so it does not constitute a sound base for discussion-based communication. On the contrary, it causes and intensifies conflict between the supporters of opposite views. Perhaps this is the aim of such “discussion” groups? To stress the differences instead of supporting the awareness of the variety of experiences in society; to antagonize people and social groups and as a result deepen the social conflicts; to support the preferential and dominant discourse which calls to aggression, stigmatizing and discrimination... Notably, the excluded from this discussion are those social groups which have limited access to the internet, despite also facing the same problems. They are single mothers, parents held in prisons, ones caring for seriously ill children, homeless parents and children, etc. Perhaps their presence on the message board would enrich the “discussion” and broaden the awareness of important problems related to this issue.

The advantages and constraints of critical content analysis

One of the most notable advantages of the presented attitude/method is the ability to survey social reality critically. Surely it may also be used to research fragments of virtual reality, as in the case of the abovementioned research. I believe there are no significant differences

between research done in the virtual sphere and the real one. A certain difficulty is the mentioned problem of limited internet access which does not only limit the ability to conduct such research but more importantly to participate in discussions about important social issues.

Critical content analysis is constrained by some ethical problems. The researching subject performs a double role – of a researcher and a critical participant in the researched reality. It is problematic to merge these two roles as the researcher is obliged to execute the “enlightenment imperative” to bring positive change in social reality. In this context it is worth considering why the researcher should decide what social change is “best” for the researched people. Moreover, the researcher is not always able to initiate such changes in the researched environment, e.g. to expand their awareness and critical reflection. This problem arose in the case of my research, for I could not participate in the chosen message board because it had ceased its operation several months before and is now inactive. Despite the mentioned constraints, critical content analysis remains an interesting, socially engaged and reflective method of researching social reality.

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Jacek Gulanowski

Qualitative content analysis. Analysis of web-portals exemplified by the analysis of Polish conservative web-portals (Konserwatyzm.pl and Legitymizm)

ABSTRACT

Firstly, various definitions of content analysis are presented. Then, the foundations of qualitative content analysis are described, as well as research procedures, the issue of naming content analysis either as a method or technique, and the problem of triangulation. After an introduction to the Polish conservative circles and an explanation of how conservatives themselves understand conservatism, the qualitative content analysis of the two most significant Polish conservative Web-portals concerning the issues of education and upbringing is presented. In the conclusions the author emphasizes the distinction between conservative postulates concerning education and upbringing and their extremely negative evaluation of the state of contemporary education as well as the radical negation of contemporary reality by the conservatives and their alienation.

Key words: content, analysis, qualitative, quantitative, Internet, web-portals, forum, Poland, conservatism, monarchism, revolution, reaction, education, upbringing, teaching

Qualitative content analysis

David Silverman uses the term “text” “to identify data consisting of words and images that have become recorded without the intervention of a researcher” [Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 74]. It is a definition broad enough for an essay, a novel, a diary, a photograph or a comic book to fit into. Surely a website (a web-portal, an Internet forum or a blog) can also be considered as a text. This stance corresponds with the words of Klaus Krippendorff: “in content analysis: images, maps, sounds, signs, symbols, and even numerical records may be included as data, that is, they may be considered as texts—provided they speak to someone about phenomena outside of what can be sensed or observed. The crucial distinction between text and what other research methods take as their starting point is that a text means something to someone, it is produced by someone to have meanings for someone else, and these meanings therefore must not be ignored and must not violate why the text exists in the first place” [Krippendorff, 2008, p. 19].

Władysław Jacek Paluchowski points out that from a formal point view each text has three aspects: semantic, stylistic and syntactic (structural). Generally the message of the text can be analyzed in order to verify hypotheses regarding formal features of the message, its content (that is: meaning), the circumstances of the communication, identity of the originator

what has inspired the communicated information and results of the communication [Paluchowski, 2000, pp. 57–58].

W.J. Paluchowski emphasizes the fact that in the case of text analysis, which has been created and exists irrespective of the researcher's interest, content analysis becomes a typical non-invasive technique; people unaware of the research are being investigated, therefore it is unlikely for the research to cause changes in their behavior [Paluchowski, 2000, p. 57]. Heidi Julien also points out that content analysis “is nonintrusive because it is applied to data already collected or existing text” [Julien, 2008, p. 121].

According to D. Silverman content analysis is a commonly accepted method of text research, especially in the field of media communication. In content analysis researchers create a set of categories, and then count the elements, which have been assigned to each of the categories. Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick summarize the definitions of content analysis found in literature and they focus on the three most important principles of conducting it – it must be: systematic, objective and quantitative [Wimmer & Dominick, 2008, p. 145].

W.J. Paluchowski points out that irrespective of the way of defining content analysis its basic concept is the analysis of the content of selected public messages and that this content informs us about the ways their authors perceive the world, because analysis of its media will aid us in recreating the picture of the world, in which the authors act, as it is that picture which shapes their actions and makes them comprehensible [Paluchowski, 2000, pp. 59–60].

Elżbieta Kalinowska writes that content analysis is a technique, which was developed in the United States at the turn of 19th and 20th century. At first it was used for the quantitative analysis of the mass press – the length of columns concerning certain topics was measured. Radio, film and television were then also researched with this technique, due to the growing popularity of those media. In the 20s and 30s of the 20th century sociologists began using content analysis in the research of public opinion, social stereotypes and various forms of communication. Content analysis was then used in the research of prejudice, political symbols or propaganda [Kalinowska, 2001, pp. 14–15]. Firstly content analysis was a *stricte* quantitative technique. Producing objective research results through the use of standardized procedures was sought [Kalinowska, 2001, pp. 19–20]. In Poland this technique is most popular in the field of press research [Kalinowska, 2001, p. 17].

D. Silverman considers content analysis to be a quantitative method of text research and recommends the analysis of narrative structures (derived from semiotics) to the qualitative researchers. It relies upon treating the text as an organized narration, and then analyzing the functions performed by the signs present in it, as it is the functions which are superior to signs and they structure a particular narration [Silverman, 2007, pp. 148–151].

On the other hand Yan Zhang writes that qualitative content analysis is possible and it brings results in fields beyond the boundaries of quantitative analysis. According to this author qualitative analysis emphasizes the integrated data presentation and its specific context. It also allows the researcher to interpret social reality in an academic, and yet subjective way [Zhang, *Content analysis...*, pp. 1–2].

By this understanding of content analysis, this method's field of possible research expands into the field of postulated by D. Silverman: analysis of narration structures. Philipp Mayring also points out that qualitative content analysis can transcend the boundaries of quantitative analysis. According to him the source of qualitative content analysis can be found in objections towards qualitative research expressed by scholars since the middle of the 20th century.

Qualitative analysis has been then criticized for the simplifying description of the phenomena researched with this method as well as ignoring latent content and contexts [Mayring, 2000, pp. 1–2].

As E. Kalinowska reports, according to A.L. George authors do not always precisely distinguish between quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The authors consider to be qualitative content analysis that in which the aim of preliminary reading is the formulation of hypotheses and discovery of new connections, not a systematic content analysis aimed at testing hypotheses; in which the procedure of observing characteristics of the content is based upon impression, and it is not a systematic and standardized procedure designed to produce objective results; in which dichotomous attributes are analyzed: qualities which can be considered as belonging or not belonging to the certain object, not attributes allowing the researcher to conduct accurate measurement or classification; in which the procedure of observation or coding is elastic, not rigid [Kalinowska, 2001, pp. 20–21].

E. Kalinowska, when comparing the qualitative and the quantitative approach towards this research technique, refers also to Preben Sepstrup, according to whom qualitative analyses are necessary in creating detailed descriptions allowing us to fully understand the message and discover the real meaning. However, they are not always able to manage to process large quantities of data, and their hardly communicable results may scarcely be considered as reliable. On the other hand, results of quantitative analyses express in simpler forms research outcomes and are more communicable. Nevertheless, they are not adequate in the comprehension of text and explanation its real message, especially in the case of a broad social context [Kalinowska, 2001, p. 22].

On the other hand W. J. Paluchowski points out that content analysis has a descriptive, not interpretative character [Paluchowski, 2000, p. 60].

Heidi Julien defines content analysis as “the intellectual process of categorizing qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes. [...] This analytic method is a way of reducing data and making sense of it—of deriving meaning” [Julien, 2008, p. 120]. As this author further points out “content analysis is a method that is independent of theoretical perspective or framework (e.g., grounded theory, phenomenology) but has its beginnings as a quantitative method. Where quantitative content analysis is helpful in answering »what« questions, qualitative content analysis can be helpful in answering »why« questions and analyzing perceptions” [Julien, 2008, p. 120].

Distinctions between quantitative and qualitative content analysis can also be noticed in the case of latent, unconscious or contextual content. In the first definition of content analysis (1952) Bernard Berelson emphasized that its aim is the description of the manifest content of communication [Krippendorff, 2004, p. 19]. This stance has been opposed by other authors who underlined the importance of latent content [Kalinowska, 2001, pp. 17–18]. H. Julien writes that “qualitative content analysis is sometimes referred to as latent content analysis” [Julien, 2008, p. 120]. According to this author “content analysis is useful for identifying both conscious and unconscious messages communicated by text (i.e., what is stated explicitly as well as what is implied or revealed by the manner in which content is expressed)” [Julien, 2008, p. 120]. As she points out: „the researcher also should consider what is missing or not present in the text being analyzed” [Julien, 2008, p. 121].

E. Kalinowska reports the statements of K. Krippendorff, who claims that qualitative content analysis can be used to analyze symbolically recognized content, discovery of symbolic meanings and the social role of the message and the description of communication's features:

what, how and to whom it is spoken and what kind of results it brings (Kalinowska, 2001, s. 20).

As H. Julien notices „qualitative researchers using a content analytic approach recognize that text is open to subjective interpretation, reflects multiple meanings, and is context dependent (e.g., part of a larger discourse)” [Julien, 2008, p. 120].

According to P. Mayring, H. Becker and H.-J. Lissmann “have differentiated levels of content: themes and main ideas of the text as primary content; context information as latent content” [Mayring, 2000, p. 2].

P. Mayring determines two main research procedures of qualitative content analysis: inductive category development and deductive category application. As “within the framework of qualitative approaches it would be of central interest, to develop the aspects of interpretation, the categories, as near as possible to the material, to formulate them in terms of the material” the inductive category development has been designed to meet those requirements [Mayring, 2000, p. 3]. “The main idea of the procedure is, to formulate a criterion of definition, derived from theoretical background and research question, which determines the aspects of the textual material taken into account” [Mayring 2000, p. 4]. In this case the research procedure consists of the following steps:

- a) formulation of research question and the object of the analysis;
- b) determination of category definition (criterion of selection) and levels of abstraction for inductive categories;
- c) step by step formulation of inductive categories out of the material based upon step 2.;
- d) revision of categories after 10-50% of the material and formative check of reliability (steps 1. and 2. should be approached again – the whole procedure must be started all over again if necessary);
- e) final working through the text and summative check of reliability;
- f) interpretation of results (step 1. should be approached again) (Mayring, 2000, p. 4).

In the case of deductive category application P. Mayring determines the following steps of research procedure:

- a) formulation of research question and the object of the analysis;
- b) formulation of theoretical based definition of the aspects of analysis, main categories and subcategories.
- c) theoretical based formulation of definitions, examples and coding rules for the categories and collecting them in a coding agenda;
- d) revision of categories and coding agenda and formative check of reliability (steps 1. and 2. should be approached again – the whole procedure must be started all over again if necessary);
- e) final working through the text and summative check of reliability;
- f) interpretation of results (step 1. should be approached again) [Mayring, 2000, p. 5].

In the deductive category application the main idea is “to give explicit definitions, examples and coding rules for each deductive category, determining exactly under what circumstances a text passage can be coded with a category” [Mayring, 2000, p. 5].

E. Kalinowska proposes the following research procedure:

- a) choosing a problem and formulation of its operative definition;
- b) selection of research material;
- c) establishment of recording units constituting basic element of content (text, picture etc.), which will be used for its recording, and establishment of context units – deciding on the largest possible quantity of material taken into consideration during characterization of

recording units (recording unit can be a sentence, a word, a term, a character, an opinion, a statement; a recording unit can be: a paragraph for a sentence, a text for a paragraph etc.);

d) initial analysis of content and development of analytic categories based upon it and assigned to the research problem (the analytic categories scheme is not supposed to enable the researcher to wholly comprehend the research material, but to answer certain questions);

e) technical establishment of research tool including all of the analytical categories (usually it is a sheet with tables in which proper numbers, symbols or quotes are written);

f) analysis of coded material – counting and concluding (answer to the research question, verification of hypotheses, formulation of conclusions concerning the sender and receiver of the message, answers concerning causes and effects of the communication). This procedure is less useful when conducting qualitative research, during which it is hard to precisely define considered questions or the results are not easily reduced into measurable units [Kalinowska, 2001, pp. 23–25].

According to H. Julien “in qualitative research, content analysis is interpretive, involving close reading of text” [Julien, 2008, p. 120]. As this author points out “analyses across the whole set of data typically produce clusters or codes that translate into »themes«” [Julien, 2008, p. 120]. Furthermore “the »categories« or clusters of data identified may represent discrete instances (i.e., something is apparent or not), or they may be represented as degrees of attributes, such as direction and intensity, or qualities (i.e., a quality such as joy is evident to some degree rather than simply present or absent). Identifying themes or categories is usually an iterative process, so the researcher spends time revisiting categories identified previously and combining or dividing them, resolving contradictions, as the text is analyzed over and over. It is also important to note that a single piece of text [...] may be relevant to more than one category or theme” [Julien, 2008, p. 120–121]. H. Julien points out also that “in addition, once thematic categories are identified, the careful researcher attempts to ensure that the groupings or categories of data are carefully defined in ways that are comprehensive (i.e., they cover all categories identifiable in the data set and all relevant data are categorized) and mutually exclusive (i.e., their definitions do not overlap)” [Julien, 2008, p. 121]. According to this author “when applying labels to categories, it is good practice to use language consistent with that used in the text under analysis” [Julien, 2008, p. 121]. The results of an analysis should be as adequate to the authors of the text as possible. They may reveal recurrent instances of “items” or themes, or they may reveal broader discourses. One should also remember that because meaning is context dependent and subjective, a single piece of text can indeed be open to different qualitative interpretations by different researchers [Julien, 2008, pp. 120–121].

According to W. J. Paluchowski content analysis (just like every other research technique) is conducted in similar consecutive steps: collecting data, data reduction, deduction, analysis, justification of conclusions, examination of the outcome in relation to the results produced with other methods and testing new hypotheses. He also writes that content analysis is an interaction of two processes: designation of the content's characteristics, which the researcher is willing to measure, and the use of rules, which the researcher must follow in order to determine and record characteristics of the analyzed text. And there is a reason for calling it an interaction, for it is not a linear process and both of the stages occur at the same time in returning loops of corrective character [Paluchowski, 2000, pp. 60–61].

W. J. Paluchowski emphasizes the importance of choosing the appropriate level of recording units (for instance: a separate text, a sentence, a sequence). Distinction between samples (selected pieces of an entirety which are further analyzed) and single record (lowest element

of content sample and also fundamental unit of content analysis) is also crucial. Apart from classic objects of text analysis (words, certain terms, paragraphs, whole works, undiversified collections of texts of similar subject matter etc.) categories typical for qualitative research (themes of sentences or paragraphs as well as characters) can be distinguished. Frequency of recurring themes or characters, their meaning arising from the context and mutual relations can be analyzed. Context unit is also significant: usually it is a bigger part of the content, constituting the basis of interpretation (and its empirical justification) of singular records. Circumstances in which a certain text has been created, spread and used can also be considered its context. Other texts may also be recognized as context, therefore the search of intertextual meaning is also necessary [Paluchowski, 2000, pp. 60–61].

W.J. Paluchowski remarks that recording units are then classified and divided into categories. Categories must be connected to the aim of the research, exhaustive (every recording unit must be assigned into a category) and disjunctive (no recording unit can be assigned to more than one category within a certain system of coding). Usually the researcher is not interested in all the features of analyzed messages, he focuses only on those connected to the problem being analyzed. The set of categories is commonly created during the classification. Nevertheless, the formulation of rules must be subjected to strict principles. The final system must respect those principles. Criteria of assigning certain units to certain categories have to be clearly defined. The researcher must aspire to creating homogenous classification – it should be created according to one principle. Through this repeatability of classification (the sole requirement of objective and systematic content analysis) becomes possible [Paluchowski, 2000, pp. 61–62].

According to W.J. Paluchowski, the coding of recording units is not equivalent with analyses, but with its beginning. The analysis can be of only descriptive character: for instance, the researcher may describe the meaning of different categories in the analyzed material, the frequency of occurrence of material showing certain features, or the intensity of those features [Paluchowski, 2000, p. 62].

According to P. Sepstrup – as E. Kalinowska reports – the biggest problem of qualitative research is the meeting of sole theoretical requirements while unbinding of methodological tyranny of a certain technique. In the case of content analysis the researcher should not use too slight recording units, which lead to the atomization of observation and results in departure from the integral understanding and analyzing of the text in isolation from the social context [Kalinowska, 2001, p. 25]. H. Julien emphasizes that “validity and reliability are key to robust content analysis. In qualitative terms, the researcher doing a qualitative content analysis seeks trustworthiness and credibility by conducting iterative analyses, seeking negative or contradictory examples, seeking confirmatory data through methodological triangulation, and providing supporting examples for conclusions drawn” [Julien, 2008, p. 121].

Another important question, which must be touched upon when discussing content analysis is the dispute whether it is a technique or a method of research. E. Kalinowska considers content analysis a technique, whereas – as she points out – in many of the recent publications it is conferred the degree of a research method. It is usually done when the qualitative content analysis is discussed. K. Krippendorff uses the terms “technique” and “method” interchangeably [Kalinowska, 2001, p. 17]. Just as does D. Silverman, who names research methods as particular research techniques, so he identifies one with the other and suggests the interchangeable use of those terms already in the phase of definition [Silverman 2007, p. 331]. Yet Teresa Bauman and Anna Wyka describe content analysis as a method [Kalinowska, 2001, p. 17].

The reader may be surprised by the fact, that in the further parts of the essay I advocate a strictly qualitative research, although aforementioned scholars write of complementarity of quantitative and qualitative content analysis or directly of the need of conducting triangulative research. However, I would like to refer to an essay by Mieczysław Malewski, who opposes allegations of the complementarity of quantitative and qualitative research, stating that the scope of methodological dimension depends on the meaning assigned to the term “methodology”. In the narrow sense, shaped farther back by neo-positivists and still accepted, methodology is the knowledge of the methods of scientific cognition and the principles of using them in the research process. In the broader sense, which has been coined after the so-called “antipositivist turn”, methodology is a type of meta-knowledge of the social aims of scientific cognition and valid strategies of its realization. In its essence it is multidimensional and consists of three mutually correlated dimensions: ontological, epistemological and methodical. The two opposing views of research methodology implicate that statement about complementarity of quantitative and qualitative research is acceptable only on the grounds of the first dimension [Malewski, 1997, p. 29].

The two opposing views of methodology M. Malewski assigns to the positivist and interpretative paradigms. They do not accede on the epistemological ground, as researchers of the quantitative approach pursue obtainment of objective and formalized knowledge, expressed in scientific theorems, principles, laws and theories, which can be translated into optimalising directives and the value of instrumentality; whereas researchers of the qualitative approach pursue mostly the understanding of occurrences in the society being researched. The quantitative and the qualitative paradigms do not adhere also on the methodic ground, as the model roles of the outside observer and the participating observer are limited exclusively to the quantitative research, and the model roles of observing participant and full participant to the qualitative research; and during one research the researcher cannot be an outside observer and fully participate in the researched society at the same time [Malewski, 1997, p. 31].

Recapitulating: M. Malewski emphasizes that research methods and techniques are not only technical tools and no methodological doctrine can ultimately legitimise them. It is so, as the doctrine itself, as a historically changeable creation, requires external (*id est*: social) legitimization. That is why the dispute between advocates of quantitative and qualitative methods is not only a methodological dispute. It does not concern solely the academic alternative between two rival paradigms, or – in a narrower way – the choice of research technique adequate to the temperament and personal preferences of particular researchers. In fact, it is a dispute concerning principles, world-view choice, opting for the certain type of the social order and the willingness of inscribing one's research practice into this order. It seems that many education researchers do not understand this fact. It can be associated with the process of their professional socialization [Malewski, 1997, p. 32].

