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Mass Media Usage as the Quality of Life Index in Poland¹

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Abstract:

The quality of life is an interdisciplinary issue. Hence, in Polish social sciences there are many different definitions for this term, which has its consequences in research. Nowadays, the topic of life quality is being analyzed through its objective and subjective indexes. The article presents results of various research on mass media usage in the context of spending free time and using modern information and communication technologies (ICT), since both these trends have dominated the field of analyzing objective and subjective dimension of life quality of Poles when it comes to using media. Unfortunately, using mass media is not regarded in research as one of the main indexes for life quality and its full utilization requires a correction of meaning and methodology.

Key words:

mass media usage, life quality, index (measurement), national Polish research

Problems with definitions and research consequences

The beginnings of scientific interest in the issue of the quality of life can be found already in the 1950s when this term was more and more frequently used in the studies of economy, social policy, medicine, psychology or sociology. In the 1960s and 70s the quality of life was mostly being analyzed from the quantitative point of view and the term itself was used in researching the level of meeting the needs of individuals and groups. There were attempts to determine the level of consumption of different goods, the so-called “minimal social standard”, necessary to meet the needs of a family (Trzebiatowski 2011: 26). Between the 1970s and 80s the term quality of life was more frequently used for sociological and psychological

¹ Quality of life index is an old term for what is now called Where-to-be-born index, however according to author's opinion the current term may cause some confusion among Polish readers, hence the old term is used in this article to provide better understanding of the discussed issue.

measurement. In social sciences the level of the quality of life was being analyzed together with such categories as: lifestyle, sense of material welfare, satisfaction with the conditions and possibilities of meeting the most important needs in life (Rybczyńska 1995: 16). Last thirty years mark a significant rise in the influence of mass media in all spheres of social life. This brings up a question: are the results of this process reflected in the research on the quality of life?. This article attempts to answer this fundamental question.

The term “quality of life” is therefore connected to many fields of social sciences, but first of all it is a philosophical category, which contains material, nonmaterial and spiritual values (Skrzypek 2001). The broad range of this term’s meaning causes difficulties in defining it, which is even increased by the usage of various terms such as: welfare, standard of living or the abovementioned quality of life (Włodarczyk 2015: 4-5). Some terminological order was introduced in the 1970s by Finnish sociologist Erik Allardt, who assumed in his concept that social welfare as a central term contains three spheres of human needs: possessing (*to have*), feeling (*to love*) and existing (*to be*). He divided social welfare to two main parts: standard of living (material needs), that is defined by the first sphere of human needs (*to have*) and the quality of life (nonmaterial needs) related to the other two spheres of human needs (*to love* and *to be*) (Allardt 1976: 227-229).

The interdisciplinary nature of researching the quality of life multiplies problems in defining this term. This difficulty is well reflected in the thesis of American researcher of life quality Rosalie L. Kane. She notices that: “(...) for some this is a very broad term, which means almost everything except from information on death of an individual, for others these are only some elements of life and there are some who stress the social and psychological aspects of life quality” (Kane 2002: 1003). This is why in Polish social sciences there are also various definitions of this term that can be divided up into four characteristic groups. The first one is made of definitions that have a visible existential dimension. For example, Stanisław Kowalik (1995: 75-85) thinks that the quality of life is in fact the quality of individual day-to-day experiences that have their source in the human cognitive system. The higher the cognitive abilities are, the higher the ability to experience, cumulate the experiences and eventually convert them into life experience, that may mean the high quality of life. And vice versa, the smaller the cognitive abilities of an individual are, the smaller the quality of his life.

The second group of definitions is related to accomplishing tasks that can be named developmental tasks or life tasks as they are the most important components of the quality of life. This stand is supported in global science by British researchers John Reaburn and Irving Rootman (1998: 53-128), and in Poland it is represented inter alia by Augustyn Bańka, who thinks that developmental tasks are linked to the individual development of a human. This is about the ability of internalizing and meeting the expectations connected to performing some defined social roles. Life tasks on the other hand, are being realized in such spheres of human existence as love, school or work. Both types of tasks may cause multiple crises in a life of a certain person, when there can occur “(...) intense experience of quality of life in a form of a continuum happiness vs. misery, satisfaction vs. dissatisfaction, sense of life vs. lack of sense of life, integration vs. alienation, etc.” (Bańka 1995: 19).

