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On the need for media education for seniors – selected issues

O potrzebie edukacji medialnej wśród seniorów – wybrane zagadnienia

Introduction

The issue of the functioning of the elderly in society is a vital one, and it gained particular relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic. While analyzing the ongoing social, cultural and economic changes, we can observe numerous transformations that determine the quality of life of the oldest generation.

The current changes are accelerating incomparably to earlier epochs, and – as noted by Joanna Zalewska (2015, p. 45) – their range and impact on social practices are increasing as well. While reflecting on a constant change, Kazimierz Krzysztofek (2012, p. 7) notes that it concerns many processes that can be perceived as components of concepts such as postmodern breakthrough, postindustrial breakthrough, or liquid modernity. According to Krzysztofek

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(2012, p. 7), this change includes the processes of globalization, migration, the information revolution, and multiculturalism.

As Piotr Sztompka (2005, p. 22) notes, the social change concerns primarily:

- transformations in how society is organized and in the patterns of thought and action over time;
- modification or transformation of the way society is organized;
- the volatility of relationships between individuals, groups, organizations, cultures and communities over time;
- changes in behavior patterns, social relations, institutions and social structure over time.

A crucial aspect of the transformations taking place is their multidimensional character. They can either be an opportunity for development and improvement of the quality of life, or bring about crises and threats – to individuals and social groups alike. And this is a context in which we should view the changes related to the progressing digitization and new media that affect the everyday life of all age groups.

This article aims at presenting issues related to media education of the elderly, which represents a specific issue in various areas of the social life. E-participation, e-services, e-integration are new challenges, but also aspects of social functioning that permanently shape the life of modern man. The need to improve the digital competences of seniors became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the introduced restrictions "transferred" the social life to the virtual world.

Media education and digital competences

The digital society (often interchangeably referred to as the information society), in which we participate, sets the groundwork for acquiring new knowledge, competences and skills in the field of new media. According to Magdalena Nowacka (2012, p. 197), "information society" is a term "that applies to all people living under the influence of new media. It includes those who spend time in front of the computer every day, either during their work, or as Internet users or elderly people, whose contact with new media is limited to chatting on messenger applications or verifying their admissions to a sanatorium".

Virtual reality, which has been progressing at a dizzying pace, has become a space for the functioning of the 21st-century people. "The omnipresence of the ICT technology and the marriage of computers and phones on the Internet prompted researchers to announce a new stage of the social development the network society. In an advanced form of the network society, the clear division into two groups of cyber reality participants (its creators and passive recipients), still in force at the first stage of the Internet's development, disappears. Nowadays, everyone can simultaneously be a recipient and a creator, both the addressee and the generator of content. Openness and creativity become the dominant model of functioning of this community, which naturally fosters the development of various forms of innovation" (Chorób, Chorób, 2015, p. 45). The omnipresent progress and change also include the virtual space, which is based on the Internet. The change in roles, the expansion of communication opportunities, the development of applications, and the expanding range of services offered on-line drive the need for acquiring new skills that will allow an individual to benefit from the opportunities offered by the technological progress.

In the face of transformations taking place both in the real and the virtual world, a person cannot remain passive, regardless of their age. They must learn new technologies so as not to experience digital exclusion. In response to the developing new media and technology, there was a need for media education, which should cover all age groups and be a complementary part of lifelong learning.

Defining media education clearly is no easy task. As noted by Agnieszka Ogonowska (2013, p. 23), this relatively new discipline was introduced mainly in English-speaking countries and the United States, e.g. in connection with the development of cultural studies. The world's leading countries that have contributed to the development of media education include Canada, New Zealand and Australia. According to the National Broadcasting Council (2022), media education "is a process of shaping and disseminating the ability to consciously and critically use social media in all social and age groups. The process of media education is an activity that should last a lifetime because the forms and technologies of communication are changing, and, moreover, society is also constantly changing." As noted by Paulina Woźniak-Chojnacka (2015, p. 183), media education is an interdisciplinary field, which is associated with necessary competences in the field of new media and the ability to receive media messages appropriately.

The literature on the subject also specifies numerous goals related to media education. According to Bronisław Siemieniecki (2007, p. 137), "the aim of media education is to prepare people for receiving and using the media as intellectual tools of modern man". Preparing a person for the conscious and critical reception of various types of media messages requires extensive knowledge of the media, understood in terms of communication tools and the content they convey. According to Józef Bednarek (2012, pp. 172–173), the media play a vital role in the process of socialization, teaching, learning and upbringing. In this context, the primary task of media education is to enable people to use new technologies efficiently in order to transfer information, develop competences that will be helpful in using multimedia, and prepare them for the critical reading of the meanings in visual culture. Bednarek (2012, p. 173) also emphasizes that currently the media are means both of learning, and of communication and intellectual work, so the media education must also focus on preparing a person for an active and responsible life in an information society. This is particularly important in the conditions of globalization. It can therefore be concluded that technological advancement is an indispensable element of globalization, which affects person's functioning in the community. This functioning often takes place in an unfamiliar space and conditions, generating a sense of fear and anxiety in individuals. According to Mirosław J. Szymański (2013, p. 55), globalization entails the dilemma of "being in between", associated with a desire to learn new things, openness, and curiosity, but also with fear, anxiety and uncertainty resulting from the necessity of making choices.

