

## WHAT OLD PEOPLE NEED NEW MEDIA FOR ?

ARTUR FABIŚ, ŁUKASZ TOMCZYK

**Abstract:** In the age of intensive development of information society, the education of people considered to be digitally-excluded gains a special meaning. Through institutional and non-institutional forms of education, the eldest part of society has an opportunity to gain new crucial competences allowing them to take part in information-social area. The article depicts the problem of developing the skills of operating new media by the eldest part of polish society. The text oscillates around the aspects of opportunities offered by new media for older people. At the same time, the txt depicts educational contexts of alleviating of digital illiteracy in Poland

**Keywords:** information society, seniors, media competences, digital exclusion, learning process of older people

### Education as a key to understanding changing reality

At the current stage of development of mankind, there are few significant transformations generating new types of societies. Functioning of groups and individuals did and still does concentrates around sources of power, which evolved to the form of information. Civilizational changes occurring nowadays due to technical factors are inevitable and irreversible. Moreover, they touch almost everyone. Thus, the information, which at the same time may become knowledge grows to the rank of attribute of power. (Por. Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 2008, s.30). The development of information tools and digital information-communication technologies caused the occurrence of new type of society described as information or knowledge society<sup>1</sup>. What's more, the above mentioned author underlines that "in the new social formula, derived from industrial society, the main form of capital is, beside goods such as: land, resources, money and their equivalents, sources of production, techniques and technologies – is knowledge"(Hejnicka\_Bezwińska, 2008, s.30). This new form of capital connected with the access to data and information allows people, through processing, sending, gaining and generating information, to complete functioning in all the walks of life, constantly increasing one's status in different environments. The table by M.Goliński shows the process of change within a society.

**Table 1 Determinants of society: agriculture, industry, information**

Type of society	Agricultural	Industrial	Information
Tempo of change	Thousands of years	200-300 years	30-40 years
Source of power	Land	Capital, natural resources, sources of production	Knowledge and information
Most important product	Food	Processed goods	Knowledge and its applications
Methods of production	Mining proces	Production process	manufacturing and revitalization proces
Technique	Handicraft	Machine	Intellectual
Means of processing	Forces of nature	Produced energy	Information and telecommunications
Main Principle	Traditionalism	decentralization	Decentralization of socjety and institution and global independence
Society	Caste	Mass	Various
Family	Extended	Nuclear	Various family models
Education	oral, ritual, family education	Mass education	Various educational models
Culture	Local	National	Global

Source: (Goliński, 2002, s.559)

<sup>1</sup> In the discourse about social changes one may come across more critical descriptions which means that the accumulation of information creates rather deformed society, lost due to subconscious influence of information smog.

“Education understood as the process of life-time learning is a phenomenon varying on particular stages of personal development” (Ferenz, 2010, s.30). This is a result not only of psychophysical abilities on different stages of development but also of historical, political, economic or education-trends context. Social changes are determined by omnipresent implementation of information solutions in every-day life, not for every generations are a phenomenon in which they can equally find themselves and make a good use of opportunities which derive from omnipresent informatization<sup>2</sup>. The key role is the process of new learning – learning how to gain information and gaining knowledge because of that. Thus, the competence of using the new media is the key tool. The variations in the matter of digital competences divide the society on three groups

- E-citizens – having all the necessary competences to use e-service’s
- Actually digitally-excluded – people who do not have skills and access to information infrastructure, which may be observed in quality of life of its members – typical example of digital exclusion (e.g. people in post-production age – the generation 50+);
- Seemingly digitally-excluded – do not have skills; however, for this community, information products are of no importance and their life style is connected with physical-material reference to service and information (mostly people in post-production age).

When analyzing the activity of adult people, children and youth in the cyber space, one should reflect upon the typology of generations elaborated by M. Prensky. The above mentioned author divides the society into digital immigrants – people born before 1983 and digital autochthons. The typology depicts the synthetic role of electronic media in the life of particular age groups.