The third group of definitions identifies quality of life with the level of satisfying one's individual needs. A sociologist Andrzej Kaleta is a supporter of this thesis and he says that quality of life is about the needs that each person considers to be the most important for their lives and about the opinion of an individual about the level of satisfying these needs. This is why in the research of the quality of life – regardless of the interdisciplinary differences – the index and level of satisfying various needs can be a bridge between connecting different analysis [Kaleta 1988: 19]. What is important, the quality of life refers also to the way of satisfying various needs, that may be divided into objective, subjective and behavioral. In terms of objective needs another division can be made – to relative and absolute needs (Gałęski 1977).

It is easy to see that the category of needs creates a theoretical basis for the definitions of this group. It is worth stressing that absolute needs are the ones that enable human organism to work correctly (hunger, thirst, lack of air). They are based on the biological structure of human organism and are seen as subjective needs, appearing automatically, without engaging the consciousness. In contrast, lack of satisfying the relative needs (safety, appreciation or self-realization) does not necessarily lead to disturbances in the functioning of an organism and can stay on the level of human consciousness in both reflective and unreflective form (Trzebiatowski 2011: 28).

The fourth group of definitions stresses the meaning of two factors. Firstly - subjective and objective indicators, secondly – the combination of them with evaluation of the level of satisfying various needs. That is why Janusz Czapiński proposes that the definition of the quality

of life should on the one hand include subjective and objective criteria and on the other hand analyze the level of satisfying different needs that contribute to the feeling of welfare and happiness. He also divides indicators of the feeling of happiness (level of satisfying one's needs) to the objective and subjective indicators. The former entails conditions of the existence of individuals and whole social groups both in material or health sense, that are being assessed socially (good-bad, better-worse, desired-undesired). The latter refer to the individual criteria of evaluating when it comes to the evaluation of life and its different aspects, individual experiences, value system or certain personal features that determine attitude towards life and the ability to adapt to social change (Czapiński & Panek 2001: 68).

The last group of definitions emphasizes the fact that while searching for measurements for the quality of life, two approaches should be distinguished: objective and subjective. If we indeed do, then two terms should be used: *quality of life* and *sense of quality of life* (Owsiński & Tarchalski 2008: 66-67). Quality of life concerns the outer sphere that is a source of various incentives and experiences of people. It is a result of an objective measurement of life and grasp of reality. Therefore, objective measurements are for example: income amount, number of children, education level or place of living. Objective indexes determine the level of processes and events that are outside of a person and do not indicate the satisfaction of people concerning changes in their lives.

The second, subjective measurement refers to feelings and emotions expressed by people. The sense of quality of life is merely saying that "something is ok". Subjective indexes do not point out to the real state of affairs (e.g. consumption pattern or its level) but to its assessment and perception by people. It can be assumed that objective indexes usually show different sides of the level (conditions) of life and subjective measurements show quality of life (felt or perceived).

Both aspects of the quality of life in Poland are consistently being used in scientific research of this issue, done from the second half of the 1980s (Piasny 1993: 76-79). The inclusion of both objective and subjective measurements of life quality can be noted in the surveys that have been conducted for years by Statistics Poland (Pol. GUS), which since 2011 have been using researching norms and procedures recommended by the European Union (GUS 2013: 7-8). Both types of indexes are also used in the research on changes in Polish society, done since 2000 under the name *Social Diagnosis* (Pol. Diagnoza Społeczna) (Czapiński & Panek 2015: 3).

The ongoing process of mediatization of all the spheres of social life should result in taking into account, while researching the quality of life, mass media – both the traditional media (press, radio, television) and the new ones (Internet, multimedia). Hence, the other research aim of this article is to show a place of the social reception of mass media, analyzed by both objective and subjective measurements, in Polish scientific research on this topic. There are two research questions connected with this aim: is the usage of mass media seen as an important index of the quality of life in Poland or perhaps its meaning in research is rather secondary and is the usage of mass media connected to objective or subjective sphere of life quality?

Mass media usage as the quality of life index in Poland

In the scientific research of the quality of life of Polish people, the social reception of mass media can be seen in two instances: firstly – while analyzing ways of spending free time and secondly – in using information and communication technologies (ICT). The amount of free time and way of spending it, as well as the individual assessment of both aspects is one of the elements of researching the level of life satisfaction. It can be assumed that the position given to these aspects in an individual assessment of the level of life satisfaction reflects their meaning for a subjective measurement of the quality of life.