Media education is complex in nature and refers to both the use of new media and the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and competences in this regard. It is an important component of the socialization process, regardless of one's age, because, as was noted earlier, it must be part of lifelong learning. In addition to media education, terms focused on digital/information or media competences appear increasingly often. These refer directly to media education and are closely associated with it.

As Agnieszka Ogonowska (2013, p. 106) notes, the development of media competences depends on factors that can be broken down into two groups. The first group is directly related to the resources of a given individual, such as cognitive abilities, motivation to acquire theoretical and practical knowledge, curiosity about the world or openness to a change. The second group consists

of environmental factors, independent of the individual. The palette of these factors includes: the educational policy, a cultural/local environment, a role and function of media organizations and educational institutions, and a cultural tradition. Ogonowska (2013, p. 106) also indicates that in a broader perspective, environmental factors may furthermore include the economic condition of the state, a geopolitical and economic situation on international markets, and legislative structures and legal mechanisms of the state supporting the media development.

From the perspective of the issues discussed, attention should be paid to environmental factors, which are shaped by two groups of determinants. The first one is related to the access to devices such as a mobile phone, newspapers, cinema, radio, a computer and the Internet. The second one is related to the institutional context, which includes "social actors and the tasks assigned to them in the field of state education policy (e.g. educational infrastructure, legal regulations, societies, communities, social associations, and civic initiatives aimed at educating individuals in human life at its various stages and in various forms)" (Ogonowska, 2013, p. 108).

According to the definition provided by the Ministry of Administration and Digitization (2014, p. 17), "Digital competences are defined as a set of information competences, including the ability to search for information, understand it, as well as assess its credibility and usefulness, and of IT competences, which include the ability to use computers and other electronic devices, and use the Internet and various types of applications and software, as well as create digital content." Digital competences should be considered at three levels: IT, informational, and functional. These levels complement each other, allowing the constructive and effective use of new media. According to the authors of the Framework catalog of digital competences, digital competences should be treated as functional, because their acquisition is not an end in itself, but is intended to develop abilities for obtaining benefits in various areas of an individual's life. "By competencies we mean a set of skills, knowledge and attitudes that allow the effective use of digital technologies" (Jasiewicz, Filiciak, Mierzecka et al., 2015, p. 7). IT competences largely depend on the access to and the contact with the media; their range includes skills related to the use of devices, such as: using smartphones, a keyboard, and a computer mouse, turning a computer/laptop/tablet off/on, touch screen operation, installing applications and software, searching for content, creating and saving folders, and using the Internet properly. Information competences can be defined as "a set of skills that allow the user to determine when given information is needed, and to search, evaluate and use information from various sources" (Jasiewicz, Filiciak, Mierzecka et al., 2015, p. 8). The catalog of practical skills includes activities determining the scope of information needed and ensuring access to information sources. In this aspect, the ability to critically evaluate information and compare it with the possessed knowledge and the system of values is also gaining relevance. Functional competences are based on information and IT competences, as they set the groundwork for carrying out specific tasks and achieving benefits in various areas of life through the use of digital technologies. According to the literature on the subject, digital competences are used in eight primary areas; these include: work and professional development, relationships with relatives, pursuit of interests, health, finances, religion and spiritual needs, daily affairs, and civic engagement (Jasiewicz, Filiciak, Mierzecka et al., 2015). It can, therefore, be assumed that new technologies enter the most important areas of human life; thus, an individual cannot remain indifferent, which is why media education becomes so important in the course of one's life. From the perspective of the discussed issues and the ongoing demographic changes, special attention should be paid to the elderly as users of new digital technologies. For various reasons, nowadays seniors experience digital exclusion, which deepens with an individual's age; therefore, it becomes reasonable to undertake activities aimed at media education in old age.

Elderly people in the world of new media

Elderly people are one of the largest social groups in Poland. According to the results of the 2021 Census, every fifth inhabitant of Poland is over 60 years old. The number of elderly people has increased by over 1.8 million over the decade (GUS, 2022). The aging of the Polish society is strongly visible in various areas of life, determining new challenges and tasks in the perspective of improving the quality of life of the oldest generations. Along with the progressing aging process, the interest in the needs of seniors increases, not only in terms of economic security, health and care, but also in terms of social activity and participation, which is directly related to media education and the use of digital technology.