Another crucial question is whether content analysis is the proper method of researching content found on the Internet. The answer is definitely positive. Not only because on the Internet one may find texts and images created by various authors from all around the world, but also because using web search engines and web browsers makes the gathering of research material quite easy. The researcher can not only seek interesting web sites, but also browse web portals, Internet forums or selected texts in search of certain themes.

Analysis of selected web portals

In this essay I discuss the analysis of two of the most significant Polish conservative web portals: *Konserwatyzm.pl* – “Portal Myśli Konserwatywnej” (“Web Portal of Conservative Thought” – managed by the *Klub Zachowawczo-Monarchistyczny – Conservative-Monarchist Club*, <http://www.konserwatyzm.pl>) and *Legitymizm* – “Portal Legitymistyczny” (“Legitimist Web Portal” – managed by the *Organizacja Monarchistów Polskich – Organization Of Polish Monarchists*)¹. In later parts of the essay I will use abbreviated names of the organizations: KZ-M and OMP. Considering the quantity and quality of journalism, frequency of updates and variety of opinions (within the conservative spectrum), these two can be recognized as representative of Polish conservatism. Although administrators of the OMP web portal do not announce the results of audience measurement, such statistics are presented consecutively every month on the KZ-M portal. Editors of the portal claim that in October 2010 the site has been visited by 97667 IP numbers (32736 unique users) from which 316507 entries have been made. The average time spent on the portal by a visitor is 6 minutes and 24 seconds. In the same time the KZ-M Internet forum has been entered 33082 times. Summing up: 349589 entries [*Statystyki konserwatyzm.pl* 2010]. It is a considerable number, especially for a niche web portal.

In the case of analysis of two conservative web portals the context is the ideological background of analyzed the ideological essays and posts. Therefore, the researcher needs foremost to know what conservatism is. Similarities and differences between the two portals must be also understood: the reason why there are two Polish conservative portals instead of just one.

The description of the position of contemporary Polish conservatives is in a way made easy – ideological self-identification is one of the most important constituents of their identity, which is portrayed in their journalism. Not only do they refer to the existing definitions of conservatism, but also create their own. They compile classifications of various types of conservatism as well, and state which of the views they consider close.

In order to mark the context of the researched phenomenon, above all I need to answer the question: what conservatism actually is. As in the qualitative content analysis it is important to use the language of the researched texts, I shall refer to academic writings (although of certain journalistic features) of two most significant authors connected with both of the portals: Jacek Bartyzel and Adam Wielomski. They are not only animators and ideologists of the Polish conservative movement, but also acclaimed researchers of conservative thought. A. Wielomski in his book *Konserwatyzm. Główne idee, nurty i postacie* (*Conservatism. Principal Ideas, Trends and Persons*) suggests abandonment of the George Nash advice of recognizing as a conservatist anyone who considers himself to be one [Wielomski, 2007, p. 12] (which would be close to the popular understanding of conservatism). As A. Wielomski points out, there is a wide-spread belief that conservatism is a reactionary doctrine. Not only in the Marxist, pejorative meaning, which can be put away in the attic of political propaganda

¹ Currently there are two *Organizations Of Polish Monarchists* – one founded by Adrian Nikiel in 1989 in the Wrocław, and one by Łukasz Kluska in 2008 in Lublin. The latter has a juridical personality; however, the former is older and its website is currently updated – contrary to the web portal run by Lublin based OMP: <http://omp.lublin.pl>.

history. Conservatism is truly reactionary, as it appears as a reaction to political, religious, social and cultural revolution. That does not mean that conservative ideas are views new in some way, opposing predominant opinions; quite the contrary: new are those predominant views, based upon which and in the name of which revolution has been performed. The ideological world of conservatism is ancient, as it is an outcome of observation and consideration of reality, which has been destroyed by revolution or at least seriously threatened by the forces of destruction [Wielomski, 2007, p. 12]. According to A. Wielomski the world of ideological conservatism is the world of old Europe: the roman catholic medieval *Christiantas*. And that is the reason for conservatives being monarchists, as this form of government is considered most appropriate, descending from the ancient order and coming from God: thus, consisting of a sacred nature. A. Wielomski explains the difference between conservatism as a true doctrine and the common understanding of this term in the following way: if by the term "conservatism" one understands a separate set of ideas, then conservatism is not a conservative attitude, which leads a man to the defense of everything which currently exists, regardless of what it actually is. According to such an understanding a conservative would be in contemporary Poland a participant of a May Day demonstration, wandering around in a Leninist cap with a red flag or a Russian (post-soviet) communist celebrating on the Red Square the outbreak of revolution. Conservatism is not only a political attitude, but, foremost, a political philosophy, although it is sometimes considered just an attitude [Wielomski, 2007, p. 13]. The way this conservative scholar and publicist understands the definition and genesis of conservatism itself is also noteworthy: conservatism is not the political attitude of a person terrified by the radicalism of changes or the ideology of a liberal frightened by bolshevism, but a wholesome set of ideas, defending the social principles and philosophical concepts prior to the revolution of 1798. Therefore, it is a political philosophy skeptically looking at modern culture and (what is often forgotten) at the centralized modern state. By the term "conservatism" is understood a trend within political philosophy which opposes increasing processes of the transformation of western civilization, initiated by the emerging of Averroism and Nominalism, the Reformation, Renaissance and has reached its climax in the age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The world after 1789 is not a conservative one, even if here and there one can find gothic relics of a pre-revolutionary world. With the murder of the world of western tradition in 1789 arose those conscious of their own agenda and conservative ideas [Wielomski, 2007, p. 17].

However, conservatism is not an ideological monolith, which always answers the questions concerning the exponents of this school of thought in the same way. It is rather a starting point and a direction of searching, exposing many trends within one school. An attempt at classification of not only conservatism but also of the whole so-called "right" has been made by J. Bartyzel. This author presents the ideas (along with their exponents) divided into categories in the following classification:

1. Traditionalist "extreme right of the right":

- a) Ultra-Royalists of the Bourbon Restoration (J. de Maistre, L. de Bonald, K. L. von Haller);
- b) "Petersburg Pentarchists" (H. Rzewuski, M. Grabowski);
- c) Legitimists (F.-R. de Chateaubriand, comte de Chambord);
- d) Ultramontanism (Pius IX, L. Veuillot, J. Balmes, P. Popiel);
- e) Spanish traditionalism (Carlism) (M. Ferrer, J. Vázquez de Mella, F. Elías de Tejada);
- f) Catholic traditionalism (Pius X, abp M. Lefebvre, P. Corrêa de Oliveira);

- g) Integral traditionalism (R. Guénon, J. Evola)
2. Authoritarian (reactionary) “right of the right”:
- a) German political romantics (Novalis, A. H. Müller, F. Schlegel);
- b) decisionism (J. Donoso Cortés, C. Schmitt);
- c) the “Young Conservative” trend within Conservative revolution (E. G. Jung, W. Stapel);
- d) “integral nationalism” of the Action Française (Ch. Maurras, L. Daudet, J. Bainville);
- e) *Nacionalcatolicismo* of the Acción Española (R. de Maeztu, E. Vegas Latapie);
- f) “Lusitanian integralism” (A. Sardinha, H. Raposo);
- g) Francoism and Salazarism;
- h) Italian nationalism (E. Corradini, L. Federzoni, A. Rocco);
- i) Catholic corporatism (Pius XI, K. von Vogelsang, E. Dollfuss);
- j) “integral conservatism” (W. Kosiakiewicz, K. M. Morawski, S. Cat-Mackiewicz);
- k) “young National Democracy” (T. Bielecki, J. Giertych, K. S. Frycz);
- l) *Southern Tradition* (A. Tate, D. Davidson, R. M. Weaver);
- ł) “paleoconservatism” (Th. Molnar, J. A. Lukacs, Th. Fleming);
- m) Nietzscheanist New Right (A. de Benoist, P. Vial, G. Faye);
- n) The Real Politics Union.
3. Moderate (conservative or national) “centre of the right”:
- a) Classic British Toryism (E. Burke, B. Disraeli, Lord Salisbury, H. Cecil);
- b) Conservative aristocratic liberalism (B. Constant, orleanists, J. Ch. Burckhardt, V. Pareto);
- c) Italian neo-guelphism (A. Rosmini, V. Gioberti);
- d) Spanish and Portuguese *moderados* (F. Martínez de la Rosa, A. da Costa Cabral);
- e) The Lambert Hotel (A. J. Czartoryski, K. B. Hoffmann), “Wiadomości Polskie” (J. Klaczko, W. Kalinka) and Cracow conservatism (Stańczycy);
- f) “Old Prussian” conservatism (F. J. Stahl, E. von Gerlach, C. Frantz);
- g) Dutch Calvinist conservatism (G. Groen van Prinsteter, Partia Antyrewolucyjna);
- h) Republican nationalism (M. Barrès, R. Dmowski, K. Kramář, E. de Valera);
- i) Christian National Union.
4. Democratic-ballotist or liberal “left of the right”:
- a) Bonapartism (democratic caesarism) and Gaullism;
- b) Christian social right (Spanish CEDA, German Zentrum, Austrian CS, Bavarian CSU);
- c) Classic liberalism (J. S. Mill, W. E. Gladstone, Lord Acton, R. von Mohl, J. Eötvös, A. Krzyżanowski);
- d) “early” National Democracy (J. L. Popławski, Z. Balicki);
- e) Italian *destra storica* (C. B. di Cavour, S. Spaventa, B. Croce);
- f) Liberal democratic conservatism (A. de Tocqueville, R. Aron);
- g) Neoliberalism (L. von Mises, F. A. von Hayek, M. Friedman);
- h) Neoconservatism (I. Kristol, N. Podhoretz);
- i) Contemporary conservative, agrarian and bourgeoisie parties (American Republican Party, British Conservative Party, Fianna Fail, CDU/CSU, Partido Popular, Forza Italia, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość).
5. Nationalist-radical and social “extreme left of the right”:
- a) Italian “conservative revolution” (G. D’Annunzio, G. Prezzolini, G. Volpe);

- b) Spanish Falange (J. A. Primo de Rivera);
- c) Mexican synarchism (J. A. Urquiza, S. Abascal);
- d) Brazilian integralism (P. Salgado, M. Reale);
- e) Belgian *Rex* (L. Degrelle);
- f) “fascist romanticism” (P. Drieu La Rochelle, R. Brasillach);
- g) “military nationalism” and “national bolshevism” (E. Jünger, E. von Salomon, E. Niekisch);
- h) Legion of the Archangel Michael (C. Z. Codreanu);
- i) ONR (J. Mosdorf) i RNR-Falanga (B. Piasecki);
- j) Neofascist *destra sociale* (G. Almirante, MSI / Fiamma Tricolore);
- k) Poujadism and National Front (J. M. Le Pen);
- l) Vlaams Blok (K. Dillen, F. Dewinter);
- ł) Austrian Freedom Party (J. Haider);
- m) International Third Position (D. Holland, R. Fiore, NOP) [Bartyzel, *Próba teoryzacji pojęcia „prawica”*].

It is quite clear that J. Bartyzel sees conservatism (or rather: “conserveartisms”) as an element of a larger entity: the so-called “Right”, which consists of different, sometimes even contradictory, currents. There are left and right wings, liberal and conservative trends, radical, revolutionary, nationalist, monarchist and other movements and ideologies within the Right. J. Bartyzel considers conservatism to be just one of its dimensions. However, his understanding of conservatism is convergent with the afore presented definition of A. Wielomski.

After this very brief explanation of what conservatism is in the understanding of conservatives themselves and with what other political ideologies it is associated, it must be displayed what are the differences between the two most important Polish conservative web portals. The most important ideological disputes between those two groups concern, above all, their attitude towards following ideas: political realism and idealism, legitimism as well as their attitude towards the Polish state (both People's Republic Of Poland and Third Polish Republic) and the Second Vatican Council. On the KZ-M portal there are numerous essays positively evaluating political realism (especially those by A. Wielomski): not only in its conservative (count Aleksander Wielopolski) or nationalist (Roman Dmowski) version, but also communist one (Wojciech Jaruzelski). People's Republic Of Poland is also evaluated from the realist point of view. Whereas, on the OMP portal People's Republic Of Poland is directly condemned, mostly because of it being state incarnation of revolutionist ideology: therefore, the negation of conservatism. The attitude towards the contemporary Polish state – although on the KZ-M portal it is evaluated negatively, and the authors do not conceal that they would welcome the downfall of democracy and its replacement with a restored monarchy or temporary dictatorship, in the case of OMP one can observe anti-state attitudes, especially embodied by Adrian Nikiel, who has not legally registered OMP, and magazines, books and leaflets edited by him are not officially recognized. The case of attitude towards the Second Vatican Council is similar. It is disapproved of on both of the portals, however, in the case of KZ-M support of conservative trends within the Church and hopes about the pontificate of Benedict XVI or backing up the Society of St. Pius X are observed, whereas, on the OMP portal sede-vacantism (a radical, somehow consistent, yet in a way anti-ecclesiastic trend) is propagated.

The idea, which raises probably most controversies, is legitimism. J. Bartyzel defines legitimism in the following way: the principle of legitimacy of power, derived from the fundamental norm of Christian political theology concerning provenance of power from God's will, determining the order of natural succession in a patrimonial monarchy, observed accord-

ing to the rules of common law, shaped by tradition of a kingdom (Bartyzel, *Legitymizm*). This author also points out that legitimism is the way of political thinking, which considers as absolutely certain and natural that earthly order, that is: natural order, must be at all times related to the supernatural order. Within legitimism one cannot think of the situation, in which any truth, any action would not be applied to the supernatural goal of man. And such is the relation between those two bodies in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas: the Mystical Body, that is: the Church (*corpus mysticum*) and by analogy to it the mystical political body (*corpus mysticum politicum*). Those two bodies are distinct, have distinct goals, but they cannot be separated, as both of them relate to the same social reality, human persons. (Bartyzel, *Czym legitymizm jest, a czym nie jest*). J. Bartyzel also emphasizes, that there are two aspects of legitimism. The first is the formal legitimism: dynastic. This aspect of legitimism, the Spanish legitimism (that is: Carlism) names “the legitimacy of descent”. One bears the right to the crown, as he is a legitimate descendant of one who bore the same right. It is just as obvious and simple. However, this legitimism is also (as is pointed out, for instance, by the French legitimist) “natural legitimism”. Why? Because the rules of succession have not been given by God. God, neither in the Holy Bible, nor in any other way, has not revealed the rules of succession. They are the product of a political community, which has adopted certain customs [Bartyzel, *Czym legitymizm jest, a czym nie jest*]. As this author further states: there is also the second aspect, even more important. This one is called by Carlists “legitimacy of the exercise of power”, “legitimacy of the execution of power”. Thus, the concern is: how is the power exercised, what its goal is [Bartyzel, *Czym legitymizm jest, a czym nie jest*]. The OMP portal (just as its name indicates) represents legitimism as its founding principle. Meanwhile, on the KZ-M portal the idea of legitimism is not excluded, however they are neither considered natural consequences of accepting the conservative agenda, that is: they are not considered the righteous and perfect conservatism.

In my research I chose a statement regarding education or upbringing to be the fundamental recording unit. Therefore, it is a sentence or a whole paragraph within an essay, a whole essay (if it's devoted only to this topic), one commentary of an essay, a sentence or a paragraph in a post on the forum or a whole post. The context for one sentence, paragraph within one essay or a whole essay is the creative activity of a certain author (his expressed worldview) as well as all the journalism published on the certain portal. In the case of a commentary on an essay the context is the essay itself as well as other commentaries or, just as in the case of an essay, creative activity of the author of the commentary (if it is possible to identify him, that is: if he uses his real name) and all the journalism published on the certain portal. In the case of a sentence, a paragraph or a whole post on the forum context is the certain topic, essay, which the discussion concerns and the creative activity of the author of the commentary, if it is possible to identify him.

During the gathering of data I used the *Google web search*. I searched the two sites using the Polish equivalents of following Key words: “upbringing”, “education”, “educational system”, “school”, “student”, “teacher”, “learning”, “teaching”, “academy”, “pedagogue”, “pedagogic”. I also made a list of Polish equivalents of similar words that could be omitted by the search engine: “educator”, “educational”, “coeducation”, “educated”, “taught”, “scholar”. As Polish is an inflected language there many variations of those words that had to be taken into consideration. Then, I have searched those Key words on both of the portals and pasted the found quotes to the working sheet (along with the authors' names, articles' titles, URLs and the dates of retrieval).

After the reading the collected quotes I determined following categories: “past and present examples of wrong education”, “pathologies of the Polish public school system”, “causes of the existence of wrong education”, “erroneous assumptions of untraditional upbringing”, “past and present examples of good education”, “presentation of educational beliefs of conservative ideologists”, “conservative plan for fixing the school system”. I have then classified quotes collected in the working sheet into those categories. Next, I have read everything once again and I changed the system of categories. Ultimately I have determined following categories: “erroneous post-revolution educational ideology”, “historic examples of educational and upbringing pathologies”, “pathologies of the contemporary public school system”, “ideological assumptions of traditional education and upbringing”, “historic and contemporary examples of traditional education and upbringing”, “conservative postulates concerning contemporary school system and education”.

It must be kept in mind that in the qualitative content analysis a particular recording unit can be assigned to more than one category. And so – for instance, the quote “Meanwhile, obligatory educational programs operate within humanitarian-sentimentalist paradigm, founded upon the thought and writing of J. J. Rousseau, claiming that man should reject his belongings, for the sake of common good, that is: firstly work for the society, then the state, and lastly (if he can still find any strength or time at all) for his own and his family's sake” ended up in both: “erroneous post-revolution educational ideology” and “pathologies of the contemporary public school system” category. A researcher also should not worry about the large number of recording units in one of the categories and a smaller number in another². Within the qualitative content analysis the aim is not the counting of recording units classified into each category³, but noticing on the quality itself – above all on the importance and character of the recording units.

Conclusions or their outline can come to researcher's mind even during the phase of first reading of the analyzed text and then during the classification of recording units into categories. First impressions should not be followed, however, these ideas are worth noting, so at the end of the analysis they can be re-approached and verified.

The following exemplary quotes have been classified into the particular categories:

Erroneous post-revolution educational ideology

“The idea of an obligatory (compulsory) and state-run school system was not known by the traditional world; it is an idea supported by all revolutionaries. For the essence of revolutionary doctrines is the creation of »a new man« (that is: better), which should be achieved by juridical, political and economic changes. However, social engineering is commencing in practice on children and that is why all revolutionists peer with remarkable interest at education” [Wielomski, *Przeciw etatyzmowi szkolnemu*].

“I will add, that it is solely a too forbearing attitude of parents towards children that is a manifestation of their egoism, they choose to maintain their peace of mind »oh, how good

² Except for the case in which disproportion is so distinct that it gives researcher the idea that either one of the categories should be split into two, or one of the categories has been erroneously defined and it is too narrow; perhaps the text should be read once again and completely new categories determined.

³ Of course descriptions can be used in the discussion of the results, for instance: in the text there have been found definitely more quotes belonging to the particular category than to another.

a parent I am, I would never hit my kid« not estimating the fatal effects of such an attitude on upbringing” [Muszyński, *Kocham, biję*].

“Meanwhile, obligatory educational programs operate within humanitarian-sentimentalist paradigm, founded upon the thought and writing of J. J. Rousseau, claiming that man should reject his belongings, for the sake of common good, that is: firstly work for the society, then the state, and lastly (if he can still find any strength or time at all) for his own and his family's sake” [*Szkola – instrument sprawowania władzy czy instytucja przekazywania wiedzy? Memorandum oświatowe*, 1996].

Historic examples of educational and upbringing pathologies

“In 1934 Congress enacted a “free and socialist youth education” bill. It obliged compulsory atheization, according to the rule that: »Every child since the fifth year of age belongs to the state. All evil comes from the clergy. God does not exist, religion is a myth, the bible is a lie«. Atheization of youth was joined with »sexual education«, modeled upon views of Alexandra Kollontai. Extreme anti-catholic fury had been manifested by the governor of Tabasco state and the leader of the local Socialist-Radical Party, Tomás Garrido Canabal (1890-1943) – organizer (modeled upon Soviet League of the Godless) of gangs commonly called the “Red Shirts” (*Los Camisas Rojas*), which murdered priests, shot at worshippers leaving the church after services, plundered and desecrated temples, recast church bells” [Bartyzel, 2009].