Nationwide research on the level of life satisfaction done by Statistics Poland (GUS) in year 2015 among the respondents over 16 years of age showed that more than 78% of interviewed Poles are satisfied with their lives, 18% did not have any opinion on this and only 4% expressed their dissatisfaction (among them more than 32% were dissatisfied with their income) (GUS 2015: 1). However, if we look at the level of life satisfaction through its component parts (table no. 1), then it can be noted that almost 62% of respondents are satisfied with their amount of free time and 60.5% express their satisfaction with the way of spending their free time. Both of these indexes are high up in the ranking, as they are only behind three other categories: relations with other people (colleagues, friends) – more than 84% are satisfied, family situation (77%) and place of living (more than 75% are satisfied). What is worth stressing here, is that both factors connected to free time are more important than health, professional situation or material conditions. This proves that free time plays an important part in the hierarchy of the most important measurement of the level of life satisfaction in Poland.

Table 1. Satisfaction with different aspects of life in Poland in year 2015

Level of satisfaction with	Percent of satisfied people in the age of 16 years old and more
relations with other people (colleagues, friends)	84.3 %
family situation	77.1 %
place of living	75.6 %
amount of free time	61.9 %
way of spending free time	60.5 %
health	59.7 %
current professional situation	59.6 %
material life conditions (other than income)	57.4 %
education	57.1 %
current financial situation (including income)	37.4 %
life in general	78.3 %

Source: own elaboration on the basis of GUS (2015).

Mass media usage is one of the activities connected to spending free time. It is worth stressing its place among other ways of spending free time. Research conducted in year 2013 by Statistics Poland (GUS) among Poles over 15 years of age showed that there are four main ways of spending free time preferred by them (GUS 2014):

- 1/ using mass media – 91.1% of respondents engage in this activity
- 2/ social life and entertainment – 67.4%
- 3/ personal passions (hobby) – 36.4%
- 4/ sports and recreation – 26.3%

Therefore mass media usage is a dominating activity during free time, perceived as characteristic feature of lifestyle in Poland (GUS 2017a: 71-73).

It is interesting however what type of media and how often is being used by Poles in their free time. The answer can be found in a survey conducted by Statistics Poland (GUS) in 2015 in a group of almost 14 thousand respondents in the age of 16 years old and more on the topic of life quality in both objective and subjective dimension. The results of research on usage of mass media (mostly traditional ones) confirmed the leading role of television (see table no. 2), which is watched every day by 81% of respondents (among them more than 20% watch TV more than 4 hours a day). Second place was occupied by radio, listened to by 63% of respondents every day. The third place belonged to reading daily press in paper edition (almost 18%) and in electronic edition (17%). Almost 30% of respondents watch once a week or more often films and

movie series by using different mediums (DVD, Blue-ray, Internet). One can wonder why using the Internet is not present on this list but it should be noted that it is mainly used for work, education, services and group communication.

Table 2. Frequency of mass media usage in free time in 2015

Way of using	Frequency of usage (percent of users)			
	every day	a few times each week	less than once a week	never or almost never
watching television	81.1 %	10.8 %	3.2 %	4.9 %
listening to radio	63.2 %	14.9 %	8.7 %	13.2 %
reading daily press in paper edition	17.6 %	33.0 %	22.9 %	26.5 %
reading daily press in electronic edition	16.9 %	14.9 %	9.8 %	58.4 %
watching films on different mediums (DVD, Blue-ray, Internet)	no data	29.0 %	19.0 %	52.0 %

Source: own elaboration on the basis of GUS (2017a: 71-72).

However, if we look on this juxtaposition from the point of view of people who never or almost never use mass media in their free time, we can see that traditional media (television, radio, press) are still very popular. Groups of people who resign from using them are not too significant, although resigning from reading daily press in paper edition by close to 26.5% of respondents and in the same time rejecting the possibility of using electronic press by almost 60% confirms the raising crisis of reading newspapers.

To define the real meaning of mass media in the lives of Polish people, it is worth looking at this topic also through the prism of time dedicated everyday to using such media. Some interesting data in this respect was delivered by a nationwide research done in 2015 within research project *Diagnoza Społeczna* among inhabitants of Poland in the age of 18 years old and more (Czapiński & Panek 2015: 371-374). According to the results of this research, an adult Pole dedicates over 4 hours daily to using mass media and among them most of the time is dedicated to three types of media: television, Internet and press. The biggest group of media users uses television on a daily basis, although it has become during recent years a type of medium that accompanies different activities at home or at work. However, as many as 95% of Poles declare that they watch television every day. Among them only 11% dedicated to television less than one hour a day. More than a half of the respondents watch TV from 1 to 3 hours a day. The Internet is used every day by 66% of adult Poles and they spend on the average a bit more than one hour

(69 minutes) to do it. Paper issues of newspapers and magazines are read by 79% of respondents, but most of them do it irregularly. Close to 75% of the readers of paper press dedicate less than half an hour to it.