**Table 2 Digital immigrants versus digital autochthons**

<b>Digital immigrants</b>	<b>Digital autochthons</b>
Have problems with understanding the virtual surface visible through the window of the monitor moving above it.	Can imagine and understand the virtual surface seen through the window moving above it
Can imagine and understand the content of long, linear text read from the book	Have problems with understanding long and complicated text
Understand the printed text better	Successfully read from the small monitor
Prefer text rather than picture and sounds	Prefer picture rather than sound and text
Prefer linear thinking and serial information processing	Prefer free (hypertext and hypermedia) access and parallel information processing
Prefer patience, system and expecting accumulated, postponed results	Prefer accidental, short-term learning, experimenting, multitasking, expect quick effects
Use basic, standard functions of mobile devices similarly to traditional	Discover all the functions of devices, come up with new applications. Treat new technologies creatively, trustworthy. They treat devices they have as very personal possessions

Source: (Hojnacki, 2006, s.26)

When analyzing the key aspect, namely the learning process, it is worth-underlining that in the age of unstoppable and dynamic transformations, the permanent education became not only a popular trend but also an element helpful in keeping up with the technical, social and scientific progress. Lifetime education, understood as a tool allowing the man to adapt to new conditions created chiefly by the technology itself, gives an opportunity to gain a completely new knowledge and constant update of it and also to gain new skills and concrete competences in all areas of life. The nature of permanent education is, according to T.Aleksander, constant, steady realization and affecting one’s development in every stage of his/her life. It is a characteristics of the process, gaining a special significance In the context of development of microelectronic devices which never ends for man. Thus, after the end of one phase of education, one moves on to the other one which is on the higher level or in a different topic area. Thee requirement of lifetime education is derived from the fact that people are somehow forced to adjust to the changes determined by the above-mentioned factors. In other words, the requirement of education derives from the state of constant revision of one’s skills, habits and knowledge,

---

<sup>2</sup> Nowadays, a phenomenon of occurrence of new education forms may be observed in accordance to age, realizing the didactic process in the matter of informal education, although rooted in formal education institutions. Thus, Children, Youth, Open, Every Age Universities appear – and the most common Universities of Third Age.

constant correction of one's actions, transformations of view and beliefs through adjusting to situation created through the changing life (Por. Aleksander, 2009, s.43-47).

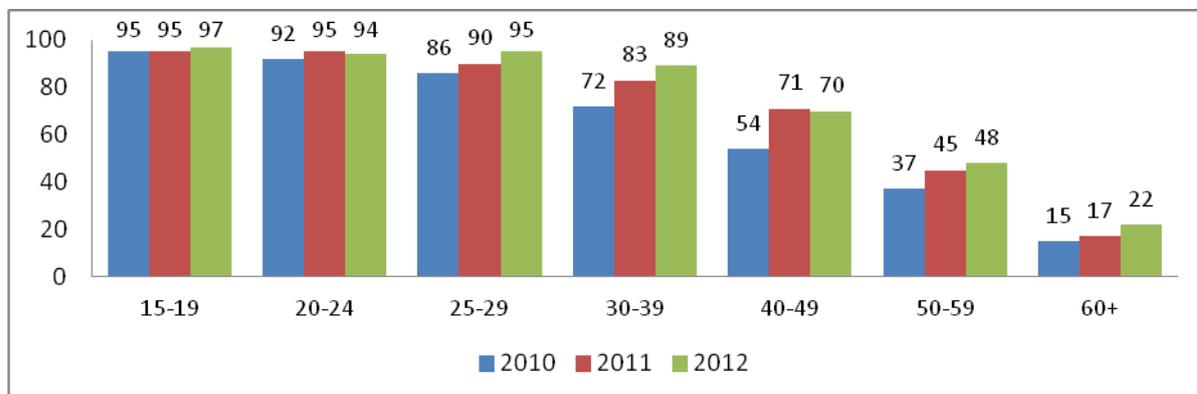
In the perspective of the lifetime education with the use of new media, very significant are four fundamentals of education elaborated by "Międzynarodowa Komisja do spraw Edukacji w XXI wieku dla UNESCO". The mentioned fundamentals have real and actual application in the matter of education connected with information technologies. First fundament determined within a category "learn to know" claims that the individual must constantly gain new knowledge aiming at understanding the surrounding world and self. This principle refers to recalling the previously-gained information, knowledge, the skill of applying different actions and operations connected with searching, coding, processing of information and knowledge. The features of new media are, therefore, a great base to put the principles into practice. The second Fundament, known as "learn to act" underlines the significance of shaping competences useful in work area. However, having information qualifications is nowadays a requirement when it comes to use of different e-service (e-administration, e-communication, e-shopping, e-banking). Learning to act allows the man, through new information technologies, to work more effectively. On the other hand, it protects one from the feeling of helplessness caused by not being able to operate new technical inventions. Another part of the report underlines the fact that learning in new areas helps the common life. We cannot narrow the mentioned picture to service connected with social services since learning for a common life may help in going beyond the intergenerational differences deriving from e.g lack of awareness of understanding the other person. The fourth fundament, "learn to be", is directed on self-development. Popularization and acceptance of this term led to the change of thinking about the process of learning. In the well-developed countries the realization of this principle provides the individual with autonomy, giving him/her the competence of free functioning in the surrounding reality (Por. Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 2008, s.157-158).