“Traditional education had been replaced with naturalistic cult of man and so-called pure, that is: devoid of sanctions and obligations, morality, tempting even with a perspective of salvation. Besides Masonic educators did not really conceal their ambitious plans, as shows for instance in a resolution of the Convent of the Great Lodge of France from 1925, in which one can find almost all of the slogans and persuasive tricks, known by us also from the »socialist school« era and the current anti-religious campaign run by leftist circles with the disingenuous concern for the child's freedom taking lead. For we read there, that: »morality taught in schools shall be laic, independent of any dogma, of any religious and metaphysical premises. Issues belonging to the supernatural field should remain a private concern; school does not possess the title to the teaching of them. It shall refer to reason, and will respect the freedom of a child. No external compulsion of any kind; conscience remains the only judge of one's acts, approving or condemning them; morality both without sanctions, as well as without obligation«” [*Szkola – instrument sprawowania władzy czy instytucja przekazywania wiedzy? Memorandum oświatowe*, 1996].

Pathologies of the contemporary public school system

“Intentions of the authors of the syllabuses are then clear: the thing is not to form mature human personalities, but to bend them to the attitude of affirmation of secular state in which what is and what is not the truth is decided by the will of an educator possessed with constructivist ideology. This purpose is supported by the prolonged process of assimilating knowledge, relying upon – on the student's part – reading/listening, mechanical memorizing and finally repeating at the request of a teacher/examiner, and on the teacher's part upon transmission, supervision and reckoning by grade. The only value in this system is then the formalized grade, and out of the sum of those grades the certificate of graduation is created” [*Szkola – instrument sprawowania władzy czy instytucja przekazywania wiedzy? Memorandum oświatowe*, 1996].

“Only the state is capable of upbringing of citizens of full value. And the family is a shady element and it must be kept under strict surveillance. Introduction of parenthood exams and appropriate licences before the procreation of a new citizen is recommended. A citizen raising a child is obliged to present monthly reports concerning relations between family members and educational progress. A citizen is furthermore obliged to let in the official inspector of family pathologies at his every demand 24/7. In the case of any doubt a citizen must agree for round-the-clock monitoring of accommodation including the bedroom. Parenthood licenses will demand yearly renewal and certification by the Grand Upbringing Commission consisting of unquestionable authorities and experts. Citizens who do not manage to renew the license, shall lose the right of raising the child. The child will be handed over to a public upbringing centre where it will be taken care of by specialized personnel. In such a case the citizen has the right to one retaking of the test. If the outcome turns out once more to be negative, the citizen can petition for visiting the child (not more often than once a month, and only if the Great Council decides that the so-called parent will not delay the citizen development of the child). And all of this to protect you, citizen, from sin and distortion. From educational mistakes, which can bring forth tragic effects for our collective community. Let experts take care of the children, so every rudimentary pathology can be detected. Citizen! A dormant Fritzl can be lurking also in you” [Bartix 2008, commentary of: Eckardt 2008].

Ideological assumptions of traditional education and upbringing

“Formal education is just a part of upbringing, of which the main goal is described by affirmation and extraction of those values, which constitute the identity of our civilization and the it's dignity, given by the Creator, the vocation of every human person” (*Polska ma własną drogę. Tezy ustrojowe*).

“The process of upbringing, education – religious, school as well as home – pursues not the goal of total elimination of such behavior (which is impossible), but of holding back and reducing such behavior, which we all perceive as blameworthy, but which we all do, since our forefathers until today” [*Polska ma własną drogę. Tezy ustrojowe*].

“In the traditional institutions the corps of knowledge should be »stored«, enabling its control, but not providing means of bringing up new, perfect generation. Conservatism allows, *implicite*, the not fulfilling of the ideal of humanity. Thus, an individual within the boundaries of tradition has a right, even a duty, of being imperfect” [Barut, 2009].

Historic and contemporary examples of traditional education and upbringing

“Until egalitarianists will enforce coeducation as a peculiar fetish, I don't see any chances of restoring normality on a large scale. However, decisions and initiatives undertaken by individuals and particular circles are what count, and there have been a few of them in recent years. Fortunately, although sparse, non-coeducational schools exist and may it be so still” [Górecki, 2009].

“A generation is growing up (more and more numerous) that doesn't know the new Misal. These children get a solid, traditional catholic upbringing in families strong with God. This is the future. And it is those people, from those families, who also engage in the actions of our Institute” [Wyrostkiewicz, 2010].

“Father had more to say, as a person bearing and transmitting the family name, with which certain individual features, or even duties or privileges were associated. Successors were

brought up in general respect for ancestors and according general rules applying to them. Especially in the early guidebooks father's attention was called not to evade from the duties of raising children. Taking care of children who were considered »unformed« not understanding the public affairs, that is simply the youngest, fell to the mother" [Żółciński, 2007].

Conservative postulates concerning contemporary school system and education

"National education must not be in any case the domain of those currently exercising authority" [Maślach, 2008].

"The state is obliged to respect the integral parental power over kids. Intervention of the state is admissible only in cases of obvious threat to the children's life or health, by the general rules designed in the penal code. Educational authority and the choice of goal, policy, type and duration of children's education belong to the parents alone. However, a family can delegate some of its education and upbringing rights to the schools, private or public. The state should guarantee the religious character of education in public schools, according to parents' dispositions concerning this matter and under the essential supervision of competent Church authorities. Upbringing in the patriotic spirit should be considered an indispensable part of the responsibility undertaken by schools in regard to the parents" [*Polska ma własną drogę. Tezy ustrojowe*].

"What should be then pursued in the field of education and upbringing? Firstly, the restoration of parents' natural entitlement to decision about forms, scope and goals of their children's education, which in the current conditions seems to be best served by the publicizing of the systems of the so-called educational checks. Secondly, the restoration of meaning of the terms used in education, devoid of ideological stains and correct in the light of reality, and to the forming of ability of testing the attained knowledge through experience. Thirdly, final and paramount, the restoration of an objective and traditional value system in the education programs, in accordance with the natural law, and most fully recognized by the Greek idealism, Roman realism and Christian theology and morality" [*Szkola – instrument sprawowania władzy czy instytucja przekazywania wiedzy? Memorandum oświatowe*, 1996].

The last question which needs to be asked is: what conclusions can be formulated at the end of the analysis of the two conservative portals. Above all: the ideal of education and upbringing for the conservatives is the traditional education and upbringing, being a continuation of the pre-revolution ones. It is then based on the Christian (Roman Catholic) and patriotic (understood as loyalty to the crown, king or legitimate authority, not post-revolutionary republic or dictatorship) values as well as virtues associated with the classical and Christian culture of Europe. This education and upbringing is realized by a family with the support of church and private schools as its tool. Some of the conservatives take into consideration entrusting the state with realization of conservative postulates concerning education and upbringing, but it is not a popular opinion.

Although the disagreement between the two conservative portals when it comes to aforementioned questions (for instance: the evaluation of People's Republic of Poland, legitimacy) is distinct, in the case of education and upbringing the opinions are similar. Thus, it can be stated that Polish conservative circles (despite of their disagreements) in the case of upbringing and education formulate similar diagnoses and attempt to draw conclusions and solutions based upon similar ideological foundations.

The distinction between conservative postulates concerning education and upbringing and their extremely negative evaluation of the state of contemporary education (including the

public education system on all of its levels and the role of important modern educators – the media) can be described and understood by reference to a term coined by conservatives: “the schism of being” or “the schism of reality”. As A. Wielomski explains referring to the Neo-Platonist philosophy and counterrevolutionary classics: for traditionalists such as Joseph de Maistre, Louis de Bonald or Felicité de La Mennais the post-revolution world surrounding them is not real, it is rather an aberration of the natural order of things. J. de Maistre in a distinguishing way wrote of the Revolution, that it is a “schism of reality”, a “schism of being”. In the neo-Platonist philosophy, in a way embraced by J. de Maistre, the terms being – non-being always refer to the spiritual. Matter, as something contrary to being (good) as well as non-being (lack of good), does not fit in this range, thus becoming the “schism”. According to this principle, created by Plotinus, Revolution cannot be placed within the range of being – non-being, as it is a schism from every existence. It cannot be said of Revolution, that it either is or is not; Revolution only “happens”. Thus, it is unreality, something that is not, and what has happened, and still it does not show the slightest trace of ability of becoming permanent [Wielomski, 2010]. From the belief in the schism of being arises the ascertainment, that the existing world is not real, it is an unnatural anti-reality, a devilish reversal of the traditional and natural order. And that is the reason of presentation of positive examples of past education and upbringing along with the call to their restoration opposing the post-revolution “anti-education” and “anti-upbringing” managed by an “anti-state”. Therefore, it is the most extreme out of all possible undermining of the legitimacy of the existence of contemporary education and upbringing: they are attacked not only on the ethical or ideological, but even on the ontological ground; it is imputed (not only directly) that it possesses a metaphysically evil character. Some differences between conservative postulates (for instance: should the traditional education be restored by the state or through the privatization of schools) are just different conclusions drawn from this assumption. The opposition of the traditional order and revolutionary “anti-order” is a conservative axiom being in force also within the pedagogical reflection of those circles. The firm defense of the family (the natural environment of man) and presenting it as an opposition of the state and school is also a consequence of this assumption.

The issues of education and upbringing are not among the ones most often addressed on the analyzed conservative portals. However, they are some kind of litmus paper, proving how much given circles are attached to the conservative ideas and on what degree they identify themselves with conservatism. By this example one can observe the distinction between commonly understood conservatism and the real idea professed by existing circles. It does also show the degree of (referring to nomenclature of adversaries of conservatism) the alienation of the conservatives. It can be even stated, that they are (or at least feel that they are) totally alienated from the contemporary world as they even undermine the assumption of it being real. By the example of the dispute concerning education and upbringing it can also be noticed, that it is not possible to reconcile the conservative vision of the world with the existing state of affairs, irrespective of calling it either democratic, post-revolutionary, anti-traditional or the right one. It is also visible that Polish conservative circles are a marginalized group: in this case on the grounds of public vision of education and upbringing or the relations between family and official institutions. As it is believed by conservatives themselves (even though they do not use the exact following terms when naming this situation) it is achieved through institutional freezing of meaning, symbolic violence and the exclusion of conservatives from the social debate.

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Qualitative observation of attitudes to different nations on Polish Internet forums

ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to assess qualitative observation as a method of Internet forum research. It defines advantages and weak points of this method and its range and contains description of research conducted with the use of qualitative observation as well. The research is related to Polish Internet users' attitudes towards different nations. The article focuses also on different questions, such as anonymity and its influence on Internet communication, obedience to rules of netiquette, disinhibition of forums' users and racism on the Internet. There is a proposition of Internet forum classification regarding their size, moderation system and rules presented.

Key words: Internet, forum, anonymity, racism, nation, netiquette, research, computer, attitude, disinhibition, qualitative observation.

The role and functions of the Internet

Nowadays, the Internet is becoming the most popular and the richest source of information, displacing television and other media¹. Development of the World Wide Web is a recent phenomenon. In 1973 only 25 computers had the access to the Internet [Castells, 2007, p. 352], today every owner of a personal computer has the potential to become a net surfer. Access to the Internet is now an indispensable facility at work, at school and in everyday life. The Internet is becoming more and more attractive due to the fact that it offers its users an almost never-ending spectrum of opportunities to express themselves. It gives them the possibility of customizing a vast environment, launching their own discussion groups, where their point of view is important and needed, establishing new contacts and refreshing the old ones. Therefore, we can take a risk of saying that the main three functions of the Internet are informative, auto-creative (connected to net surfers' active creation of their Internet personality) and communicative function (related to auto-creative). In the times of Web 2.0, when the websites providing user-generated content are the most important ones [Piotrowski, 2008 quoted in Bąk, 2009, p. 161], the informative function of the Internet is receding into the background, whereas the remaining two are increasing. The increasing number of different Internet forums, chats and social network services as well as the alarming growth of Internet

¹ According to the research described by D. Tapscott, 71% to 87% of people from twelve countries admit that they would be able to live without the TV. However, only 13% to 29% of them claim that they do not need the Internet [Tapscott, 2010, p. 96].

addiction disorder, also known as IAD [Paklepa, 2003, p. 459], seem to be its indication. The question is why people have to use the Internet to communicate? Why is real life insufficient?

Internet forums types – subject matter and content

We can observe this issue from two different angles. Firstly, we can assume that the Internet users try to find other people who share their passions and interests on the Web. It is very easy to find Polish Internet forums concerning cooking, photography, sailing, literature or needlework. The Internet overcomes barriers of age, gender and language, “being the only media which is an instrument of communication” [Grzenia, 2003, p. 5], not just a one-sided message. The Internet users share their own experiences, ideas and opinions related to a particular topic on such forums, creating simultaneously a huge base of valuable information for others. The exchange is a great opportunity to express opinions on different topics as well. Such places tend to be exclusive, available only to those who have appropriate knowledge of the main issue. Usually, there is a harsh moderation system which quickly eliminates undesirable users. Breaking the general rules of the forum is also unacceptable.

On the other hand, there are huge, generally accessible forums of the biggest Polish portals, such as *o2*, *Onet*, *Interia* or *Wirtualna Polska* – the users are anonymous there and the moderators are impersonal. The forums' administrators pay less attention to stimulation of users' creativity, their comfort or the way of discussing matters. In fact, it is increase in the number of visitors on the website that counts. In addition, many people do not treat these forums as instruments of a constructive dialogue, but rather as centres of auto-therapy, auto-promotion or – frequently – unjustified criticism of other forum users: discussions which take place on such forums are for them merely a way of demonstrating their superiority and ideology. Generally speaking, people are more absorbed by themselves on the Internet than anywhere else. This is the one of the virtual world's characteristic features. The Internet users tend towards overrating the importance of their words, usually unconsciously [Wallace, 2001, p. 50]. This is the ordinary origin of the Internet arguments and misunderstandings. According to literature, common factors motivating starting an Internet communication are the needs of affiliation, making impression and domination [Barani, 2009, p. 112], which only confirms the thesis of self-centred attitudes spreading on the Internet.

The content of the biggest Polish Internet forums represents mostly chaotic and not very useful information. It is a fact that websites of popular Polish newspapers and their forums are a source of different opinions and a variety of users' “theories” on a wide range of topics. The level of these remarks varies as well – many of them contain numerous grammar and spelling mistakes, some are insulting or frankly violate the law. However, along with such statements, also semi-scientific or even scientifically supported posts can be found.

Due to the differences mentioned above, Polish Internet forums seem to be an interesting material for a research. As an attempt to confirm this thesis, we decided to conduct qualitative observation of the two of them trying to find an answer to the question “What do the Poles think about different nations?”, yet because of some unexpected reactions of forums' users our research covered participation in the life of a few forums along with analysis of chats and comments on news websites.

Observation as a method of Internet research

Because of the structure of contents on presented forums – lack of logical order, chaos, often contradictory opinions [Pankowski, 2006, p. 2] – we decided to choose a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research strategies require gathering data by regular daily, constant contact with a particular society [Bauman & Pilch 2010, p. 284]. Societies of the Internet forums have their own specific rules and traditions. Taking this fact and our own experience related to characteristic features of forums into consideration, we recognized qualitative observation as the most appropriate method of the research.

Qualitative observation is classified in a diversity of ways. Among others, we can distinguish participant and non-participant observation [Łobocki, 2005, pp. 48, 50]. Ethnographic researches, in which the researcher enters the life of a community and learns new facts about it through the interaction, are the prototypes of participant observation [Bauman & Pilch, 2010, p. 318]. Such a connection with the community results in consequences dependent on the researcher's activity – the researcher is the one who decides in which direction the analysis shall go, thus they have to be aware of their subjectivity [Bauman & Pilch, 2010, p. 320].

During the planning phase of the research we assumed the use of participant observation on one of the forums. We decided to begin an appropriate topic and participate in the discussion actively. We had to create a new profile as well what is required to begin communication on the chosen forum. Several times we tried to encourage forum users to widen their views by adding posts containing some detailed questions concerning previous utterances of the users. However, we did not confess to be researchers, because we wanted to receive as many varying statements as possible. On the second forum we focused on users' and moderators' observation within a framework of existing topics. Apart from users' posts, we identified actions of moderators (deleting particular posts, giving warnings, etc.) as a second significant subject of observation. These actions gave us specific information about welcome and undesired views on analysed forums.

According to literature [Bauman & Pilch 2010, p. 324], one of the difficulties of participant observation can be problems with gaining trust among the people from the examined society. However, it is not the most significant problem in the Internet researches, owing to specific features of the Internet communication as well as to a great number of respondents (in such a case, receiving at least a few responses is likely to happen).

What caused more problems was the pace of discussion. On Internet forums, unlike chats, communication is mostly asynchronous – new posts do not appear as often and are usually more complex and deliberate. It is also better to know the content of previous posts in order not to repeat views and arguments that have already been presented. As a result, the flow of discussion is much slower than on chats and gathering the appropriate quantity of data turns out to be time consuming.

Research assumptions

The prime goal of our research was discovering attitudes towards different nations present among the users of popular Polish Internet forums. We aimed at acknowledging as wide a range of opinions and attitudes as possible by gathering any available and contributing data.

We wanted to research the connection between anonymity or its lack and the size of a forum with the range and character of presented attitudes. However, in the process of data analysis our reflections changed and we started to pay attention to the significance of Internet research itself. The main subject of the research still remained important, but we became aware of restraints that made any final conclusions incomplete. This informational deficiency made us think about possible development of Internet research in aspects of widening its range and its usage in different fields of social sciences. From this point on we tried to prove the necessity of such research itself, but first of all – the necessity of appropriate planning, financing and making use of it for different goals and disciplines of knowledge.

At the beginning of our work we formed a few initial assumptions. Firstly, we defined Polish Internet as too wide an environment to receive unambiguous answers to our question by analysing only a few forums. Secondly, compliance with the principles of netiquette on Polish Internet still leaves a lot to be desired, especially on big forums, where the majority of the Internet users participate in discussion. Apart from this, on the Internet we can find more extreme views than in real life. Last but not least, net surfers who reveal their true personal data tend to present less radical opinions than anonymous users.

We have to add that our assumptions are complementary. By observing how, why and where Polish Internet users express their opinions about other nations, we obtain an incredible field for a research on the quality of Internet services, moderation systems and on the topic itself. We have the insight into the influence of anonymity, size of the forum and its subject matter on the level of discussion. It results in very interesting and untypical effects at times.

As we mentioned before, anonymity or its lack has huge influence on the quality of the users' statements as well as on their content. As a rule, opinions of the users who have to reveal their personal data are less controversial, more polite, typical. On the other hand, anonymous users feel unfettered and their remarks in most cases contain insulting or iconoclastic content. Anonymity on the Internet, even if only partial, minimizes users' anxiety of social exclusion [Wallace, 2001, p. 56].

Another element that has a crucial meaning for the content of users' posts is a system of rules on a particular forum and the way of enforcing the rules. The Internet forums can be generally divided into two groups when it comes to the rules. There are “dead-law” forums and “lively-law” forums². The bigger forums with automatic moderation systems ordinarily have a system of regulations in which the most important point concerns the forum's owner's lack of responsibility for opinions and behaviour of the users. The smaller forums, where the users know each other well and the moderators participate in discussions actively, benefit from monitoring conversations and the direction of the website development themselves. Undoubtedly, such an attitude is more reasonable and serves the enjoyment of the users better.

² „Lively-law” and „dead-law” forums are notions adapted only for the needs of this article. “Lively-law” forums have a set of rules that are obeyed by the most of the users. If someone disobeys the rules, they are punished by moderators or administrators of the forum. On the contrary, “dead-law” forums in spite of having a set of rules established, do not enforce them.

Range of research

At first we decided to choose two Internet forums for our research – an anonymous one and one that requires revealing personal data in the registration form. The chosen forums were www.goldenline.pl and www.ateista.pl.

*Goldenline*³ is a social network service focusing on professional career, job offers along with establishing new contacts. The website's registration form requires a full set of personal data (first name and surname, localization, age, etc.) and a description of a user's professional career. When you are registered, you can find your friends, send messages and apply for different kinds of jobs. There are forums and groups launched by the users themselves, which represent a variety of topics and subtopics on a number of issues. *Goldenline's* administration is obliged to delete profiles containing false data and execute the website's rules.

Goldenline's registration form demands user's full name, e-mail address, town, province and a branch. The user who removes the data is banned from using the site. If the user's data somehow proves to be false or outdated, the user receives a warning; if the warning is not heeded, their account is blocked. The presence of restrictive regulations which do not allow any exceptions provides authenticity of interlocutors. This authenticity is connected to a certain level of discussion due to the age of the users (the service allows only adults) and their potential legal liability as well as – say – reluctance to discredit themselves by representing views unpopular in public life.