Still, the factor that influences everyday usage of mass media the most in Poland is social and demographic features, especially: sex, age and education (see table no. 3). These features cause a clear differentiation in the amount of time dedicated everyday to using television, Internet and press. The smallest differences in this respect are caused by sex: men use the Internet a bit longer (15 minutes) than women and women watch television and read press in paper issues a bit longer than men (respectively – 3 and 2 minutes longer).

Table 3. Time of daily use of mass media in Poland in 2015 based on selected social and demographic features

Categories of media users	Daily time of using media (in minutes)		
	Television	Internet	Press
media users in general	158	69	24
men	156	77	23
women	159	62	25
users at the age 18-24	134	142	18
users at the age 25-34	134	115	21
users at the age 35 - 44	139	84	23
users at the age 45-49	160	44	24
users at the age 60-64	183	28	29
users at the age 65 and more	199	12	30
education: basic or lower	191	11	18
basic training/ lower secondary school	170	33	20
secondary education	162	61	26
higher education	131	121	31
studying	130	155	19

Source: own elaboration on the basis of: Czapiński & Panek (2015).

However, if we consider influence of age, then two main regularities can be noted: the older the person, the longer he or she watches television and reads paper editions of newspaper and magazines. For example, young people (at the age from 18 to 24 years old) dedicate daily a bit more than 2 hours (134 minutes) to watching TV and only 18 minutes to reading press.

Older people however (at the age of 65 years and more), watch TV every day for more than 3 hours (199 minutes) and read press for the longest time – that is 30 minutes. Age also greatly influences using the Internet. Here, the youngest Internet users (aged from 18 to 24 years old) spend the most time with it – daily over 3 hours (142 minutes), whereas the oldest ones spend only 12 minutes using the Internet. This regularity is universal across the world – the Internet is a favorite medium of young people.

Visible differences occur also when we analyze the criterion of education. Again, two regularities can be noted: the higher the education, the more time adult Poles spend using the Internet and less watching television. In this case, the discrepancies are really big. People with basic or lower education spend over 3 hours (exactly 191 minutes) daily in front of a TV, while they use the Internet only for 11 minutes. On the other hand, people with higher education and those who study watch TV for over two hours daily (respectively 131 and 130 minutes) and their daily online activity exceeds 2 hours (people with higher education – 121 minutes) or even 2.5 hours (students – 155 minutes). People with basic or lower education dedicate the least amount of time to reading paper issues of newspaper and magazines (only 19 minutes daily), whereas people with higher education read press for almost twice as long (31 minutes). It can be concluded, that for the less educated Poles it is the television that is the most important medium, whereas the educated ones prefer using the Internet and reading press.

A lot of interesting data regarding the meaning of mass media for life quality in Poland has been provided through research on using information and communication technologies (ICT), which has been done since 2004. This research points out mostly to the objective factors of using media and technology that influence life quality of Poles. The first factor is the equipment of households with facilities and devices enabling the usage of mass media. Research done by Statistics Poland ([GUS 2017d](#)) showed that:

- 98% of households in Poland have at least one TV,
- 97% of households have a mobile phone (in case of 61% of households it is a smart phone),
- 87.5% of households have a modern TV (plasma TV or LCD),
- 76% of households are equipped with a PC (and 75% have Internet access),
- 69% of households have the necessary equipment to receive, record and reproduce sound,
- 26% of households have DVD player,
- 11% of households have home theater.

The above list shows that the vast majority of households in Poland have a TV, mobile phone, PC and equipment to receive, record and reproduce sound. These devices are a technological basis for using both traditional and modern media.