### The characteristics of an older person as new media user

When analyzing the aspect of functioning of an older person in the digital immigrants group, one should refer to the research from "World Internet project WI 2012" which allows us to observe that (Por. WIP, 2012, s.6-31):

- Almost 2/3 of Poles have an access to the internet, but there is a correlation between education and age. Both variables affect the people in a way that the older or less educated the respondent, the less probability that he/she uses the internet.
- 1/3 people do not use internet, since they are not interested in e-service,
- Surprisingly, almost half of people not being web users indirectly use e-service through people from their surrounding
- The presence of digital autochthons in the place of residence decreases the amount of use of the internet in the group of digital immigrants,
- Individuals who do not use internet claim that through being offline, they save time and money and also they do not experience the negative aspects of cyber space,
- With a course of time a systematic but slow increase of users qualified as digital immigrants can be observed. This state is connected with two factors such as: increasing digital competences through the mentioned group and through the phenomenon of generation replacement.

**Picture 1 Internet using in Poland in 2010-2012**



Source: (WIP, 2012, s.12)

In every development stage, also old age, one can take advantage from the possibilities created by different environments – media play a great role in it. Old age does not differ within this aspect from other

stages of development. Media are a great potential but also a source of danger, tool of exclusion from many areas of life. One can use the possibilities rooted in modern media but may also become their victim. The area of chances and threats from the media becomes, naturally, education.

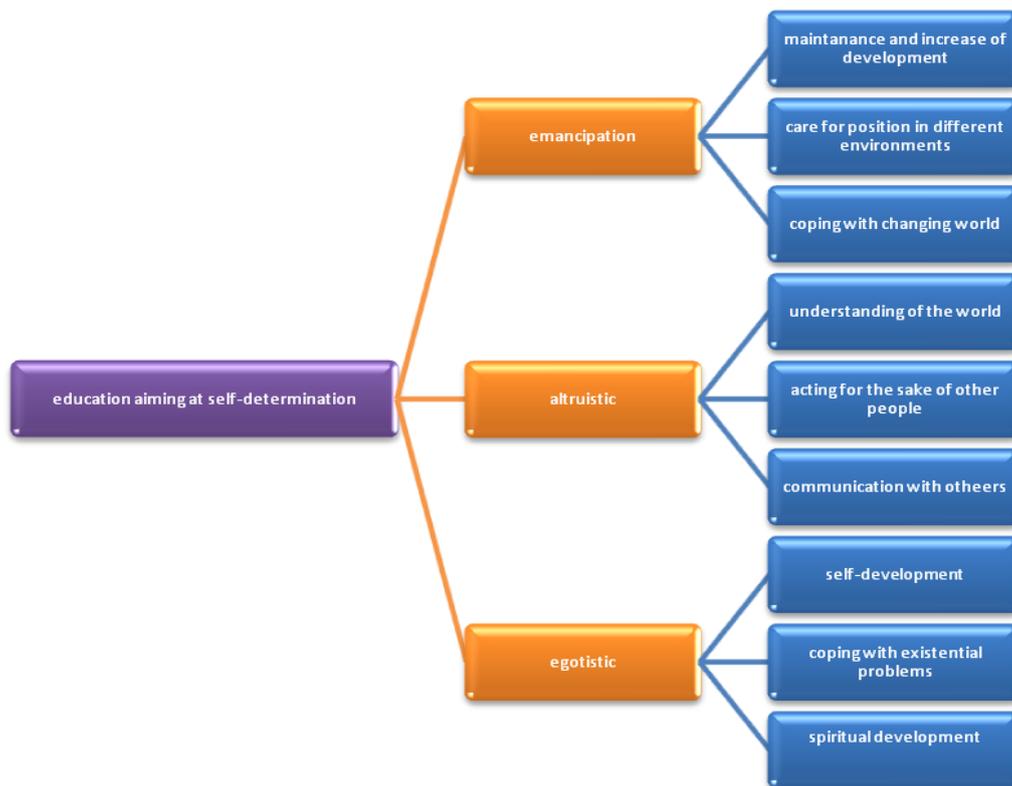
For effective use of new media, required are competences, which J.Jasiewicz defines as conscious, learnable skills determining the effective behavior or action in particular branch. Competences are relational (they connect the man with culture and civilization and relative since they depend on social, cultural and technological changes. Unfortunately, when analyzing the aspects of digital competences, it is difficult to determine of which elements they consist of since in literature of the subject many variations may be observed and the elements are sometimes mistaken with information competences (engineering). Relatively often the media education, and the competences shaped are treated marginally. Digital competences in this article and those occurring in the following subsection are presented as a set of skills determining effective use of electronic media through the use of devices and software and abilities allowing us to assess and find information from different e-source (Por. Jasiewicz, 2012). "Among the competences, which modern person should have in order to function in the information society, we distinguish: a set of instrumental and intellectual skills. Instrumental competences are based on correct use of computer microelectronic devices. ("clicking") whereas the intellectual competences are connected with the understanding of functioning of new media with their effect on individuals and society" (Tomczyk, 2011, s.6).