By contrast, the second forum that we chose is not so “professional”. *Ateista* guarantees its users complete anonymity. A variety of topics can be found here, among others *philosophy* and *world-view*, *social issues* and *science*; each of them is divided into a number of subtopics. The users pay attention mainly to the topics related to the politics and religion/ philosophy.

As far as participant observation is concerned, we expected a wide range of responses especially on the *Goldenline* website where we started topics suitable for the needs of our research. Unfortunately, the interest in the topics was apparently not so great and in spite of encouraging the users to enter the conversation, in most of the topics we did not receive any answers that would contribute to the research. Only a few people shared their views and the discussions “died” rapidly, falling to a low position in their categories. Because of that fact, we tried establishing a few topics in various sections of *o2* forum which we mentioned before. The choice was dictated by significant differences between the content of *o2* forum and *Ateista*, the second forum under our analysis – *o2* is a more open, general forum with minimal moderator participation. Here we did not achieve too much either – moderators' actions were haphazard; they deleted some of the topics just because of the users' reports, without any kind of verification. We launched a topic in a wrong section as an experiment and it remained there for a quite a long time until we disposed of it without any post, yet without a ban or being removed by moderators.

On the contrary, *Ateista* website proved to be the perfect choice. We found there many already existing topics which seemed to approximately answer our needs. We managed to gather numerous earlier submissions.

³ More information about *Goldenline* social network service can be found in: Piechura, *Wyemituj siebie! Serwisy społecznościowe jako przestrzeń autoprezentacji* [„Nowe Media” 2008, nr 4].

Before we start the analysis, we shall describe the characteristics of *Ateista* forum and its users in more detail. First of all, we have to emphasize the role of the forum's list of regulations, which defines the group of users desired by administrators and establish general rules of using the website. The list suggests uninhibited freedom in respect of expressing users' opinions, but includes a few limitations as well. The first point on the list tells us that everyone can use the forum, but the following ones restrict the group of potential users by forbidding misbehaviour (in terms of commonly accepted standards) under threat of expulsion of misbehaving users. Another topic mentioned on the list of regulations is the desired tone of conversation – the users are allowed to disagree with their opponents' views, but disagreement cannot be transferred into attacking other people. What is more, the forum's owner reserves the right to remove law-violating or redundant statements. At the same time, the list of rules informs us that the owner is not responsible in any way for the users' expressed opinions.

As far as the practical aspects of this issue are concerned – indeed, the rules mentioned above are generally executed and administration along with moderators take part in their execution actively. However, it does not mean that the discussions do not contain any radical or controversial opinions – which we will mention in the following paragraphs. The gathered information comes from topics about national shame, tolerance, the Romanys and about the Poles' attitudes to different nations and vice versa.

Analysis of data

Before we start data analysis, it is important to describe our own view on what kind of data was useful in the research. To begin with, as data we identified the whole of forum users' products – their posts with their full content: views on the main topic, language used in their presentation, emoticons, attached images and context of the utterance. We tried to perceive analysed discussions in their full form, so not only as a set of individual opinions, but as a reasonable sequence of opinions, with respect to exchange of arguments, polemicising and expressing approval or disapproval. An important part of the data was as we mentioned before, actions of moderators indicating commonly accepted views on a particular forum.

The users' opinions gathered on *Ateista* website depict mainly attitudes towards the European nations. Sometimes the USA features in their utterances, but it is easy to see that the Internet users above all express their views about the nations which are close and well-known to them (and taking the geographical localization of Poland into consideration, these are the European nations). According to some of the opinions, Poland is divided into two main parts – “Poland of inferiority” and “Poland of xenophobia” – remaining in opposition, but against all appearances closely related. One of the characteristic features of “Poland of inferiority” is ceaseless feeling of shame because of the country and its politics, its education system, its “omnipresent Catholicism”, etc. The representatives of this section of our people are reluctant towards the stereotypical image of Poles as “thieves” or “layabouts”. On the other hand, there is also “Poland of xenophobia” and its representatives who themselves use stereotypes in respect of other nations.

In general, no sooner had we started the research, we were struck by the power of stereotypes among *Ateista* forum's users. It turns out that the stereotype of “the incredible West” contrasted with “the Polish backwater” is, twenty years after the overthrow of communism,

still present in the consciousness of the Poles. In spite of apparent progress made by Poland in different fields for the last twenty years, many people still perceive other European countries as a kind of “a better world”. Such an attitude is maintained especially towards economic conditions, job market, health service and living standards in these countries (particularly in Germany and England). However, there were also the users who tried to undermine the foundation of such beliefs. They claimed that the countries of “the legendary West” have drawbacks as well, but they put a lot of effort into concealing them and that is why their commonly acquired image is so attractive (as one of the users writes: “Where are you going to go in a foreign town? To the market square or to the district of blocks of flats?”) [www.ateista.pl].

Above we analysed the users' attitude towards the “impersonal” aspects of the structure and functioning of the countries⁴. Differing points of view can be discovered when it comes to the representatives of other countries – and here the stereotypes rooted in the users' mentalities can be even more visible. Even if the myth of “the incredible West” could be defined as a historically determined conviction, instilled into the mind of the present generation by the previous one which knew communistic ideas very well, it is much more difficult to find the origins of the stereotypes concerning the Englishmen, the Germans, the Italians or the Russians. There appeared numerous statements assessing other nations on a basis of their alcohol preferences, using the lowest class stereotypes, in the topic originally related to the attitudes of Poles towards different nations from the historical and social point of view. Let us quote some of them as examples: “The Irish – good drinking buddies, ever soaked with Guinness, can't hold their vodka, though”, “Germans – they know their beer. Contrary to the popular misconception, they also know how to handle vodka”, “The Czechs – know both their beer and their vodka”. At the same time the forum's users give us to understand that they would not like to be assessed in a negative way by the Irish, the Germans or the Czechs.

Regardless of such points of view, different ones, related to the original topic, could likewise be found, however full of distrust and distance. Broadly speaking, univocal assessment of other nations from the historical perspective turned out to be problematic, if not impossible, since the same countries repeatedly have played extremely unlike roles in relation to Poland within a very short period of time. Nevertheless, a number of opinions were echoed more frequently than the others. As a remnant of the tragic events of World War II, when England and France refused to support the Polish army in the battle with German forces, citizens of these countries were defined as “traitors”, whereas the Germans and the Russians were perceived as “oppressors and partitioners” due to the same historical event. Such associations cause anxiety as they indicate the lack of any kind of alteration in some people's mentality. The values instilled during the process of institutionalized education in Poland, such as respect for the Polish struggle for independence, take in this case their exaggerated forms, resulting in immediate classifying every German as “a Nazi” and every Russian as “a Bolshevik”.

Anyhow, the positive impact of historical education on the *Ateista* website's users' attitudes towards different nations can be observed in their opinion concerning the Lithuanians.

⁴ Economy, health service and job market are kinds of Key words that provoke some defined associations. According to our research, the users on *Ateista* forum appreciate these aspects of other countries' lives, but simultaneously criticize representatives of the same countries. Therefore, we can acknowledge that they do not notice the connection between economy and the citizens who create the economy. That is why we use the word “impersonal”.

What is emphasized during the process of institutionalized historical education is the significant role of the contacts between Poland and Lithuania in the times of their united cooperation as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This fact can be the reason of a good image of Lithuanian on the Polish Internet.

As far as the Polish Internet users' opinions about different nations in their contemporary state are concerned – except the views concerning alcohol consumption – we found a certain amount of interesting utterances, such as this one, referring to the Swedes: “At work they seemed to be reserved, but hard-working as hell. That is they have their eight-hour work-day and they don't even think of working a second longer, but during these eight hours they work like f***ing machines... It doesn't matter if it's raining or snowing, the work has to be done” [www.ateista.pl]. As claimed by the users, the fluent knowledge of English among the Swedes from various social classes and various professions was likewise noteworthy and deserved respect.

On the contrary, the users criticized the poor knowledge of foreign languages among the Italians who were criticized due to different reasons as well. Above all, the Internet users disapproved the Italians' lack of hygiene, the more conspicuous in comparison with their “uncovered tracing the fashion changes”. One of the users summarized this feature a bit violently: “Wearing pink T-shirts is right, putting gel on your hair is right, but using soap – not so much...” [www.ateista.pl].

The Germans' attitude to the upbringing of their children was considered on the forum as well. Germans are identified by the *Ateista* website's users' as too liberal in terms of upbringing. The users accuse them of definitely permitting their children to do too much, strengthening their overvalued self-esteem and simultaneously developing pretentiousness.

Even though the users' opinions on other European nations do not always express approval, it is not hard to notice that they recognize their citizens as more or less equal to themselves. Nonetheless, there is a nation treated as inferior by the users of *Ateista* forum – the Romany. We can find a separate topic under a very suggestive title “the Romany BEGONE!” on the forum. “Discussion” in the framework of this topic without few exceptions was reduced to the comments in a very like style: “It's not that I don't like them because of their skin colour, I don't like them, because of they're thievish criminal vermin living on wangling, cadging, deceit and theft” [www.ateista.pl]. Admittedly, there were some people who tried to start a reasonable conversation using sound arguments. They appealed mainly to the existing stereotypes about the Poles which are not necessarily true, such as the image of Poles as thieves, due to the fact that the Romany's tendency to theft is the most common feature attributed to them. As we mentioned before, there were a number of people who expressed extremely negative, racist, law-violating opinions. On the other hand, there were the users who defended the Romany, but perhaps the most interesting ideas belonged to those, who were somewhere between these two groups. Undeniably, they did not hide that there is “a lot of truth” in the commonly accepted vision of the Romany – as they claimed, it is caused by the Romany's tradition and culture – they tried not to generalize, though. Instead of generalizing, they suggested logical and reasonable – in their eyes – solutions to the problem of the Romany in Poland. As the solution they defined merely treating the Romany equally to the other citizens of our country. Above all, they focused on executing the law (including labour law) and punishment in the same way as it is done in relation to the Poles (according to their views, such equality does not exist, because in the name of tolerance the Romany have more privileges). Such treatment would result in emigration of those of the Romany who deserve

being described in a stereotypical way, whereas those who do not have anything in common with the stereotypes would be able to remain in Poland.

As we can see, the opinions of *Ateista* forum's users are truly diverse – from acute and extreme, violating the law, through entirely typical, to more creative and surprising. More importantly, there appeared a problem of racism; likewise the existence of fossilized, difficult to change beliefs concerning other nations, caused among others by the way history teaching was marked. These pieces of information indicate the need of further researches on these issues (especially on the issue of racism).

Owing to our failure on *Goldenline* and *o2* forums, we began a search for a separate source of information on the topic under consideration, launching a few topics on different forums, of which the most successful turned out to be the ones launched on *Tawerna RPG* website. We have to emphasize the fact, that we did not expect so many responses from the users of a forum related to fantasy culture.

Tawerna RPG forum pays a lot of attention to its system of regulations. The website is strongly related to literature, which can be seen in the list of rules. First of all, vulgarity is banned. Instead of using vulgar language, the administrators suggest emoticons as a substitute. Secondly, obedience to language rules (spelling, punctuation, grammar and style) is accentuated. Moreover, the users are obliged to use Polish, and Polish alone, in the name of efficient communication. Finally, the attitude to other users is mentioned; offending and ridiculing them is forbidden. The list of regulations ends with a suggestive sentence: “TRPG forum is created for intelligent people, who are aware of the rules of etiquette” (<http://www.trpg.pl/forum/>, topic *Regulaminy i Współpraca > Regulamin Forum Tawerny RPG*).

The forum maintains a special topic for new users where they can introduce themselves. Seemingly, the forum's society appears to be exclusive, yet after closer observation it turns out to be open to all “new blood”. The beginners, potential players, moderators or authors of articles related to *Tawerna RPG* Internet magazine are welcome. The users who do not obey the rules are placed on a blacklist and if the violation is repeated, they are given a ban for a week, a month or without time limit. No exceptions are allowed and controversial/insulting/ rules-violating posts are removed. Fortunately, during our research this did not have to happen.

The participants of the discussion were mostly young people – none of the active users were above thirty. These are people from various backgrounds; they come from towns, cities and villages and study at various levels of education. A number of them study technical or humanities specializations at universities and some of them have already graduated. In spite of a certain level of anonymity, the users know each other well, often also in their real lives. The users frequently choose nicknames which suggest their names or surnames. These factors along with the moderators' and administrators' lively participation in the discussions as well as obedience and enforcement of the rules restrict or rather moderate the conversation.

We began the topic with questions. We neither stated anywhere why such a topic is started nor asked for specially composed, long or polite remarks to receive as wide spectrum of opinions as possible. In addition, we found a few existing topics which were connected directly or indirectly to ours – *politics, religion, manga & anime, literature, opinions*. The topic is still popular (as for a quite small forum) and it will surely remain popular for a long time. Its subject is catchy and, generally speaking, close to everyone, especially when we consider that the Internet is a place where the majority of people express their points of view. A different question is if these points of view are “sound” and “reasonable”.

As in the everyday life, there were truly miscellaneous opinions on the forum. Many of *Tawerna RPG* forum's users emphasize the division of Polish society into two opposing groups. One of them represents "extremist nationalism" while the other one is situated closely to "dangerous cosmopolitanism". These two attitudes occur commonly especially among youngsters, at times with awareness or partial awareness. One of the debaters noticed that it is hardly possible to eradicate numerous stereotypes instilled in the mind of the younger generation during the process of socialization. "They are inseparably connected with our mentality – the German will always be a Teutonic Knight and the Russian will be a Bolshevik. It is similar with the Pole abroad – for the Germans we will always be car thieves" [www.trpg.pl/forum]. The forum's users repeatedly remarked that a significant part of their opinions is a result of their own experience, not necessarily of what they heard, what people from close and distant circles "persuaded" them. What is important, on *Tawerna RPG* forum we did not find a post which would not contribute to the research. However, a few users admitted that if they do not have anything valuable to say or to add, they merely withdraw from the discussion.

The weakness of the Poles caused by considering religion as "the last resort", "being rooted in not-really-our Catholicism" and "non-objective approach to communism" [www.trpg.pl/forum/] was repeated in the main current of the discussion. The users pointed out that on the one hand Poland seems to despise nations of the West, while on the other hand it wants to be much the same. As the users claimed, the Poles do not have their own national identity, cultural and scientific achievements and language development (the negative role of borrowings from different languages was noticed), especially in the post-war period. In different words – we criticize other nations and envy them, but at the same time we adapt their ideas to our conditions due to the lack of ability to invent something ourselves, which can be proved among other things on the Polish Internet⁵. As on different forums, apart from the issue of the West and communism, the issue of racism and anti-semitism occurred, but was mostly condemned by the users. When it comes to racism, the conclusions from all of the forums are the same – whenever the topic of the Poles' attitude to different nations is discussed, the issue of racism appears.

The matter of the Romany was one of the most important cases on *Tawerna RPG* forum – the users discussed their history and the reasons for reluctance towards the Romany occurring in Poland. Once again users focused on their individual experiences related to the Romany, such as thefts, robberies, threats and beggary. A number of debaters accentuated the fact that "a civilized Gypsy", so one accustomed to our vision of society, will not look like, behave or make impression like "a stereotypical Gypsy", the one who reads people's palms, begs for money or steals, among others owing to shame or fear linked to this stereotype. On the contrary, other users underlined the fact that the Romany respect their culture and tradition, even though they do not have their own place in the world and have to live a life of vagrants. Numerous debaters claimed that they do not approve of the Romany, yet they do not want them to leave Poland. There appeared an interesting idea of the Romany compulsory settlement as a cause of their "degeneration" and "aggressive behaviour". Summarizing the issue of the Romany – the users' opinions about them are negative, but we cannot define their approach as hatred.

⁵ We mean websites like *nasza-klasa*, *fotka*, *demotywatory*, *wrzuta* and various kinds of blog services, which are a copy of different nations' propositions, mostly *facebook*, *imageshack*, *4han*, *youtube*, *megaupload* and when it comes to blog services – *wordpress*.

One of the users observed an amusing paradox concerning people with other than white skin colour, occurring commonly in Poland. The Poles want to be tolerant and treat them equally. However, they tend towards taking photos of themselves with Asians or Afroamericans “to be fashionable”, as they say [www.trpg.pl/forum/]. A different statement summarised this phenomenon in an interesting way: “Generally speaking, most people I know see themselves as tolerant, exemplary Poles. But if you start a topic of racism, they immediately start to crack jokes about skin colour and exchange funny – in their eyes – remarks, such as »In my house negros are stokers and I heat the house with jews«. Everyone is happy and smiles, they just joke, they have the right to make fun of anything they want to. It's hard to comment on it, usually in such situations I'd like to escape from this sick country, best to Mars, where there's no ignorance and hypocrisy. Recently, I heard such jokes so often that I feel sick just when I think about them. I stopped laughing long ago” [www.trpg.pl/forum/].

Unfortunately, by analysing the remarks of *Tawerna RPG*, *Goldenline*, *o2* and *Ateista* forums' users, it is easy to notice that aggressive, insulting jokes concerning Jews, Afroamericans, the Germans or the Russians are still surprisingly attractive. The Internet users seem to play a psychological game “If It Weren't For You”, accusing foreigners, the politics and culture of different countries of causing the weakness of Poland [Berne, 2000, p. 39]. At the same time they do not look at themselves realistically. However, what is worth accenting, it strikes numerous people and is related to teenagers, their educational shortages, only partially conscious perception and peer pressure. We have to emphasize the fact that nowadays the virtual world and everyday life are melting into one when it comes to points of view as well as to the way of discussing matters. It is detectable that Internet conversations are colder and every opposing opinion sounds more hostile than in off-line communication. Internet communication lacks body language, the factor that truly affects our attitudes to others [Wallace, 2001, pp. 25–26]. Text as a main medium of exchanging information restricts our interpretation of interlocutors' intentions. Despite a huge effort put into adding more “warmth” to Internet communication (introducing emoticons as a substitute for body language and facial expressions), it is not difficult to guess that nothing can replace a real interaction [Barani, 2009, p. 107]. The fact that even in everyday life discussions are becoming more and more aggressive is alarming. Nevertheless, on the Internet the level of directness or aggression is increasing to an even higher extent. It is linked to disinhibition, which manifests in insulting behaviour, yet in excessive openness as well [Joinson, 2009, pp. 140–141]. Disinhibition is a result of anonymity and the atmosphere of permissiveness predominant on the Internet. Even the most “cultural” (or perceived as cultural) Internet societies cannot avoid the phenomenon of disinhibition.

Reactions for the topic that we launched experimentally on www.gazeta.pl website are a representative example of disinhibition. With time, the topic vanished in the “abyss” of the website. Possibly it was removed, yet we did not manage to reach it. However, we know that the discussion was immediately fed with arguments related to politics and eventually became a perfect example of a brawl violating all the rules of netiquette.

Despite a difference of opinions, any severe argument did not happen on *Tawerna RPG* forum. In addition, all of actively participating users considered the discussion as a serious one, which did not happen on any different forum. That is interesting for a forum where the users do not have to reveal their personal data, but not surprising as such. Conformity on the Internet does not have as wide range as in real life, yet it is still common and – moreover – necessary as a kind of “cement” of an Internet society [Wallace, 2001, p. 85].

Putting the remarks of the participants aside, we have to mention other aspects of *Tawerna RPG* forum's life. Above all, we appreciate the system of moderation. Moderators of

this forum, as opposed to a few different websites, neither identified our topic as spam nor banned or displaced it, but joined the discussion, which was a pleasant change. The topic, despite its slow development, is being followed up to now with hardly any encouragement from its initiators.

When it comes to chats, the majority of utterances did not contribute to the research – they concerned mostly the matter of the Romany and contained numerous stereotypical comments. However, there was an interesting situation when the conversation with an anonymous user drifted into the direction of arguments on forums and low quality of forums' users' comments and ideas. The user summarized this fact as follows: “Intelligent persons don't need this type of discussion; they don't need to talk about obvious things. They will observe, check and study, but they will not take part in a direct way” [www.czateria.interia.pl]. Interpretation of this remark can give us the insight into disadvantages of the use of qualitative observation as a method of Internet research. Some of the Internet users, even if they have their own view on a particular topic, do not participate in discussion. They are called lurkers – they observe the conversation, but they do not feel the need to express their own ideas actively [Wallace, 2001, p. 52]. Considering the issue from this angle, we can conclude that Internet researches in certain cases are limited merely to those who are active and to those only. In such situations the research team becomes unintentionally selective.