However, the new media and modern information and communication technologies have changed lives of people through providing them with the access to the Internet. To many of its users the Internet has become the most important medium for information, entertainment, communication and services and it is also a very important tool for work and education. In 2017 in Poland 72.7% (in 2016 – 69.9%) of people in the age of 16 and more were using the Internet regularly (at least once a week). This means that the popularity of the Internet among Poles is still growing and we cannot talk about saturation in this respect (GUS 2017c: 123). Hence finding an answer to the question of what is the Internet being used for seems reasonable. The research done in 2017 enabled creating a list of the most important reasons for using the Internet for personal matters in Poland in years 2013-2017, that have a significant meaning for the quality of life (see table no. 4).

Among ten most frequent reasons for using the Internet the prevailing ones concern getting various information (e-mail, information on products and services, reading electronic press, using tourism websites). What is important, the level of interest in these particular aspects of Internet use is visibly stable, only reading of e-press is still gradually gaining popularity. From the perspective of life quality this means that the Internet is attractive especially because its simplicity in reaching the needed information. In the second place the Internet users have put the communication advantages of the Internet (using social media, Internet calls, video conferences). Communication through the Internet replaces direct contact between people and this should be regarded not only as a sign of modern times, but also as an aspect of life quality. Another group of reasons for using Internet's resources are those connected to services and trade (e-banking, e-trade, downloading computer programs, searching for job, sending offers). In this case the Internet also helps in solving life issues and satisfying needs. To sum it up, from the perspective of the reasons for using the Internet it is a medium of information, communication, services and trade and it influences in a positive manner both the objective and subjective dimension of life quality in Poland.

Table 4. Reasons for Internet use in private matters in Poland between 2013 and 2017.

Reasons for using the Internet	Percentage [%] of Internet users in the following years				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
using e-mail	81.9	79.5	79.4	78.8	78.6
searching for information on products and services	72.4	75.3	62.1	77.3	75.8
reading, downloading online press	43.7	70.8	68.6	79.1	79.3
using social media	56.2	55.3	60.9	60.3	63.2
using bank services	50.9	48.9	45.9	53.4	52.3
Internet calls, video conferences	38.3	41.3	40.6	38.5	41.8
using tourism websites	18.9	20.7	25.2	28.1	29.7
downloading computer programs	23.1	22.4	16.4	17.6	17.1
searching for job, sending offers	17.9	17.4	14.5	15.7	15.3
selling products, e.g. at auctions	12.0	17.4	17.8	21.3	20.4

Source: own elaboration on the basis of: GUS (2017d).

The meaning of mass media usage as the quality of life index in Poland

If we look at the abovementioned results of the research on using the mass media in the context of spending one’s free time and using modern information and communication technologies from the perspective of using them for measuring life quality in Poland, then we can notice a few regularities. First of all – in researching free time of Polish people, the usage of mass media as one of the nine basic elements shaping the term “life quality”² is not being systematically analyzed. This is proven by Statistics Poland (GUS) report from the research done in 2017, where this index was not included (GUS 2017a: 14-15), whereas in the research in year 2015 it was in fact analyzed (GUS 2017b: 71-72).

Secondly, in the research on using the modern information and communication technologies – using mass media is analyzed in the context of information society mostly as one of the objective indexes for its development. The aspect of the meaning of traditional and modern media as well as the ICT for the quality of life is not reflected in this research. The results of this research may only partly be used for the objective (sometimes subjective) aspect of life quality in Poland.

Thirdly, both described trends in research on using mass media are separated and done on the basis of different methodological assumptions. This means that the Polish research on life

² Other elements shaping the term „life quality” in Polish research are: material life conditions, work, health, education, economic and physical safety, subjective welfare, quality of environment in the place of living as well as the state and basic rights and civic activity. See: GUS (2017b).

quality lacks a common concept of utilizing the results of different surveys and analysis reflecting on various aspects of the social reception of both traditional and modern mass media.

Overcoming the weaknesses mentioned above becomes an important challenge for the research on life quality in Poland. Mass media usage in objective and subjective approach should become part of research categories connected to life quality for good. This demand concerns especially surveys conducted by Statistics Poland, an institution that has the biggest possibilities of research in the country, based on a methodology recommended by the European Union.

Thereby it can be concluded that the usage of mass media is not regarded as an important index in Polish research on the quality of life and it is visibly a secondary element concerning mostly the objective dimension of this topic. It is not a weakness of Polish research only, because also in the European research on the quality of life EQLS, conducted since 2003 mass media usage in analyzed only rarely and is not included in the group of main research categories (EQLS 2016). Therefore, it seems that a multidimensional analysis of life quality in Poland requires emphasizing and methodological correction when it comes to using traditional and modern mass media.

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