### **Old people and new media**

In gerontology dictionaries it is hard to find the term "new media". With the term "new" are connected only such words as: morbidity and morbidity rate. Media specialists try to define the term "new media" through finding their constructive features such as interactivity, data transfer speed, tele-presence and many more. What are new media for old people? or which media are new for old people? Surely, for many people regardless of the age, the new media are those which for others are not new anymore and the adjective "new" would only describe its main meaning connected with the origin of relation, with something unknown. New media may be – in common meaning – information transfer technologies which are only being discovered and their being new derives from the first attempts to learn, but may also, from the media experts perspective, be commonly-accepted as modern forms of data transfer, characterized by proper features.

In the case of older people, the target of education will be self-determination. According to activity theory, seniors, in order to live through their old age with dignity, have to take care of their activity also in the matter of education so that they are satisfied by it and, at the same time, for other generations to accept those activities and partly use them. Education is not only an aim of activity, but also a tool to gain new competences allowing people to develop and act. Education as self-determination and self-maintenance in the old age would base mainly on three basic functions:

- **Emancipation** – guaranteeing not only maintaining position and location of seniors in all environments but also constant development, freedom from dependence, oppressive conditions, stereotypes, superstitions and increase of senior generation in social hierarchy, self-reliance – both on individual and whole generation level.
- **Altruistic** – preparing for understanding others, to sacrifices, to act for the sake of the other person. Due to meeting others, seniors may find themselves in the role of volunteers, caregivers or local politicians.
- **Egotic** – leading to self-fulfillment, to fulfill one's ambitions, dreams and aspirations. Due to learning, an adult man not only extends his/her interests, but also develops personally, becomes also more perfect in spiritual area. He/she can face existential fears, problems of everyday life at old age. Moreover, it helps him/her to prepare for death.



Gaining new competences and knowledge in the matter of digital technologies by older people originally gives an opportunity for increase of self-education and extending the range of self-determination. Self-determination in the typology proposed on above-mentioned picture occurs in three elementary areas, where each of them determines a perspective in which electronic media as successfully-implemented in the process of learning increase its quality and extend the possibilities of reaching particular educational aims. The chosen detail aims concentrate around the following education effects:

**Emancipation function** directs the process of learning on individual increase of quality of life, caring for satisfaction of life and steady development of interests, freeing from oppressive conditions and creation of better future. However, emancipation refers mainly to actions for the sake of the whole senior society. It is therefore considered on macro surface with the reference to other generations. The aim is to provide seniors with a strong position in the social structure.

- **Maintaining and development** of activity in many areas of life of older people is one of the conditions of dignified old age. Discovering new activities and maintaining the existing with the help of new media allows seniors to go to unknown, complex world which stimulates for a constant development.
- **Caring for seniors'** position in different environments is a task of emancipation, it shows by existence of new technologies in the world and representing generation of seniors as a party in media and through media. It is also an entrance to the world dominated with society using different forms of e-service. It is an active form of preventing the digital exclusion, entering the digital world – the world of digital autochthons creates an opportunity to eliminate the negative stereotypes about age. From the seniors' needs perspective, activity in this area is a form of fulfilling the need of acceptance and belonging.
- **Coping with changing reality** by older people as a generation which grew up in "analog world" is especially dependent on the help of digital autochthons, who, in organized forms of education, become mentors (inversely to the industrial society). Finding place in the society of constant change requires the acceptance of the fact that apart from gaining basic technical competences (e.g. operating the mouse, keyboard, operating system) the process of education in this area requires constant learning since the occurrence of new e-service is a very dynamic phenomenon.

**Altruistic function** in senior learning refers to the activity for the sake of other people. It may take a form of a style of life, and surely for seniors, it is an obvious action so wanted in building the identity of an adult person.