Even though the response on *o2* and *Goldenline* was not very intense, we did find a few statements worth mentioning: “Yes, we have prejudices concerning different nations. For example the Romanians. We don't know their culture, but we see them stereotypically as layabouts and homeless. We hate the Germans and the Russians as well, because of history and wars. Some of the prejudices can't be changed, because it's impossible to educate the whole nation” [http://forum.o2.pl/]. The author of the remark accentuates the fact that a fair part of the Internet users is aware of the Poles' particular attitudes to other nations caused by the educational shortages mentioned before. As we can see, some problems are frequent everywhere, regardless of the character, regulations and users of a specific forum. The fact suggests us that the opinions about different nations, irrespective of their variety, remain within certain non-exceedable boundaries.

General conclusions

Summarizing our research, we admit that observing development of already existing topics was a much easier task than encouraging people to participate in a potential discussion. However, we have to point out that our topics remained of moderate or low attractiveness, thus we chose “bad” places or simply potential users were not interested in such a form of discussion, on a “neutral” topic. Because we have to admit that we tried to maintain neutrality which caused a rather slow conversation. We did not wish to provoke the users into beginning arguments.

Observation was more effective also due to the quantity of data in already existing topics that we analysed. The topics were being developed for months before we started to peruse them. Therefore, we received more reactions and comments on the considered subject on *Ateista* forum than on *Tawerna RPG* website.

Our thesis related to the range of Internet researches was confirmed – in the case of social matters (in accordance to our topic, there is racism, nationalism and intolerance for

ethnic minorities among them) we cannot rely on a fraction of the Internet, on a work of a few people. Therefore, our research cannot answer unambiguously the question of Poles' attitudes to different nations. It shows a seemingly distorted, but probably true image of the problem. However, it is insufficient. Issues of Internet researches have to be analysed on a small scale, on one or two forums, yet on a big scale, as comparison with a few existing researches. The discrepancy between opinions on forums requiring the users' personal data or being communities of the users who know each other well and on the anonymous ones seems to confirm this fact. When it comes to the issue of cultural behaviour – it lacks where there is no moderation system enforcing the rules. The thesis considering radical and aggressive utterances on the Internet proved to be true as well – we have never received opinions so full of hatred in public discussions. However, the research did not answer all of the questions. We still do not know what is the real influence of revealing personal data to the quantity of given opinions. In such a case, the lack of appropriate answers should be a stimulus to continue Internet researches.

The Internet gives its users anonymity, provides unfettered freedom of speech and the lack of censorship. There are voices which define the Internet as the last free medium. The medium without control, without imposition of ideas, religion, attitudes. Individual, sincere, true medium, and because of that – so extreme. Repeatedly the users of analysed forums marked in private messages that they would not express the opinions presented on forum (positive and negative as well) in off-line discussion. In fact, we are familiar with such an attitude, frequently appearing on different kinds of Internet services – people tend to be more courageous and eager to communicate via Internet than in direct eye-to-eye interaction.

We hope that the research answered additionally one more question – what is the role of Internet studies? Are they important and worth continuing?

They are, because the Internet is an irreplaceable source of otherwise unavailable data. This fact itself proves the significance of the Internet researches. They are the more necessary as a kind of prevention – thanks to them a number of serious problems can be identified and counteraction can be initiated. They are valuable likewise as a factor of changes adapted in a subject that we are especially interested in – education. The Internet can surely become a source that will allow the development of education in its various aspects.

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A diagnostic survey tool for exploration of the social networking site

ABSTRACT

The following article relates to research designed to explore the specific social networking site Facebook as an example. This aspect is very important from a scientific point of view, because indiscriminate use of such sites is a new phenomenon affects today's generation. I include in the article characteristics of a diagnostic survey and guidance on the use of this method in virtual space for the reader to visualize the existence of new research perspectives created by the development of the Internet.

Keywords: social networking, survey, Facebook, Internet, telephone interview, personal interview, postal survey, the survey's release, the environmental survey, Internet survey, controlled recorder (controlled).

In today's ever changing world, technological development and the need to keep up with the pace of life gives 21st century man many challenges. He must undertake several activities and undertakings to cope with ongoing self-education in order to properly and actively work in many areas of everyday life. Currently as well as technical innovations, knowledge of which a smooth and continuous use is a necessity, people watch and participate in the processes in virtual space. Development of the Internet and its accessibility, has led to new forms of activity for the masses. The study of this virtual world is a challenge that faces researchers today. Research methods and techniques, adapted to quite different fields have had to be modified, varied, or simply have to create the forms. In this study, the virtual space of the author will be used as a survey, we therefore briefly characterize this type of research tool.

Characteristics of the survey

The survey carried out testing procedures allowing for numerous populations, after selecting a representative sample of the community in such a way as to reflect the characteristics of interest to us a of group of people. "These studies are inspired by variety of ad hoc needs, and their goal is to identify and analyze both the opinion and attitudes that exist in the minds of the people of society or any parts thereof, and apply variety of issues, current situation, various factors, such as issues of very broad interest" [Sztumski, 2005, p. 201]. There is, however, the phenomenon of having a specific location but distributed in society. The survey is intended to demonstrate the structural and functional attributes of these phenomena, after their discovery [Pilch, 2010, p. 80]. The increasing popularity of survey research is associ-

ated with a desire to establish public opinion, inter alia, on the political parties, institutions, promoted goods and services offered by various industries. Development of marketing has contributed to the prevalence of conducting surveys, which have disclosed favorite consumer trends, and thus making changes to the services offered. The issue, which no doubt is worth pointing out is most prevalent in highly civilized countries, the need for continuous learning about the changing attitudes and beliefs of people feeding the various social groups of the country. Recording these changes is very important from the viewpoint of politicians, who form their attitudes and political actions precisely on the basis of public opinion, and also in terms of people offering different goods and services. These surveys meet the needs of highly developed countries, allowing people to quickly gather information for relatively small financial outlay. Research conducted by the survey is very useful in diagnosing the attitudes of respondents, their motives and interests, or a certain amount of information acquired by them on the specific range of subjects interesting to the investigator. However, you cannot treat this method as a tool to get to final solutions, well-established decisions which go beyond the scope of the respondents. In addition, the phenomenon observed, recorded by careful research sample, have a high degree of risk in the wider population. The nearer the analyzed sample is to the whole, the more likely it becomes [Goriszowski, 2005, p. 80]. The essence of the survey is to measure the subject's score on a particular topic using a suitable research technique. Selecting the proper techniques according to M. Szreder depends on “ investigation and research issues, specific populations, sample size, time and budget allocated to the testing, the precision of inference (the maximum permitted error of estimation)” [Szreder, 2010, p. 158]. Looking at the information, with data research techniques we can distinguish between direct techniques which include: an interview (personal interview and telephone interview) and intermediate survey (postal questionnaire, release, site survey, controlled recorder) [Szreder, 2010, p. 159–169]. In addition, to calculate the environmental survey, however, direct the presence or absence of the investigator during the study affects the way of classification of the above groups. It is worthwhile to briefly describe these techniques: who is in direct.

Characterization of a diagnostic survey and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this method is a very important issue. In the introduction, we introduced additional types of surveys that are available for use in research, depending on the criteria of the conduct of the research. The survey site is in fact one of the few known and used techniques of measuring opinion.

Personal interview (face to face, personal interview) is the accumulation of important information by the researcher contact with the respondent. Among the advantages of the above observation techniques should be considered their high effectiveness in persuading people to participate in the test trial, compared to other techniques. Moreover, there is an opportunity to dispel any ambiguities arising in the course of the study. Contact between the interviewer and the respondent allows immediate detection of anomalies or contradictions in statements obtained. A personal history questionnaire makes it possible to use a large number of questions, because this form is less aggravating than if the respondent if he would have to come to him to answer the same number of questions, only using another technique. Reviews, using personal interview also entails some problems and using it should take into account the fact that a certain group of respondents can be unfavorably oriented to cooperate with those conducting the study. Sometimes the response in the presence of the interviewer related to a depressing answer would be without hesitation on the topic if the survey was anonymous. Also, the gender, age and appearance of the interviewers have an impact on the

response. In a situation where the respondent wants to present him/herself in the best light there can be concealment of facts and opinions [Szreder, 2010, p. 159].

Telephone interview (telephone interviewing) also comes under direct measurement techniques, which finds its application in the polls, as well as in marketing research. The popularity of this technique revolves around the fact that the information gained does not differ from the quality of data obtained through personal interviews. The requisite for such tests is to create a questionnaire constructed of closed questions, the structure is so transparent that it does not hamper the research. Conducting research using the telephone interview technique allows for quick annotation being told an opinion. As with the personal interview, there is immediate opportunity to clarify questions by the interviewer, while the lack of face to face contact leads to a more free and frank expression. Progress in the field of telephony is conducive to effective testing by this technique, however, there is a risk that the sample chosen in the study will be unrepresentative in the absence of individual units of the survey population excluded from it because they do not use the phone. But this is small percentage of people in the world today. Conducting a telephone interview also forces the interviewer to limit the conversation with the respondent, because excessive duration of the conversation leads to a greater tendency to give inaccurate answers in order to expedite the interview.

Postal survey is one of the most popular indirect measurement techniques used in order to gauge public opinion. "This type of measurement is independent of the respondent with regard to the objectives of the study, explained in a letter attached to the questionnaire (cover letter), with selection of answers to the questionnaire and questionnaire returned to the sender (usually in an additional envelope to the return address)" [Szreder, 2010, p. 164]. The advantages of postal surveys are low financial expenditure incurred for the research. Thanks to the postal survey, it is possible to reach out to the people reluctant to grant interviews, as well as to those hard to reach. In the case of postal surveys, there is the possibility of deeper reflection and introspection, and hence more accurate answers. However, a major disadvantage of a postal survey technique is the low number of returned questionnaires (high non-response rate). No response may be explained by the fact of inadequate familiarity with the object of study, respondents who share interests related to the topic of research are more likely to respond than when the subject of research is completely alien to them. Another disadvantage associated with this technique is the inability to control the conditions under which the questionnaire is completed, as well as to the person providing the answers. The researcher may not be entirely sure whether the survey was completed by the person to whom it was addressed. Also incorrect understanding of the question, poor reading of questions lead to wrong answers [Szreder, 2010, pp. 164–167].

The survey release is a tool which should be used in case studies involving respondents distributed over a fairly large territory. Readers of a newspapers or magazines, may be involved in the study, stating that responses will be significant in the study [Łobocki, 2010, p. 264].

Environmental Survey will be conducted at the place of the data of the respondents (at school, at work, at home) and is extremely important in clinical teaching. Of course, it guarantees the repayment of most of the copies of the surveys and carefully selected respondents who are more easily available than in other survey techniques. **Controlled recorder** is a technique where the person being served with a questionnaire study is left it for limited time. At that time the respondent has "completed his duty". The role of the interviewer in this case consists of presenting the user the correct answer, and verifying the record after receiving the returned forms. This technique is gaining particular popularity in studies in which the

researcher enters in a regular register of facts in a given period of time. However, in the case studies of public opinion is not very useful [Szreder, 2010, pp. 168–169].

Internet Survey The Internet, being a popular means of communication is also useful for field surveys. This increasingly prevalent means of communication allows you to establish contact with the respondents from the remotest corners of the world. An Internet survey can be used in the form of a questionnaire sent by mail to the address of the participant survey (e-mail survey) or a survey made available on its website (web page based survey) [Szreder, 2010, p. 167].

Please be aware that both methods lead to contact being made with a limited population (the population that has access to a computer with Internet connection). In the event that the sample surveys using electronic mail special attention should be given when selecting the quality of the sampling frame (list of addresses, e-mail accounts), because on this choice depends the success in collaborating with people involved in the study. Questionnaires available on websites dictates the need to direct the respondents to the internet address given in the questionnaire. In order to obtain the respondents, the researcher can choose them in a completely random manner. The task of researcher is to encourage the group of those persons previously involved in opening a website to participate in the study (pop-up Questionnaires.) The researcher can place an ad about their research on well-known sites, encouraging visitors to move to a specific website in order to complete the questionnaire (advertising on sites), or send an invitation e-mail (e-mail invitations.) Of course, it may be useful to invite some discussion groups (listserv, news group and chats group advertising), or the use of aid agencies that make up the commercial panels of respondents (commercial Internet panels) and recruiting volunteers to carry out research, who meet the criteria. Of course, this is done electronically [Szreder, 2010, p. 168].

It is worth noting that the outcome of the research depends not only on the preparation of methodological development and how the investigator obtained data, but also on the arrangement of the questionnaire. The correct preparation affects people's responses. The issue of correct alignment of the questionnaire is becoming increasingly important especially in a survey conducted via the Internet, where the opportunity to dispel ambiguity is limited in contrast to the situation when the respondent replies to the questionnaire in the presence of the interviewer. Therefore, the researcher needs to construct a form that should follow certain rules, which will contribute to obtaining reliable information. The necessary elements of the survey used in social studies include: information about the institution conducting the research, the purpose of research and further clarification, the nature of which depends on the type of survey. Particularly important are the questions that relate to the purpose for which a given poll is done. We can distinguish questions which concern the study of the problem and referring to the same subjects. Also important are the instructions on how to respond to given questions [Sztumski, 2005, pp. 176–177]. In addition, researchers should consider formulating questions relative to the maturity of the respondents so that the questions can be understood. Content of questions should be designed so that respondents are able to express their opinion. Questions should be appropriate, that is sent to such a group of people who will be able to give credible answers. If the question concerns only a small group of people among the respondents, what is quite frequently encountered is the tendency to provide random answers, instead of signaling that they have no opinion on the subject. Long, complicated questions are not suitable for a the survey. Quite often the respondent is not willing to explore their meaning, so they should therefore be brief. The investigator should avoid two part questions. These questions risk a situation in which the respondent identifies himself

or is able to respond only to one of the two parts of a question, which leads to feelings of alienation between the respondent and the questioner and the lost opportunity for a comprehensive and correct answer; quite often denying the application form in a question becomes a cause of misinterpretation or omission by the respondent. Therefore, questions containing negative forms must be kept to a minimum. It is necessary to use polite forms, especially when the researcher is asking sensitive questions of the respondent. The order of questions significantly affects the quality of responses. The same question in a different order entirely transforms the image survey. It should avoid proverbs, abbreviations and jargon, ambiguous terms, and assumptions, as well as words that are related to the perceived worth of phenomena or concepts. You should also remember not to ignore the response category "I do not know" or "not applicable" [Oppenheim 2004, pp. 150–152]. The questionnaire may take the form of open questions, closed questions or half-open questions. As a reminder, questions are called closed questions if they contain prepared answers to choose from. An open-ended question is one in which the respondent him/herself constructs the answer, but in addition to the half-open questions prepared by the author of the survey response options, there is a space for the respondent's own ideas. Very useful for the researcher are filter questions, which contribute to the reliability of answers. The reason for the provision of inaccurate responses by the respondents in the case of the correctness of the questions may simply be ignorance or poor knowledge of the subject or purpose of the survey research [Pieter, 1975, p. 93].

The selection of the sample should pay attention to its three permanent features, namely, a substantive feature, showing clearly and unambiguously the subject of research; defining characteristic time interval, and the researcher who is interested. It may be a crucial time, which is clearly different from previous occasions. The third feature is its spatiality, allowing determining of the whereabouts of the respondents, the geographical area [Szreder, 2010, p. 40]. When analyzing sampling techniques it is worth noting that they are divided into probabilistic techniques and non probabilistic techniques. In the random selection from a population sample "every individual in the population has a positive and known probability of getting to try" and "for each team, individuals of the population can determine the probability that, in total he will find himself in the trial" [Szreder, 2010, p. 68]. You can replace the simple draw of an individual (simple random sampling), a selection of units from the population of the definitive, systematic random (systematic sampling), random stratified (stratified sampling), random ensemble (sampling mirrors). In addition, the researcher has at his disposal physical generators (dice, coin) allowing the creation of a sequence of random numbers, "which can not be determined by any established pattern (algorithm)" [Szreder 2010, p. 72]. For non probabilistic techniques including random selection (according to your convenience) (convenience sampling), where attempts to enter the unit are only accidental, never on the road draws. They were simply in the place at the time of testing. Purposeful selection of the sample (purposive sampling), which is another technique uses non probabilistic techniques from the researcher's own knowledge about the population and the selection of a concrete representative study population of individuals. In the case of quota (quota sampling) sampling should be based on certain variables, based on which "population structure" compelling "trial and to try to elect the amount of units representing different sub-proportions in proportions such as is the share of these sub-populations in the whole population" [Szreder, 2010, p. 60]. Based on the statistics and the known distributions (eg, gender in the population), the researcher may conclude that the structure of the sample should closely reflect the current structure of the population, making this technique extremely useful to him. Snowball method (snowball sampling) allows for quick and effective increase in the number

of respondents. The researcher in fact has only a few individuals who tested and recommend other units belonging to the population.

Own research

Paying attention to the specificity of questionnaire surveys in the virtual world, you might want to bring into the study authors, who in modern times are developing intensively in modern times new phenomenon, which were not there before. Currently, we are dealing with a palette of different forms of interpersonal contacts on social networking sites. They bring together groups of people often not familiar with each other, facilitating contact between users and offering a wide range of functions. The basis of social networks is to create your own profile and also the ability to modify it according to your needs but within the specific privacy policy proposed by the authors. They bring together users with similar interests, having similar goals or a desire to exchange specific content, often giving the chance to see people from other parts of the world (if they are global), and a chance to talk with people inaccessible in the real world, or curing the shyness of some people. An example is the social network www.facebook.com, which from the perspective of global coverage, the number of people using its services, and with their fairly extensive range, was selected for the study. Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites, covering 500 million active users around the world [Facebook-Statistics]. Use of this site is absolutely free and only requires registration.

Users create their profiles, which may include personal data, information about their interests, political views and religious beliefs. *Facebook* offers many features aimed at enhancing and facilitating the use of the site. The options available include; Invite a friend request, add your own photos and create photo albums, address book, block users, buddy list, commenting on pictures and posts, the option to set the status indicates the user's location and activity. Communicating with friends can be done by private or public messages, posted on the boards. Inspection of friends is possible and, depending on privacy settings, sometimes also other holders visiting the *Facebook* profile. It is worth noting that the array is a space located on the user profile, on which you place your message. The mini-chat feature allows you to conduct conversations only between friends in a list. So far, *Facebook* has introduced group chat. In addition, users can create their own group. Use the option "I like it" will join the group, giving an opportunity to learn interesting facts, to acquire new information and exchange views between users passionate about their issues. The issue of privacy is treated very seriously by the creators of *Facebook*. In order to protect people using the service a number of settings is offered, from which the user selects the most convenient for him. To allow rapid identification of the person, some information is exposed to the sight of all. This information includes: your name, profile picture, gender, and the network to which you belong (the network form a school, workplace, as well as geographic regions). The other settings such as date of birth, place of residence, posts, information about relationships, family, political and religious views, are in the contents of the array, also favorite quotes and interest) depending on the wish to be exposed to view to all the users of the service, friends or just people, power circle of friends. The profile holder has the right to decide about who has access to pictures and video. There is the possibility to make movies and video clips on the board, allowing you to share your favorite material with your friends. Games and applications are designed to provide an additional element of entertainment for portal account holders. Per-

sons under 18 years of age may not be holders of public profiles, and news about them is limited only to friends and networks, even if you want to share with everyone. This does not apply to the name, profile picture, gender. The fact that the use of *Facebook* is free makes it increasingly popular with companies setting up their profiles for the advertising of goods and services. This phenomenon is quite common.

The diversity and wealth of available features makes it easy for each use to be able to find something interesting. It is noteworthy that it is the specificity of actions and forms that drive the dynamic development of this type of meeting place. The subject of this survey was to identify the specific behaviour and activities presented by the users of the portal www.facebook.com. The scope of the study was limited to three thematic sections, namely: to indicate the degree of attachment to the portal users and engage in activities, the second aspect concerns the detection and the ways to manage relationships between users of the portal, a very interesting problem, and third to identify the different forms of leisure activities by users. In addition, efforts have been made to obtain views on the expectations of respondents regarding the site, and their subjective sense of security during use. The presented aspects are interesting and as yet unfathomable areas in Internet space, so you may want to look at them a little closer. Closer to understanding the preferences and actions of a select group of people allows you to diagnose the facts and forecast further development of interaction between users. The research sample consisted of one hundred respondents who were recruited for the study as a result of the snowball method (snowball sampling). All respondents were users of the portal www.facebook.com, residing in Poland. Respondents who would recommend their friends, expressing willingness to participate in the survey contributed to the rapid pace of growth in the number of respondents and their diversity.

Characteristics of the survey results and conclusions.

The research sample consisted of one hundred respondents obtained by using the snowball technique. The selection of interviewees for the social networking site Facebook was connected at the same time to propose to persons belonging to a group of friends who also have a profile, and expressed willingness to participate in the research. This facilitated a rapid increase in the number of respondents genuinely interested in filling in the questionnaire and permitted the acquisition of reliable data in terms of information available from the respondent against the questions set out in the questionnaire.

Of the group of respondents in the study, 75% consisted of women. Age of respondents: 70% of people included were in the range of 18–23 years, while 28% were people aged 24–35 years. A small proportion (2% of respondents) were in the category from 36 to 64 years. There were no respondents under 18 or over 65. Half of the respondents were from cities over 100,000 inhabitants, 26% from cities from 20 to 100 thousand, while the village and the town of 20,000 inhabitants accounted for 12% of the respondents. It is worth noting that respondents to a large extent embraced the active age group, or starting their own scientific career. Observing the development of the virtual world and the acquisition of literacy with its rich palette of services is an indispensable part of life of these age groups. The first thematic block on issues concerning the degree of attachment to the site www.facebook.com its users and their involvement in activities on behalf of this space was characterized by a large number of reference questions to respondents. 56% of respondents declared that they logged

on a daily basis sometimes several times. every day, 18% once a day, 20% – several times a week. Only 3% said they log on once a week, very few (1%) once a month and less frequently (2%). 66% of respondents admitted that they spend 2 to 3 hours on Facebook.com., 5% of respondents, up to one hour – 15%, half an hour 14% less.

Table 1. How often do you log into Facebook site?

	Number of respondents	Percent
Once a Day	18	18%
Several times a Day	56	56%
Once a week	3	3%
Several times a week	20	20%
Once a month	1	1%
Less than once a month	2	2%

It is worth noting that half of respondents admit to frequent use of portal services and fairly long one-off visits. This demonstrates a commitment to www.facebook.com, for 66% of respondents. This pattern of attachment to the portal corresponds to frequent visits to virtual space and time spent long enough to be able to engage in an interesting user activity.. However, only 26% of respondents reported using the mobile version of Facebook, of which 55% of people use it because of the desire to share different information with friends even if they do not have access to a computer for the Internet. However, 45% of respondents chose the option in the question “other”, without specifying motives, thus, the declared commitment is not necessarily linked to the use of the site at any location, as evidenced by the fact that 74% of respondents do not need www.facebook.com applications on the phone. However, the general inability to use the site results in 68% of respondents feeling of discomfort or dissatisfaction. It is a signal that a strong commitment to the portal calls the need for action in varying degrees of continuous and active usage. In addition, 77% of users would actively like to give up on the site and as many as 66% say that it is important for them as a meeting place. In addition, 68% of respondents declared a potential loss or of feeling uncomfortable if the website were no longer to exist. In addition the sense of attachment to the dynamics of the functioning of social networks being important activities of users, to some extent it influences its dynamic growth and size group of people using its services. The frequency of presence in this space is combined with the activity of users in many areas. For a large group of respondents, as much as 63% of friends shared the assumption of a profile on www.facebook.com, contributing to a likely increase in the number of users, whereas for 31% of the respondents this has not happened at all. The question, “What do you do most often when logged in on Facebook?” Respondents could choose up to three answers. As many as 71% of users share their favorite content with their friends, 61% use the application, 57%, take up issues and opinions on new pictures of friends. Only 7% of respondents look for new friends, while 15% also perform other activities. Activities enjoying the most interest among users leads to constant current exchange of content between them, and active communication. The vast majority of those polled said they never failed to create their own application on www.facebook.com (tj. 95%), but 61% of respondents used those offered by the portal. Popular games (75%), to a lesser extent, quizzes (12%), giving to friends virtual gifts (5%),

tests (4%) and other applications (4%). In addition, 92% of respondents admit that they have created their own thematic group, although 68% in response to another question states that a member is present. People declaring their participation in 82% of such groups want to meet people with similar interests, 35% of them would like to discuss with other users, 11% are guided by other motives. Extremely significant is the response of respondents to the question: “Have you had the opportunity to influence the development of the portal, so that the scope of services was even greater, or engaged in activities regardless of how much time you would have to devote to them?”. As many as 57% of respondents say they are willing to take the expansion of activity the portal offers, without repenting for her own time.

Analyzing the above data, we can conclude that a significant part of the respondents show a commitment to the service of Facebook.com manifested through many and many hours of daily visits, as well as motivating people into the opening of profiles on the site. Members declare their loyalty to their friends from the portal and the portal itself, they see it as an important meeting place for them. Another aspect that it allows us to assume that Facebook users have a commitment to the portal, and a strong commitment to its development and a willingness to take actions that would broaden the scope of services offered by the service. Both the inability to use and the prospect of an eventual cessation of the functioning of the social service gives the respondents a sense of dissatisfaction and discomfort, which also may serve as a factor for attachment to the page. Looking at the preferences of users and frequency of use of the various options offered by the service, we can conclude that the sharing of different content becomes not only entertainment but also the habit of users. And the fact of recommending your friends and creating your own profile on the site suggests that Facebook is a friendly place for them where they want to share time with people who they like.

The second theme concerned the block to detect and identify forms to manage relationships between users of the portal. Up to 98% of respondents considered adding photos, links, and content potentially interesting to friends. Therefore, 58% of respondents in another question, acknowledge adding to their content once a week using the facility, 32% – several times a week, only 4% – every day or once a month. Few (2%) perform this activity once every few months.

Table 2. How often do you add content to the portal Facebook?

	Number of respondents	Percent
Daily	4	4%
Once a week	58	58%
Several times a week	32	32%
Once a month	4	4%
Once every few month	2	2%

For the most preferred forms of maintaining contacts between users, 82% of respondents posted annotations, 75% comment, 34% writing posts on the board, 16% chose discussion, 2% invitations to use applications, while for 12% of respondents support takes other forms of relationship (the possibility to choose up to three answers). For those declaring scoring or opinions on friends' photos, 97% of respondents, and the main reason for making this activity is sympathy for their friends – 77%, the desire to draw attention on yourself and others to

obtain a response from them – 14%, 2% of respondents want to persuade through this action to view and opinions on your photos, 1% likes to express their views on other people, while 6% of the respondents had other reasons to engage in these activities.

The global reach of *Facebook* has contributed to formation of a number of acquaintanceships between people from all over the world. 44% of users have worldwide contacts while 56% do not have acquaintanceship of this type. Respondents when asked whether one of their friends can include people from other countries, which are not of Polish nationality, 58% responded affirmatively (42% do not have friends from other countries), in addition to 43% of cases, acquaintanceship of these have been included on *Facebook*. However, 57% of respondents have friends from other countries who have concluded their acquaintanceship by means other than the present social networking site. The question to the people who got to know friends (from other countries) through use of the site: “Would you have had a chance to get to know these people in the real world, without this portal?” 58% of respondents said yes, 40% say that would not be possible, but 2% don't know.

It can be argued that *Facebook* is a portal that gives a chance to get acquaintanceship and contacts that could not exist in the real world. It can be concluded that virtual space offers the prospect to shy people or people, who have problems with interpersonal contacts. of getting to know new people. Forms of relationships are possible which do not require direct contact which is often helpful. It can be assumed that virtual friendships are established based on mutual discussions, interests, passions, and the virtual friendship which is the ground on which this relationship is created.

The third thematic block was designed to identify the forms of organization of leisure time chosen by users of the portal www.facebook.com. Many of the respondents, with the possibility of indicating the three options in the question “What activity occupies your spare time?” responded: involvement in issues relating to [facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) (64%), watching television (60%), meeting with friends (57%), Internet use (55%), plus: sport (22%), the activity of a hobby (15%), reading books (12%), other (11%), participation in cultural events (4%). Despite the large number of people engaged in leisure time in matters related to the portal in answer to the question “How often do you spend time on activities that are not related to the use of *Facebook*?” answers were quite varied: very often, leisure time spent on activities not related to the portal, 35%, 25% stated that they often arranged such activities, 22% said rarely, while 18% – very rarely. Very often, leisure time spent on activities not related to the portal, 35%, 25% stated that they often arranged such activities, 22% said they rarely did, while 18% – very rarely.

Table 3. How often do you spend free time for activities that are not related to the use of Facebook?

	Number of respondents	Percent
Often	25	25%
Very often	35	35%
Rarely	22	22%
Very rare	18	18%

It would be baseless to assume that the activity of Facebook users in their free time is variable and is not subordinated solely to one type of activity (using services offered by social networking site [Facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)).

Facebook developers offer a range of privacy settings intended to form a convenience to users. Privacy settings offered by the service are in line with the needs of 75% of respondents, while for 25% they are not satisfactory. On the question of a sense of security when sharing information on *Facebook*, 69% of the correspondents concluded that they feel safe making public information about themselves, while 31% of the respondents feel less comfortable. The popularity of *Facebook.com* can not only provide a wide range of users having to provide entertainment, as well as a convenient way to communicate with friends, but also a number of privacy settings, where the application allows users to feel safe.

Concluding Remarks

In the course of these studies we encountered several problems. The assumptions of the study were based on the opinions of 100 users of the social networking site *Facebook.com*. According to the snowball sampling method, chosen by people who gave their consent to participate in the study being asked to indicate the other users of *Facebook*, which according to them also to choose to participate in the study. By using this approach in the short term we gained a rapid increase in respondent numbers. However, part of the declared respondents did not complete the questionnaires. Another problem which we come across was a long time waiting for the return of completed questionnaires.

This article shows that research conducted by a diagnostic survey method using the Internet can be equally useful and effective to those performed by the same method using traditional media. Application of a diagnostic survey carried out by using the Internet is increasingly in common use under more favorable conditions of measurement. Questionnaires sent by this method may be filled at any time of day, when you have the time. This is a facility resulting in a greater willingness to participate in the study, and the sense of anonymity. Research in virtual space may include specific social groups, clearly defining their nature or conditions of membership. Researchers somehow get into the functioning of the virtual environment of persons who are guided by specific objectives of the contacts. It is worth remembering that modern man will observe and participate in the new phenomena that take place only in the virtual world. Be prepared for more vigorous pace of covering the different spheres of human life, requiring changes in diagnosis, which is an alternative diagnostic test conducted over the Internet.

Please note that an Internet survey by the nature of its many qualities carries the risk associated with the reliability of respondents to whom it is addressed. The researcher is not always able to check who is genuinely responding to questions. However, the approach chosen was a snowball, in which respondents on the current trends were a group of one hundred people whose responses you would have reason to trust to avoid problems associated with the identity and authenticity of those surveyed. Indication of the growing number of multi-faceted involvement in numbers of people participating on social networking sites makes it possible to forecast their dynamic development and the basic ground for interpersonal relations. A less attractive method as a result of inadequacy to the needs of service users, carries the risk of extinction of some of the portals and their displacement by the more interesting ones. Expectations are dependent on current trends, the share held by particular groups of Internet users and availability of services which are promoted by the public and businesses. Portals are not only becoming a meeting place for friends and acquaintances, but they are a field of

advertising by shops and companies who have set up profiles. Time spent on such projects will become an indispensable part of modern life. Thus, it is seen that all changes and modifications of social networking sites can become quite unpredictable in its scope. But surely the place of virtual meetings will be a significant player in the lives of more people. Research methods should be adapted to the virtual world, while the survey may become a method worth recommending the exploration of web space. With skilful use of the method, a virtual survey should not in any way supplant a survey conducted in the real world.

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Hermeneutic photography analysis in researching virtual self-presentation

ABSTRACT

This article proposes employing the hermeneutic photography analysis technique in research performed on internet social networks. The first part describes the research technique stressing the role of the author/director in comprehending, interpreting and decoding the meaning of the picture. The second part presents the research performed on websites: *nasza-klasa* (one of the most popular social networks in Poland) and an equivalent called *odnoklassniki* whose members come from or live in the former Soviet Union. The research problem is focused on the question of self-presentation. The results present examples of using self-presentation techniques by authors of photograph galleries in the selected internet communities. Finally, the weaknesses and strengths of hermeneutic photography analysis which have been found in the research are presented.

Key words: photography, comprehending and interpreting images, image meaning, self-presentation, hermeneutic photography analysis, Computer-mediated communication (CMC), social network

Understanding reality through interpreting photographic image

‘Monsieur Joseph-Nicephore Niepce [...] He creates sunlight images, just like Thomas Wedgwood, but differently [...].’

‘What is the method?’

‘Monsieur Niepce is able to protect his images from darkening in the sun – to a certain degree, using nitric acid. He has also attempted to make a copying matrix. [...] Now he is experimenting with substances which harden in sunlight instead of darkening because that way it is easier to clean the areas which have not come in contact with sunlight, and then remove them by etching. But he has not found a suitable substance yet [...].’

‘So if he finds it, the lines and shadows formed by the acid and then filled with ink will create an image’

[Darwin, 2008, pp. 309–310]

The first photographic image was created in 1826 (or 1827), presenting a view of nature. It was taken by Joseph Niepce [Wielka Encyklopedia PWN, 2003]. Since then, over nearly two centuries, many people have worked on improving the degree in which the images represent reality and the quickness and simplicity of the process.

Taking a photograph is an interpretation of a piece of reality and image analysis is an attempt to comprehend this interpretation. The category of comprehension, which is the

basis of hermeneutical research, was introduced by the founders of the interpretative paradigm – Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber. The former considered hermeneutics as the correct method of cognizing the social world [Kozakiewicz, 1991, p. 66]. The *Verstehen* research procedure based on re-experiencing [Krasnodębski, 1986, p. 85] was to guarantee objectivity in humanities [Krasnodębski, 1986, p. 85]. W. Dilthey's concept was severely criticized by the scientific community. Only when pursued by M. Weber, “the father of understanding sociology” [Malewski, 1998, p. 29], did the understanding method gain wider acceptance. In contrast with his predecessor, instead of proposing direct experience as a means of understanding the social world, M. Weber complemented understanding with rational explanation [Benton & Craib, 2003, p. 75]. Therefore according to M. Weber not “empathic Verstehen”, as proposed by W. Dilthey, but “understanding explanation” or “explanatory understanding” is the basic sociological method [Benton & Craib, 2003, p. 75].

The feeling of solidarity or empathy with the person seen in a photograph was popularized by the photographs of Louis Vert. Their dynamism contrasted with the static images produced by the photographers of that time. Vert's photographs showed people in motion-performing everyday tasks, caught in a usual situation [Jeffrey, 2008, pp. 38–39]. Such photographs seem not to have been directed or arranged. Hence, they may seem more vivid, authentic and so inspire a different reflection in the viewer than do portraits. An important factor is where the photograph lies on the art-realism continuum, similarly as with paintings, which depending on the intention of the author could perform a documenting and preserving or an artistic function. For example in the 1930s conveying a meaning became one of the main aims of photography. One of the means to this end was to juxtapose several photographs which presented a history or metaphor – as e.g. Walker Evans's photographs published in *American Photographs*. They showed a young girl and a woman on separate photographs, juxtaposed so that the people seemed to look at each other – the girl looked into the future, while the woman looked into the past [Jeffrey, 2008, pp. 222–223]. Arranging images into a history is also popular nowadays as a way to convey meaning. A chronological arrangement of photographs in an album presents the story of a person's life. It is easy to take photographs quickly which makes it possible to tell the story of a specific, short situation using photographs with captions. Even an amateur director/author can now utilize many means to convey meaning, and interpret reality through an image. The basic elements of an image – featured in professional as well as amateur photographs – are: space, line, shape, tone, colour, motion and rhythm [Block, 2010, p. 2]. The meanings are decoded by different research techniques. One of them, which contains all the aforementioned aspects (interpretation and comprehension of the meanings conveyed by the author) is hermeneutical analysis.

Hermeneutics cannot be treated as a means of collecting research material. It is a certain research philosophy, or – as described by Mieczysław Malewski – “a proposed cognitive perspective towards the world” [Malewski, 1998, p. 31]. The essence of this perspective is perpetual interpretation through consecutive viewings of the text and negotiating meanings with the author of the text. Photographs also can be treated as a text (as can every work of art which is part of human culture), and even more an oral or written description of a photograph, the context in which it was taken and the context in which it is exhibited.

Hermeneutic analysis, which is the leading method of this research concentrates most profoundly on the author of the photographs [Sztompka, 2005, p. 77]. We have broadened the term “author”, understanding it not only as the person who physically took the picture, but most importantly the person who selects the photographs and exhibits, describes and com-

ments on them – “gives them life”. Therefore the author is here understood as the author of the photograph gallery presented in a social network.

The problem of photograph authors is vital in qualitative analysis. “Photographing is never a neutral act, for the experience of the photographer binds him/her directly to the registered object – through the choice of the distance, perspective and cropping” [Olechnicki, 2000, p. 137] Depending on whether it is a spontaneously taken photograph or an organized session, the interpretation of reality may begin either at the stage of setting the lens or earlier – at the **directing**¹ stage, before the scene is photographed. Photograph enhancement is the next stage of directing. It is worth noting that the author of the photograph is not necessarily the person who triggered the camera. It is more complex – often it is the object who decides about the final look of the photograph – through choosing props, the perspective and then selecting the photographs and enhancing them. Being the author/director of the photograph may manifest itself at different stages of creating the image:

- a) taking the photograph (*distance from the object, perspective, the object's posture, choosing props*);
- b) enhancing the photograph (*cropping the background; color; saturation; correcting the object's appearance, adding frames*);
- c) promoting the photograph (*promoter choice, topic/caption added to the photograph, the place where it is promoted*).

All these factors significantly affect how the photograph is perceived and interpreted. Notably, the author/director may be a third party as well as the object shown in the photograph. The so-called “handheld” photographs are popular in social networks, where one photographs oneself by holding the camera at arm's length; self-timers are also widely used. Even if the photograph is triggered by a third party, the object may direct the image by choosing props, providing guidelines to the person behind the camera, and later by enhancing the photograph.

The image alone without any additional description and comments by the author may be an object extraordinarily difficult to interpret scientifically, if it is indeed at all possible. That is why hermeneutic analysis may be especially useful to interpret photographs even in addition to other techniques. Firstly, hermeneutics allow for employing the researcher's pre-understanding. Secondly, it complements the researcher's interpretations with the author's. Simplifying, the research procedure in a hermeneutic perspective is as follows:

- a) pre-understanding (the researcher uses the knowledge which he had acquired before commencing the research process – designating the research areas);
- b) understanding (I stage of interpreting);
- c) horizon fusion (II stage of interpreting – negotiating the meanings with the author of the photograph or gallery).

Pre-understanding, which is connected with the researcher's knowledge acquired outside of the research may be successfully used at any stage of the research process. It is the knowledge which is referred and discussed during interpreting. Negotiating meanings with the author allows us to deepen the understanding and avoid over interpreting. It can be done by means of interviewing or photograph titles, descriptions, comments (and the author's answers to other people's comments about the photograph) may be used.

¹ More information about directing images can be found in: Piejko, 2008, p. 35; Frąckowiak, 2008, p. 3.

Research problem and environment

The research problem refers to the idea of self-presentation. This question is a relatively new term in science. Regular research of self-presentation was begun simultaneously by Erving Goffman (in sociology) and Edward Jones (in psychology) [Leary, 2007, pp. 18–29]. Since then the interest in this problem has been gradually increasing, not only among scientists. For an ordinary reader it may be interesting to consider self-presentation in the context of affecting others, manipulation. It is exemplified by the popularity of the book by Robert B. Cialdini (2004). Self-presentation (manipulating the impression) is here understood as by Mark Leary: "...the process in which an individual controls the way in which they are perceived by their environment" [Leary, 2007, p. 27]. This research was aimed at virtual self-presentation – it is the primary function used in social networks, which is expressed in the idea of self-broadcasting and auto-creation in cyberspace [Piechura, 2008, p. 51].