- **Understanding the world** is gaining and constantly extending the general knowledge in order to understand the changes in the surrounding world and other people in it. The use of new media is connected with the art of gaining and verifying knowledge, and phenomena around become more

understandable, when one has an actual knowledge. The cardinal difficulty in gaining knowledge is information noise in which it is hard to select the true and well-prepared information.

- **Acting for the sake of others** takes a form of using the web in order to realization of original needs of the e.g. close person (husband, wife, friend) who does not use the web. Here, e-seniors play a role of a bridge between new technologies and the digitally-excluded
- **Communication with others** is one of the most useful features of new media pointed by new media users. Communication on different levels from family or professional determined and will determine the further development the indirect forms of transferring information (mail, communicators, forum, comments, VoIP).

**Egotic function** is a healthy egoism, it is a use of new media in self-development. At old age one must take care of not only the family environment but also of his/her self-development

- **personal development** refers to almost constitutional principle of developmental psychology – to lifetime development, until death. In obvious way, the new media open a great resources of information to gain by people directed on self-education and self-fulfillment.
- **Coping with existential problems.** Old age is a time in which a person experienced by life and clever by his/her own biography may face existential problems and look for the answers for the most difficult questions – about God, sense of life, or a record of own existence. In this research, new media may be an irreplaceable source of knowledge and a place to exchange opinions, expressing one's doubts.
- **Spiritual development** at old age is determined by maturity of the person. It is a development of the most intimate sphere of human's life, it is getting closer to the Absolute, to spiritual development, searching for higher values by all means. Media, which help to maintain anonymity may be an important source of searching for information in the matter of topics unlikely touched upon in the indirect contact.

## Conclusion

Answering the question included in the title, one may attempt to answer by playing a role of a follower or the opponent of new technologies. The former would point at the great potential which global web, computer software or modern communication tools are. They may be of a great potential in the process of life time learning. Maybe they are even crucial in the case of full partaking of seniors in many areas of life. However, the skeptical would probably say that apart from the virtual world, there is a real one, which also has a great potential and has less threats than partaking in the world of modern media. Is it crucial to open for new media when for most of the life one could perfectly do without them? new media may be important in the process of self-development but they are not irreplaceable if this development can progress without them. New media are the chance which can be taken in every stage of life in order to learn for self-determination.

## Bibliography

- ALEKSANDER, Tadeusz. 2009. *Andragogika*. Podręcznik akademicki. Kraków : Instytut Technologii Eksploatacji PIB Radom-Kraków. ISBN 978-83-7204-703-8.
- FERENZ, Krystyna. 2010. Edukacja całościowa człowieka w świetle zadań rozwojowych. In KOWALSKI, Mirosław, OLCZAK, Agnieszka (eds.). *Edukacja w przebiegu życia*. Kraków : Impuls. ISBN 978-83-7587-347-4.
- GOLIŃSKI, Michał. 2002. Społeczeństwo globalnej informacji. In ROKICKA-BRONIATOWSKA, Anna (ed.). *Wstęp do informatyki gospodarczej*. Warszawa : Szkoła Główna Handlowa. ISBN 83-7225-111-0.
- HEJNICKA-BEZWIŃSKA, Teresa. 2008. *Pedagogika ogólna*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne. ISBN 978-83-60501-19-1.
- HOJNACKI, Lechosław. 2006. Pokolenie m-learningu – nowe wyzwanie dla szkoły. In *E-mentor*, ISSN 1731-6758, nr 1(13).
- JASIEWICZ, Justyna. 2012. *Kompetencje cyfrowe Polaków. Wystąpienie na konferencji „Stan polskiego Internetu”*. Warszawa.
- TOMCZYK, Łukasz. 2008. Wykluczenie cyfrowe w społeczeństwie informacyjnym. In SIENKIEWICZ, Piotr, NOWAK, Jerzy (ed.). *Społeczeństwo informacyjne. Krok naprzód, dwa kroki wstecz*. Katowice : Wyd. Polskie Towarzystw Informatyczne. ISBN 978-83-60810-23-1.
- TOMCZYK, Łukasz. 2011. *Zostań E-obywatelem. Efektywne wykorzystanie komputera i Internetu w życiu codziennym*. Wyd. Bielsko-Biała : Specjalistyczne usługi edukacyjne i turystyczne CURSUS. ISBN 978-83-926897-9-9.
- WIP, World Internet Project Poland. 2012. Warszawa : Agora SA i Orange Polska.