The number of created galleries, differences in age, education, etc. in the users prove that the phenomenon of self-broadcasting is ubiquitous on the internet. However, in contrast to other media there is no selection of the "elite" who can publicize their image on a large scale. After a brief evolution it is no longer the "elite" (in this context *digerati*² [Brockman, 1996, Zawojski, 2010] – digital elite) that shapes the medium, but ordinary users, the "net mob" [Zawojski, 2010, pp. 22–27]. The internet has made experimenting with their publicized image possible for anyone with internet access. Widespread access and the services provided on the internet make it possible to consider it *a continuation of the real world*. Even creating a fictional character in an imaginary world of social networks such as "secondlife.com" or MUD and MMORPG games the user shapes it considering how it will be perceived by others. Social networks may provide clear information on self-presentation. It is firstly because of their function (having different specific aims, they all require self-presentation), secondly because they assume presenting authentic user data. Two websites were chosen for this research: *nasza-klasa* (one of the most popular social networks in Poland) and an equivalent called *odnoklassniki*, whose members come from of live in the former Soviet Union. This choice made it possible to consider the intercultural aspect, although it must be noted that this was not comparative research. Seventeen galleries were chosen, eight in *odnoklassniki* and nine in *nasza-klasa*. Each person has been marked with a capital letter and an "n" or an "o" to mark *nasza-klasa* and *odnoklassniki*, accordingly.

Apart from interpreting photography itself, descriptions and comments were also analyzed and interviews have been conducted with the authors.

The proposed aspects which we believe are to be considered in hermeneutic analysis are: Figure-background relation; Inter-figure relation; Photograph enhancement; Photograph-text (title, description, comment) relation; Photograph descriptions (anchor/link [vide: R. Barthes 1977 as cited in Sztompka, 2005, p. 79]); Visitors' comments and author's replies; Authorship/directing of the photograph; Main photograph (available for anyone) – the rest of the photographs (often available only for friends) relation.

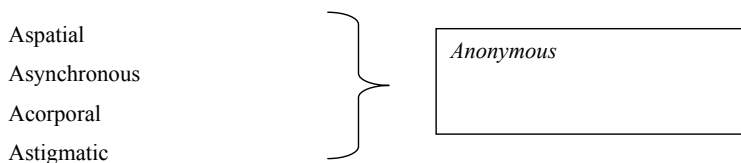
² "Digital" and "literati" as in *glitterati* – Renaissance writers (cylebrities) – the first generation of cyberelite. This term was first used by the editor of *Time Race* in 1992 (Zawojski, 2010).

Findings

“Photographs not only document the events of our times, but photographing itself and communicating via icon codes has become part of contemporary culture” [Krzychała, 2008, p. 9]. Photographs are becoming a “trigger” or even a “means of communication” and not only people with close relations. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) differs not only from direct communication. The specificity of CMC has made many researchers separate it from communication and communicating via other media. To characterize mass media messages, mass communication theory has been used since the beginning of the twentieth century. This problem has been described in detail by Denis McQuain [2008]. Considering the interaction between the sender and the recipient, the internet differs from other media and it is noticed by Peter Winterhoff-Spurk – “for the first time in mass broadcasting history the media are beginning to be defined not by concrete though diverse broadcasting technologies, but by different utilization of the same technology” [Winterhoff-Spurk, 2007, p. 17]. This communication is of “many-to-many” type, where the senders are at the same time the recipients. The cited author proposes calling this communication “interactive, or participative mass communication, or netcasting” [Winterhoff-Spurk, 2007, p. 17].

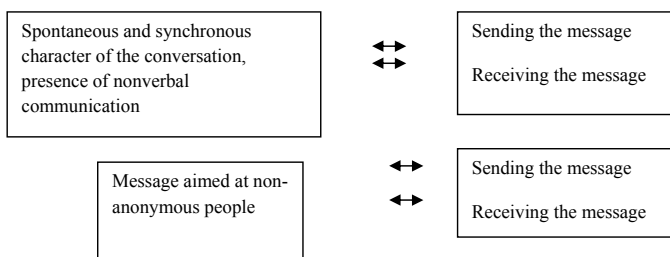
The most characteristic features of computer-mediated communication are shown in the figure below.

CMC Features³ according to **Marc A. Smith**⁴



Considering the above, it is possible to analyze what differences may arise in self-presentation based on the type of communication.

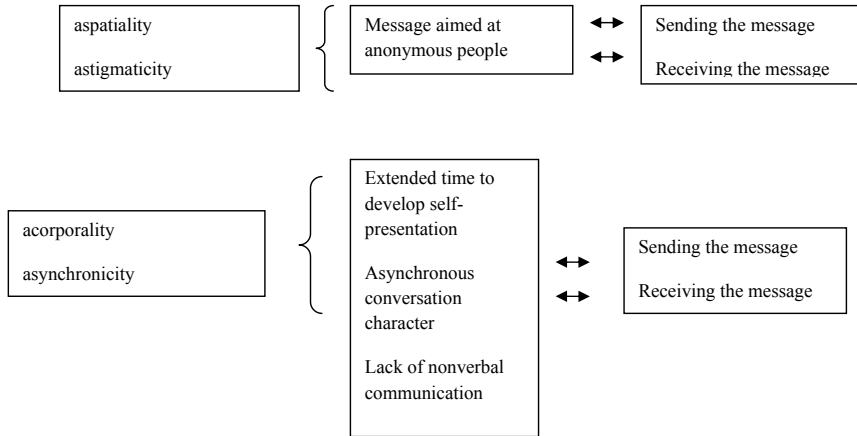
Self-presentation in direct communication



³ CMC researchers also name its other features. The chosen classification shows the most common ones. (According to John Suler, one of the features of cyberspace is *Recordability* – registering communication. Being conscious of the fact that one’s conversations are registered e.g. in text form may affect communication [Suler, 1996]).

⁴ Based on: [Smith, 1992].

Self-presentation in CMC⁵



Posting photographs in social networks and revealing true names instead of nicknames have largely reduced the features presented above (except asynchronicity and acorporality). That is why it may be believed that people enjoy the more direct character of communication and its attractiveness may be defined mainly by the wide broadcast and asynchronicity, which allows the development of self-presentation over an extended period of time. This research concentrated mainly on finding which self-presentation techniques may be utilized in social networks through such a means as photography and the accompanying descriptions and comments. Widely used in everyday life self-presentation techniques include: self-description, expressing attitude, public attributions, memory manipulation, nonverbal behavior, social contact, decoration, props and lighting [Leary, 2007, p. 52].

Self-description is the most direct technique, consisting of a verbal description of one's self [Leary, 2007, p. 30]. In social networks the users cannot speak of themselves, but they can write, which might be considered a substitute for verbal description. Such self-describing is often featured in photograph descriptions. Here are some examples: "Beautiful girls:D" (Author: Cn); "I'm handsome, am I not? I'm hot" (Author: Jn); "My sexy back with my sexy tattoo" (Author: Jn). Apparently these descriptions are of humorous nature or at least are so perceived. Enumerating one's attractive features may be treated as boasting and arrogant. That is why the descriptions are sometimes indirect [Leary, 2007, p. 52]. These diplomatic auto-descriptions include quotations placed under the photographs, not referring directly to the author, but forming a whole together with the photograph – and so describing the author. For example: "a woman must strive to be aflame, with a bright flame, alight with passion, words, ideas and the longing for what she loves, whatever that might be" (Author: Cn). Another type of self-description is simply an uncaptioned photo showing the author in a special situation – the author's successes or passions (e.g. Master or Bachelor exams, parachute jumps, etc.).

Photographs in social networks may be used to express one's attitudes, which is another self-presentation technique. These are also photographs showing the author in a special situ-

⁵ Based on the characterization of CMC presented by Marc A. Smith [1992].

ation (demonstrations, parades, acting as a volunteer during a flood). An example of such a photograph is one posted by author Po, showing her together with her friends at the Orange Revolution in Kiev. It has recently become popular on *nasza-klasa* to post so-called demotivators⁶, which may also reflect the author's attitude to various phenomena, institutions, etc. users attitudes are also presented using photographs which show an activity, gesture, facial expression of the author together with a caption explaining the attitude. For example: a photograph showing the author drinking beer, caption: "after the exam! between classes! or before! or during, who would remember?" (Author: Jn). Another photograph: the author with an explicit gesture, caption: "facing the client" (Author: Jn).

It is difficult to assess whether the technique described as "public attributions" is used. The authors do not have to explain their actions, because if a photograph shows them in a negative way, it is simply not posted. What is more, the authors can remove negative comments which might compromise them. That is why defense attributions – whose usage helps explain one's actions by giving some convenient reason [Leary, 2007, p. 34] – cannot appear in the author's gallery, because communication asynchronicity allows one to take the time to think about and select the content which the author may wish to share with others.

Another technique, whose occurrence is also difficult to infer on the sole basis of photographs with descriptions/comments are "memory manipulations". This technique is surely used on websites, e.g. when a person is added to the list of friends after having sent an invitation, even though the other user is not sure whether they have met. Verifying this would require using another (other than photography analysis) research technique.

The self-presentation technique which is described as "nonverbal behavior" spans expressing emotion, external appearance, gestures and movement [Leary, 2007, p. 52].

Presenting nonverbal behavior is limited in computer-aided communication. However, certain substitutes may be found which arguably allow for nonverbal communication. People in the photographs may show emotion e.g. by smiling. Authors may also pose in certain ways, gesticulate (an example having been presented above). Another way to show emotion is by adding emoticons to photograph descriptions/comments. The users' external appearance is very important. Some people stressed that they do not undertake any specific preparations before taking the photograph, they only correct their makeup (Authors: Cn, Zo), hair (Authors: Bn, Cn). There were also those who mentioned meticulous preparations: "*I'll take care to prepare – I'm thinking about the clothes, makeup, poses*" (Author: No).

Another self-presentation technique consists of controlling the information concerning the people one is linked to [Leary, 2007, p. 34]. Observation and interviews with the authors reveal that meaningful people who appear in the users galleries are mostly their *children, partners/spouses, parents and friends*.

Usually they are the users' children. In the case of friends or even partners/spouses the problem of their agreement to publicize their image arises. The question gets even more complicated if the users wish to post photographs with their colleagues from work. Photographs of children are often directed, special props are used and the descriptions are written in a manner which makes it seem it was written by the children themselves. People closely related to the author are shown in a good light, which may be a consequence of the self-presentation

⁶ "**Demotivator** (demotivating image) – a meaningful image or photograph together with a commenting caption. A demotivator is usually ironic (is supposed to ridicule reality) or cynical" [<http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demotywatory>].

technique which M. Leary describes as “basking in reflected light” [Leary, 2007]. Posting photographs of important people may also be considered with reference to manifesting the “independent self” and the “interdependent self” in the context of intercultural differences. Despite the fact that the culture of Russian and Polish language websites are more closely related than the decidedly different cultures of East and West (e.g. such countries as the USA and Japan), some important differences are however apparent. What has been noticed is that on the Russian website there are more photographs showing family, friends and colleagues than on the Polish website. Perhaps defining oneself by links to others is more typical for Russian culture than for Polish.

The last of the considered self-presentation techniques refers to the space and objects surrounding a person. In photographs posted in social networks only fragments of the surroundings are seen. However, using “decoration”, “props” and “lighting” may also be noticed here. Manipulating the lighting is done by retouching the photograph – lightening, darkening or altering the colour. The interviewed claimed that they do not change anything in the photographs apart from resizing when they post it. However, black-and-white photographs were found in their galleries. This manipulation has ceased to be considered a profound intervention in the image. But still, people who change a colour photograph into a black-and-white one have some intention of “improving” the photograph. Decorations are mostly the background of the photographs. It can be nature or various interesting places that the authors were visiting during their journeys. The background is sometimes captioned as well. These can also be everyday places for the authors, and they wish to show them. One of the authors presented several photographs taken in different rooms in her new apartment. Another author's photographs show his workplace. Presenting space via photographs may positively affect the general impression, because it is the author who decides what is to be highlighted and what should remain unseen. The photograph may be taken in the most attractive room without revealing the fact that the rest of the apartment is still unfinished. The props also perform a key role in self-presentation. For women popular props are flowers – some photographs include a description of what the occasion for receiving the flowers was, some simply show a smiling face with a bouquet. Props also include cars – photographs usually show people standing next to their cars (both men and women), on *odnoklassniki* we have found more photographs showing people with their sports equipment (bicycles, kayaks, etc.). Men also post photographs with their hunting or sports firearms. Such photographs have been found both on *nasza-klasa* and on *odnoklassniki*.

Both interviews and observation show that the topics of posted photographs are either the author or an interesting place the author has visited, or an important event: “I post photographs from events which are important in my life (e.g. my wedding J), places I have visited, meetings with friends” (Author: An). “I mainly post photographs from fascinating places I have visited, and in them should be the people who I visit these places with, who I share my adventures with” (Author: En).

These photographs are meaningful and they are supposed to present the topic in a positive way. If they feature the author, aesthetic appearance is important: “If I am in the picture, I should look good and attractive in my view” (Author: Zo); “So that all the people (in the photograph) look well” (Author: Go); “I have to look good and it has to be interesting, non-standard in some way” (author: Bn); “Everyone sometimes likes the way they look in a photograph and sometimes not, so I'm sure I post these photographs in which I consider myself attractive” (Author: Cn). Some authors highlighted that the photograph should reflect the author's personality (Author: No). If the topic is a place or an event, than the aesthetical value

of the photograph is important: "If it's a place, it has to be a nice photograph" (Author: Zo). The choice of photographs which the authors wish to share with others is not random – they are the photographs which the authors especially like (Authors: To, Ko), which they believe others may like: "I think photographs should carry a meaning and a positive emotional message for the viewer" (Author: Cn). Provoking emotion in the viewer was mentioned by other authors: "Nice (photos) e.g. from a trip or funny ones" (author: Mn); "There is no rule. It has to be either funny or from an interesting place or interesting event" (Author: Jn); "Nice, funny or meaningful" (Author: Gn). This last citation contains the criteria for selecting the photographs which were mentioned by nearly all the users. It may be the aesthetical value, the weight of the topic or the humorous depiction of the situation – but the picture should make a good impression on the viewer and so – provide a good impression of the author.

To sum up, posting photographs in social networks and describing the images provides wide possibility to employ almost every common self-presentation technique, regardless of the limitations of CMC.

Communication in social networks is established through presenting oneself as well as assessing other users. The authors were asked what their grades/comments on their friends' photographs are based on. Interestingly, comments do not have to be connected with any real interest in the photograph – they are often provided as a repayment for the other user's previous comments or to express general fondness for the user. "Automatically, as an answer to their being nice" (Author: No); "Nothing special, I think that often it is supposed to seem polite or being nice in exchange – comment for comment" (Author: Mn); "Mainly for the originality, but I also post them when they bring positive feelings or simply because I like someone and I want them to feel good" (Author: Bn); "For interesting photographs and for the people who are important to me" (Author: Go). Adding comments is also connected with expressing emotion inspired by the photograph: "For the photographs which make me smile and make me happy J when I want to say: you look great J" (Author: An), as well as when the photograph is enjoyed on the basis of its originality, topic or technical features: "I rank photos when I like them and I comment on them if I feel like writing about them, when something comes to my mind" (Author: To); "For an interesting, joyful photograph" (Author: Cn); "For especially interesting or entertaining shots, well taken photographs. Most of all technically correct, well framed, etc." (Author: En); "Originality, sense of humor, warmth coming from the picture" (Author: Lo).

Apparently, some aspects of what people may enjoy in their own and in other people's photographs are consistent: humorous character, originality, aesthetics. Interestingly, while concerning their own photographs the authors stressed the importance of appearance, this aspect seems not to be important when assessing other people's photographs.

Conclusion

Registering material with a photographic camera is extraordinarily precise – it provides a lot of collateral and contextual data [Olechnicki, 2000, p. 119]. Other advantages of this tool – the same accuracy over all of its working time and gathering material which is easy to segregate and store [Olechnicki, 2000, p. 119]. Any doubts which may distort the material are situated primarily in two areas – the first being the researcher's sensitivity of observation, the second – manipulation of the image in directing and enhancing the material [Olechnicki,

2000, pp. 118–119]. Both areas refer to the intention competence of the author. In the case of interpreting photographs posted on the internet, it is the researched person (or another person who took the photographs) who is the author of the photograph, and not the researcher. Four advantages of internet photography analysis have been found: a wide selection of photographs, a view on the discussion between the author and other users about the photographs and the ability to analyze the photographs on an intercultural level. Difficulty and doubt arise e.g. in the ethical area: the photographs are publicly available for everyone including the researcher, but if contact with the author cannot be established, there is the question of his approval of the research. Encouraging internet users to participate in research is not an easy task, as a consequence of: the users' fear of spam⁷ and manipulation; their unhappiness caused by multiple attempts to conduct research on the internet. The researcher's credibility is also a problem, resulting from his anonymity (lack of direct contact). Another difficulty in analyzing internet photography is that some users make their albums available for everyone while others – only for their friends. This may result in people granting universal full access (or being the researcher's friends) being researched more often which considerably narrows the research perspective.

In the end it is important to note the areas that should be taken into account when researching self-presentation in a culturally diverse environment. These aspects have been stressed in this research and should be deepened by employing additional research techniques.

	Analyzed areas	Intercultural context
	Self-presentation	Cultural models and values expected and promoted in the cultural environment
C H A N N E L	Computer-mediated communication	The degree of distortion of the message by the medium, e.g. as a result of lack of access to a Cyrillic keyboard
M E A N S	Language – verbal (writing), nonverbal (emoticons)	1) Language codes created by the cultural environment
	Image (photograph)	1) Elements exposed in the photograph – props. Background (places). 2) Background-figure relation 3) Elements of the external appearance of the figure (clothing, makeup, etc.)

The researched environments are nearly identical in their functions, rules and aims stated by the administrators, but they affect their users differently. There are for example bilingual people who participate in both websites, however their profiles are not identical – they differ

⁷ A month before I commenced this research, someone hacked into my *odnoklassniki* account and started sending spam messages to other users. When I change my password and the spamming ceased my messages were still not treated as credible by some users.

in the number of photographs, descriptions, highlighted content, etc. An interesting issue is the text font used on *odnoklassniki*. Many of this website's users currently live outside the former USSR, e.g. in Germany, Poland, the USA. Not all of them possess Cyrillic-supporting keyboards so they usually write Russian words using the Latin alphabet. Depending on their location, they use different symbols for the phonemes. The users develop certain language codes whose deciphering is in time possible for new people but it may be of some difficulty for the researcher. In the light of the above problems, we believe employing content analysis apart from photography interpretation should facilitate the research, especially since this technique has already been partly used while interpreting the photograph descriptions and comments.

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Postmodern exhibitionism on the Internet – an analysis of photos appearing on selected social networking sites

ABSTRACT

Today we are witnessing a rapid transformation of key areas of human life – social, economic, cultural and technological. On the cultural level we are dealing with the so called “instant culture” that is symbolized by the famous triad: fast food, fast sex and fast cars – life focused on unlimited consumption, living for “immediacy” and “the immediate” and with media created illusions, that have become our everyday life [Melosik, 2005]. Moreover the present is orientated towards physicality and sexuality, which combined with the hedonistic and consumerist approach, limits the role of a partner to “utility”, allowing immediate sexual satisfaction without commitment and involvement. At the same time we often withdraw from reality and turn towards virtual space which replaces it – cyberspace, where we transfer all the above behaviour. The Cyber sphere gives people an illusion of anonymity and freedom, which in turn makes it easier and more likely that they will expose themselves – including physicality – sometimes in a lot braver fashion than would happen in social reality. Such behaviour, may be called a social Internet/network exhibitionism. It manifests itself in a distinctive marking of one's presence in the life of the Internet community with unfettered accentuation of one's sexuality. Examples of this type of behaviour are photos posted on various social network sites. Photos illustrating social exhibitionism, will provide research material, through which we will present an analysis of images as a method of testing the web space.

Key words: post-modernity, sexuality, exhibitionism, Internet, social networking sites, photos analysis of photographs

Today we are witnessing a rapid transformation of key areas of human life – social, economic, cultural and technological. On the cultural level we are dealing with the so called “instant culture”, which refers to “...habit and necessity of life in the »immediacy«. Instant culture is symbolized by the famous triad: fast food, fast sex, fast cars. Fast food includes the microwave oven, a cup of instant coffee, McDonald's and Coca-Cola [...]. Fast sex is an immediate sexual satisfaction, of which an exemplification is Viagra – »instant sex« without commitment and emotional involvement [...]. Finally a fast car is a symbol of shrinking time and space [...]. Instant culture is also characterized by »immediacy« of communication: phone, fax, e-mail, television stations, MTV and CNN. Another good example is plastic surgery (as an immediate form of obtaining ideal body, youth and beauty), a supermarket and the Internet” [Melosik, 2005, p. 15]. The natural environment for young people is a world of unlimited consumption of goods, services, and sometimes consumption of the “other man”. This is somewhat due to moral relativism and professing an axiological hedonism – which perceives pleasure as the

highest value. "The consumer has to seek his fortune, without the slightest hesitation and prefers items that deliver maximum satisfaction" [Melosik, 2005, p. 15].

Moreover we all live in an age dominated by mass media – youth follows its designs and based on it builds a structure of values, which serve as a guide in the real world. Another aspect having an influence on life in modern times is a rejection of stability and monotony – and sometimes even fear of them – a tradeoff for constant change. Young people set on unlimited consumption, living in the "immediacy" and "immediate" and next to media created illusions, cannot and do not want to wait for anything. "Under the influence of media messages young people are convinced that their daily duty is not only "immediate pleasure", but also to maximize the experience. The message, they receive, states that they should "not opt out of anything", and that they should "try everything". They live as if every day were the "last day of their lives" – "always on the top" [Melosik, 2005, p. 21]. In addition, the present is orientated towards the cult of the body and sexuality. There is a compulsion to have an exciting and rich sexual life, which in modern consumer culture is not a problem. Youth magazines and television, promote the idea of so called "...»recreational sex«, which in no case serves to deepen the emotional ties between its participants, but to provide entertainment and excitement..." [Melosik, 2005, p. 22]. Sex is one of the "products" that we "have" as much as a new computer or iPod. At the same time other people are relegated to the role of objects, which – according to consumerism and hedonism – we can use, then "throw away" or exchange for "better model". On the other hand, emphasis is placed on the body, showing that our sexuality – makes today the core of our identity. This applies mainly to young women who feel that beautiful looks – symbolized by a lean and firm body – is their duty. In order to look like models from the covers of popular magazines, or singers bending half-naked bodies in music videos, they torment themselves with diets, apply various cosmetics, and when it does not help – visit the plastic surgeon. All the above trends have an impact on the emergence of some new social behaviour, which had not existed up till now on such a large scale. Jacek Kurzępa names them with term "social exhibitionism," understood as "...the behaviour of the individual, which in a striking, and sometimes over-expressed, way manifests its presence in the life of a group, peer or social environment in general. The nature, indication and motivation of exhibitionist behavior in the social sense are sometimes different, their common theme is the desire, need or an attempt to *mark their presence*, including its display in order to offset the effects of a specific state of deprivation linked to different categories of needs and/or different types of motivation" [Kurzępa, 2005, p. 125]. J. Kurzępa lists six types of social exhibitionism: compensatory, therapeutic, aggressive-compulsive, of provocative identity, narcissistic, and resistance. Compensation exhibitionism is to compensate for certain deficiencies. In this case, provocative behavior may appear due to the lack of certain needs, such as recognition, acceptance, low self-esteem, but also a desire to "exist" and "distinguish oneself". Therapeutic exhibitionism, in turn, is based on units of excessive openness to other people, even strangers. It manifests itself in exaggerated and unfettered exuberance in intimate and private issues. The purpose of this type of behavior is somehow to achieve mental *catharsis* – sharing concerns, fears, problems with other people, gives comfort and brings balance.

The main feature of aggressive exhibitionism is targeting various forms of aggression against everyone and everything. Such behaviour aims to intimidate others, and to seek to challenge their positions and arguments.

In the case of compulsive exhibitionism the main goal is to "...respond, to keep in line with the mechanism of »action-reaction«. [...] Excessive disclosure of one's emotions, state of mind, opinions and evaluation of a variety of messages that can be interpreted as the appli-

cation of 'attack is the best defense' tactics, meaning such reaction in relation to an environment that is disproportionate to the impulse" [Kurzępa, 2005, p. 129].

Exhibitionism of provocative identity is associated mainly with the behaviour of minority groups, which in general opinion are considered deviant. This type is primarily designed to provoke, but also involves incentives to search for acceptance and identity. Exhibitionism of resistance is associated with "...fundamentalist behavior, or those which clearly represent significant borders of tolerance for individual difference in both thoughts and actions, attitudes and behaviour [...] It is, in most cases, exaggerated behaviour, with sharp contours, that could be described according to the slogan: 'I am thoroughly ideological'" [Kurzępa, 2005, p. 132].

The last but not least manifestation of exhibitionistic behavior is a narcissistic exhibitionism. Grounds for narcissistic behaviour are the need to be recognized, admired and being in the spotlight. Self-presentation of that kind usually have physical and sexual connotations. In social life we can see it fully only in selected places such as discotheques – "...room trembles from the deafening techno music, rhythmic, edgy uncontrolled movements, youth is going bonkers, here and there glows fluorescent clothing of teenagers, that burst on the platform (the proscenium, to the 'cage') with great eagerness. There with full exposure from every part of the audience, expose their lithe bodies. From time to time they glance in the mirror, which is not only to deepen the dimensions of the room, but – more importantly – allows a dancing person (her/him) to enjoy self. Hose and frictional movements, voluptuous lips, wetting and massaging the breast, nothing is inappropriate here, the more erotic, expressive, the better" [Kurzępa, 2005, s. 131].

Increasingly, we withdraw from real life and virtual reality replaces it – cyberspace, where we move all the specific contemporary features. The cyber sphere gives people an illusion of anonymity and freedom which makes it easier and more likely to expose themselves – including their physicality – sometimes a lot braver than would happen in social reality. Exhibitionism on the Web is manifested in a distinctive appearance in the life of the Internet community, mainly through its emphasis on unfettered sexuality. This type of social behaviour can be encountered increasingly easily due to the simplicity and a massive audience. This especially often appears on various social network sites and is designed to focus attention and create awe in the audience.

The culture in which we live is also called the "civilization of the image" [(Konecki, 2005, p. 43], "visual culture", "visual era" [Sztompka, 2005, p. 12]. Piotr Sztompka, speaking of the three historical periods, distinguished by prevailing features of culture, highlighted the *oral age*, *verbal age*, and *visual age* [Sztompka, 2005, p. 12]. The first one is characterized by the dominance of verbal communication in interpersonal communication. The second era – verbal – due to the invention of writing, allows you to consolidate information and experiences and sharing them with the wider circle of people. In a *visual era* the image becomes a means of great importance in mainly interpersonal communication [Sztompka, 2005, pp. 12–13].

This happens because of television, the still growing Internet, cinema and even the press, which by using images, tries to attract the attention of consumers. We live in a culture that is increasingly permeated by visual images. This is what makes the perception of the world around us averaged by the images, therefore, says K. Konecki, it requires the application of research methods that use image [Konecki, 2005, p. 43]. This is even more emphasized by Marcus Banks and his assumption that visual methods are specific, valuable and should be taken into account regardless of the research topic. He adds, however, that it is not about replacing all other methods, only that it should be regarded as one of many methodologies

used by the researcher of society, which in some circumstances is less, and in other, more useful [Banks, 2009, p. 24].

Terms such as “visual sociology” and “visual methods” are very broad in meaning. We, in turn, will be interested only in a fragment of this issue, that is the analysis of photographs. To better understand the photo analysis we need to begin with the issues of visual sociology in general. The main objective of visual sociology, says K. Konecki, is to understand how the various social groups interpret visual images according to their social position and context [Konecki, 2005, p. 43]. Subjects of interest, in turn, are all visual manifestations of social life, everything that can be visually seen and gives data about society [Sztompka, 2005, p. 17], therefore this may relate to paintings, drawings, photography, sculpture, film, video game, advertisement. In our analysis we will cover a single aspect that is related to photographs.

Trying to define these kinds of images we can say that they are part of social reality because they are created by humans, represent social life and are the subject of public perception [Sztompka, 2005, p. 76]. In addition, as noted by J. Szarkowski, photography is a window, but also the mirror [after Sztompka, 2005, s. 75], which allows the photographer to see his or her reflection, a situation in which a photo was taken, his or her culture, age, intentions and motivations [Sztompka, 2005, p. 75].

In other words, the pictures do not reflect reality objectively, as it is, but show images from the photographer's point of view, therefore, beyond what the pictures present, the context of creation is also important. This point of view on pictures is also shared by M. Krajewski, who claims that the photographs do not serve only as a representation of what they refer, they are not “media storage, in which the role dominant paradigm of photographic analysis is trying to embed them” [Kaczmarek, 2008, p. 131] they are more tangible links directing relations between people [Kaczmarek, 2008, p. 131].

Photographs used in visual testing can take two forms. First, they may be empirical materials developed, and thus self-images created by the researcher in documents referred to in research or in order to analyse various aspects of human life [Banks, 2009, p. 27]. These materials are distinguished by the huge influence of researcher on the data obtained. The second type of visual research involves the collection and analysis of the so-called “already existing material,” and therefore not produced by the researcher himself but by other persons [Banks, 2005, p. 28]. In such materials, a researcher's impact is much smaller. These two types of photography need not be used separately in visual studies they can also be combined. Let us look closely at using photography as an already existing material. In this analysis, a specific research project, the researcher collects photographs in order to enrich his description of the surveyed population, getting the material to expand the analysis and interpretation made on the basis of field research applications, or use of photos as evidence helpful in verifying the hypotheses [Konecki, 2005, p. 46]. Such analysis may take place using material previously obtained by the researcher or photographs that are in the public domain, in newspapers and even on websites.

Photos, as empirical material, require reading, in other words, interpretation that could be done at many levels. The first is on the esthetic level, which relates to artistic conventions used to present the subject, so therefore is rarely the focus for sociologists. The second level is the dimension of socio-psychological interpretations which relate to the level of interpersonal and subjective – useful when we are interested in motives of people and their definitions of the given situation. The third dimension – historical and contextual – the purely individual aspect located in the historical process and following an examination of nomothetic and idiographic aspects.

Another dimension is the cultural dimension, in which certain idioms of representation referred to in photographed objects are reflected in the analyzed photographs. Finally, the purely social dimension in which the interpretation of social position or social meaning of photographed objects becomes the center of sociological analysis [Konecki, 2005, pp. 43–44]. Researchers focused on social studies are mainly interested in the dimensions of fifth, fourth, third and second type, graded in order of importance.

The different ways of analyzing images are dependent on the approach to photography. The most interesting and relevant to the study of social phenomena seems to be a critical position. It consists of entering into complex, multilayered meaning encoded in the photograph. According to P. Sztompka such critical task sets itself from the point of view of hermeneutic, semi logic, structuralistic, and discursive analysis of the photographic image [Sztompka, 2005, p. 76].

Hermeneutic analysis looks at the picture from the perspective of the author. Takes into account: who made a picture, in which social role he existed, the situation in which it is located, for what purpose, and with what intention it was done, for whom it was made and whom it was addressed, by what motives it was guided during the choosing of the subject, which stereotypes, prejudices, likes and dislikes contributed to a given approach to the subject, from the perspective of what age, social class, gender, racial, the author perceived his pictures, and by which emotions he was affected. These, as well as other, similar questions are the subject of hermeneutical analysis of the pictures, which penetrates into the realm of subjects and the subjectivity of the author [Sztompka, 2005, p. 78]. The hermenetic image may also relate to the people presented in the image. What we see in the picture are only external, observable characteristics of people and their behaviour, but we can assume that they are only signs or symptoms of hidden states, and that interpretation is to decode these characters [Sztompka, 2005, p. 80].

When we do not observe the author as a subject, but the picture as a visual fact, central importance is gained by structuralist and semiological analysis., which reaches into the realm of culture. The basic idea of semiologic interpretation assumes that the image is a sign or a system of signs, that have hidden cultural meanings [Sztompka, 2005, p. 81]. F. de Saussure's semiology is defined as “the study of the functioning of signs in society” [de Saussure, 2002, p. 16], so in this analysis all sorts of signs are interpreted shown in the photographs of people, such as age, gender, race, dress, decoration, signs of status, facial expression, body posture and layout, etc. Semiologic analysis is characterized by high formalism and is only an introduction to the substantive analysis, that is of structuralist level, which implies that the “observable (and captured in the photo) situations or social events are not random and chaotic, but an emanation of some deep, social structures hidden from direct observation. Such structures determine the shape of social situations, the form of events and course of events, determine and limit what can happen in social life” [Sztompka, 2005, p. 86]. Photography, therefore, showing signs of social life, is a visible sign of those structures. Its interpretation, in turn, is based on the disclosure of structures, that consists of something that has already been marked, as well as hidden denotations and connotations of visually observed situations. In other words, the structuralist analysis is based on the extraction and revealing of normative, interactive, ideal structures of social life hidden behind the observable manifestations of them [Sztompka, 2005, p. 87].

The last presented interpretation type is the discursive interpretation. This analysis takes into account the aspect of the reception of images, seeks to reveal, to whom an image is addressed and how the recipient perceives the importance of the image. This interpretation

thus requires us to find the category of recipients of the given photographic image and to identify regimes of receipt, meaning to characterize the institution within which the image is produced, transmitted and exhibited with the associated specific practices linked with acknowledging the picture [Sztompka, 2005, p. 92]. However, we have to note that the reception of photographic images tends to be subjective, it means that every recipient may perceive and interpret the photo differently.

In our study we undertook analysis of images posted on the social network fotka.pl. Detailed analysis of the hermeneutic, semiologic and discursive type was made towards four photos that capture the essence of the phenomenon of social exhibitionism in the network. The portal Fotka.pl is the oldest and the largest social portal in Poland, allowing people, mainly youngsters, to make new contacts and relations. This analysis is intended to highlight the way in which young people present their body on the Internet, what are their motives and how they are perceived. All of the discussed photographs were taken by people that appear in them themselves.

Description of the Photographs

Photo No. 1

In this picture there is a young woman (c. 20–23 years) who is also the author of the picture (the picture is made “from the hand”¹). The woman has long, curly black hair falling on her bare arms. Eyes and mouth have been highlighted with strong makeup. She is dressed in a colorful flowered dress with a tight-cut neckline that exposes much of her breasts. The photo was taken in a bright room, and exposes only the figure of the author in the foreground breasts exposed. The author of the photos, “stares” at the viewer in a provocative way – inviting admiration of her body – while forming her lips into a kiss.

Photo No. 2

This photo shows two young girls, aged around 15–18 years. One of them is also the author of the picture – the picture was taken using reflection from a mirror. Both girls are dressed in black lingerie and white, tight fitting full – body tops. The photo was taken by the longhaired blonde, her friend has short red hair. One of the girls (blonde), one hand resting on the sink, while holding the camera in the other. Leaning towards the mirror, she stands with her legs apart, shows a deep cleavage and thrusting buttocks. The second girl (redhaired) stands beside her friend, one hand pulls down to the bottom of her underwear and the other is held close to her mouth. A deep-cut shirt reveals her breasts. The photo was taken in the bathroom – a bath is in the background with two glasses of wine standing on it.

Photo No. 3

As in previous cases, the girl seen in the picture is also its author. The photo was taken at night in the bedroom – evidenced by the bed which is visible in the background. In the

¹ Photo “from hand”/image “in the mirror” – “auto photography”, the author photographs himself holding the camera in his/her hands, or directing the lens to the mirror, facing it.

foreground we see a 16-year old girl² with fair hair who sits legs wide apart on the floor in front of a mirror, she holds the camera in one hand, the other rests on the floor, leaning slightly forward, she is short and wearing very tight white shorts and a white shirt with a big neck, which reveals pink underwear. The teenager looks straight into the mirror – making an impression as if looking straight at the viewer. Her eyes and facial expressions (such as lips set for a kiss) are provocative. Under the photo there is a caption which suggests that the recipient will be male.

Photo No. 4

The photograph shows a young girl (16-18 years old), who stands in front of the mirror that is probably located in a hallway. The photo was taken with a mobile phone. The young woman is standing sideways to the mirror, thus exposing her silhouette – mainly chest and buttocks. The left hand holds a cell phone, while right hand rests on a slightly turned head. She has long black hair and is dressed in tight trousers and a white sports bra. The girl is looking into the mirror while taking on an innocent, yet provocative shot.

Authors' intentions

In the previously described photographs we notice a few recurring motifs used while taking such pictures. The main intention of the authors is to present themselves in the best possible way through the exposure of the body in terms of sexual content. This exhibition shows full body or its most attractive elements in the authors' views. On most images, body parts such as breasts or buttocks are positioned in the main plan – centred. This is deliberate and is intended to focus the view of the receiver on the given detail. Women highlight the attractiveness of their bodies with appropriate dresses. In the case of exposure of the breasts – by deep-cut necklines or bra, while buttocks and legs are underlined by skinny jeans, short skirts or shorts, sometimes only underwear and high heels are worn. This type of presentation of the female body is designed to attract the attention of mostly male members of the portal and makes it easier to meet new people. Simultaneously, these photographs are also viewed by women, which leads to comparison with the attractiveness of their own bodies, to those shown in the picture. Presenting one's own body on social network sites is also aimed at meeting the needs for acceptance and confirmation of one's own worth, therefore photos are public and accessible to a wide audience. Sometimes the pictures show women in provocative sexual poses, which may indicate sexual intentions of the sender further relationships of a sexual nature.

Reception of photos

The actual reception of a picture may differ from the intentions of the author. Due to the fact that the viewers of these photographs are primarily men, women presented on them are set in the role as sexual objects. The authors of the described images, display their bodies

² Age is given and posted on the profile of the user of fotka.pl social network.

themselves, in this way they are made to look like objects, inviting the attentions of men for similar practices. Women photographed in this way can also be perceived as courageous, liberal, breaking the conventions, and are likely to be interpreted as a willing to accept casual relationships based on sex. On the other hand, the violation of basic norms and principles of social life may entail criticism, lead to harassment of those women and attempts to exclude them from the Internet community.

Interpretation of the researcher

In recent years, we have noticed increased use of a variety of social network sites, and hence, increased posting of photos presenting the self-image. To catch the attention of the recipient, images are becoming bolder and more provocative and often show the naked body. First of all, our analysis shows that the main form of internet exhibitionism is that of a compensation type, secondly narcissistic, and, in some cases, provocative identity. Such a form of self-presentation is usually a shortage or lack of something – mainly a sense of low esteem combined with the need for acceptance, recognition and admiration. It also appears that these actions are linked to a cry for self definition – of one's own identity – through the body.

The reasons for this type of behaviour can be seen within young people by copying patterns seen in mass media. Nudity surrounds us from all sides and in every situation – at home, in school, at work, on the street. Teens gazing at images of celebrities dancing stark naked in music videos, photo shoots for popular magazines, and trying to resemble them, even for short moment, to feel like a celebrity. Secondly, the reason may be lack of awareness of how wide the range of potential recipients is, who is the real recipient, and if the message is interpreted as the intention of the sender. Another reason is that posting provocative pictures is a necessity to attract attention, to exist among their colleagues and establish new contacts that may prove dangerous because of the inadequacy of the expectations of the recipient to the sender's intentions.

Placing pictures containing the naked body is also a sort of a game with the recipient. It involves provocation, agitation, moving the greatest number of recipients, that are predominantly male, but it can be interrupted at any time, it gives the broadcaster a sense of agency, power, control over the situation, because he or she defines the rules of the game, selects the participants and controls its course.

The analysis of photographs depicting social exhibitionism, reminds us that displaying bodies on the Internet comes easy to young people, because it is a form of indirect contact, which means that they feel no shame. They perceive virtual space as a completely different kind of reality, where one is afforded greater freedom. Sometimes they also feel some kind of separateness of their image between reality from that presented in cyberspace.

Increasingly, social acceptance starts to appear, or at least lack of social sanctions, for presenting such an image on the Internet, while there exists denial of this type of conduct in “real” life, which enhances the potential for transferring that behaviour to the field of virtual space. Moreover it can be noted that young people who want to accentuate their individuality, to rise above mediocrity – post their provocative photos just to be noticed – they try to overcome every obstacle and every social norm in doing so, and therefore the exhibitionism phenomenon is predicted to intensify.

These studies have shown that image analysis is a method that works very well in the analysis of photographs presented in the Internet, due to simple fact that the Internet has so many users. It can also easily be subjected to comparative analysis of pictures from different countries, due to their wide availability. However, weakness of this method to test the virtual space emerges since it is hard to make a hermeneutical analysis of photographs found in cyberspace. Due to the fact that the authors of images – even when they personally appear on them – are still anonymous, hence it is difficult to answer questions that may prove very important in the analysis of photographs. Moreover, in comparison to traditional images, photographs posted on the Internet are less persistent – this is due to the fact that at any moment they may be removed by the author or deleted by owners of the server. As mentioned earlier, hermeneutic analysis also allows the possibility to benefit from a more direct method – that is an interview – in order to obtain answers to questions left unanswered. However it is hard to estimate how this method will prove in the study of the cyberspace, because Internet users may wish to remain anonymous participants of virtual reality.

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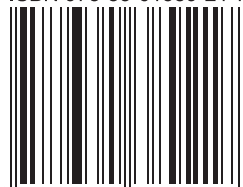
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