As the previous considerations showed, media education enables active participation in the social life, acquiring information, expanding knowledge, and gaining new skills and competences that are necessary for the social participation. Media education in old age is directly related to various forms of activity, primarily educational and social. Educational and social activities dedicated to elderly are an area where they can develop their digital competences; however, as study results show, seniors in Poland are reluctant to use technological solutions. Based on the analyzes carried out, it can be concluded that a modern Polish senior does not have digital competences. They only use the Internet occasionally. According to the data of the Central Statistical Office (GUS), only 13% of people over 65 years old declare that they use the Internet daily, while as many as 75% declare that they have never used it. Seniors most often use the Internet to find necessary information (16%), use online banking services (9%), use social media (7%), purchase or sell products and services (6%), and use public administration services via the Internet (6%) (GUS, 2017, pp. 5-6). The number of people using the Internet decreases with age. Nevertheless, the percentage of seniors who use new media is gradually increasing from year to year. According to the data of the Central Statistical Office (2020), in 2020 43.2% of people aged 65-74 used the Internet; in 2019 it was 37.00%, and in 2015 only 21.3%. In 2020, 48.3% of people aged 60-74 used the Internet at least once a week. The percentage of regular Internet users was slightly higher among men (49.3%) than among women (47.5%) from this age group. To a great extent, the frequency of the Internet use depended on the level of education. In 2020, the percentage of people regularly using the Internet reached 10.2% for seniors aged 60-74 with primary or lower secondary education, 46.0% for people with secondary education, and 88.8% for those with higher education (GUS 2021, p. 62).

The vast majority of seniors use the Internet for private affairs (e.g. reading news, browsing online newspapers), searching for information about goods and services, obtaining information on health, sending e-mails and using online banking services (GUS, 2021, pp. 63–64). When compared to younger generations, Polish seniors use Internet-based public administration services and online shopping less frequently. During the pandemic, websites dedicated to the coronavirus enjoyed great interest among seniors using the Internet, but most often older people got information about COVID-19 from television and radio (GUS, 2021, p. 63).

Polish seniors show a low level of digital competence, as shown by the data of the Central Statistical Office. According to it, the Poles do not use the Internet because they lack appropriate competences, do not feel the need to use the Internet often, the associated costs are too high, for reasons associated with disability, privacy and security, or because they are afraid of using the Internet due to content available online. The lack of digital competences mainly affects older people. Among the oldest people (aged 75 and more), this reason was given by every second respondent (nearly 55%). This percentage reached 38% and 24% for people aged 65-74 and 55-64, respectively. In the youngest age groups analyzed, the ability to use the Internet was practically common. The lack of need to use of the Internet frequently is also most visible among seniors. Everyday use of the Internet was declared by 25% and 9% of respondents aged 65-74 and over 75, respectively. The scope of online activity is clearly differentiated by age (GUS, 2020). The percentage of people not using the Internet increases with age. No use of the Internet due to competence barriers can undoubtedly be considered an indicator of digital exclusion (e-exclusion), and thus one of the indicators of social exclusion. The literature on the subject lists five major areas of discrimination against the oldest age groups. These are: the labor market, social assistance, health care, social participation and communication, and services. A new area of marginalization is increasingly being indicated - digital exclusion (Fabis, Wawrzyniak, Chabior, 2015, pp. 247-252).

In 2020, digital exclusion in Poland affected 3.8 million people. 96% of the excluded people were aged 45–74, where 50% of people in this group did not have basic digital competences (Cyfryzacja KPRM, 2022). Digital exclusion is not an easy phenomenon to define clearly; as the literature specifies that "digital exclusion is a phenomenon of social inequalities between individuals, households, enterprises, and regions at the level of socio-economic development, related to both access to information and communication technologies and their use in all areas of activity" (Orange Foundation, 2021, p. 9). In the context of digital exclusion, attention should also be paid to its levels, because this issue is very complex and one should not focus solely on the lack of access to digital technologies. According to the Report compiled on the initiative of the Orange Foundation, two basic types of digital exclusion can be distinguished (Orange Foundation, 2021, p. 9).

The first type of exclusion, referred to as hard, is associated with the lack of access and is manifested by a lack of access to:

- devices, technology and the Internet due to their physical unavailability;
- devices, technology and the Internet at a level ensuring freedom of use,
 e.g. due to the lack of an appropriate connection or stability of services;
 or
- to devices, technology and the Internet due to their cost.

The access-related exclusion is therefore associated with economic and geographical reasons, as well as with the lack of adaptation to the needs of people, e.g. with disabilities.

Another type of exclusion specified in the Report is the "soft" exclusion related to the use. This is manifested by:

- lack of competence related to the use of devices, technology and the Internet;
- lack of motivation and presence of mental barriers, making an individual unwilling to learn new technologies; or
- not using technology for various purposes related to the information society.

According to the data provided in the Report on social and digital exclusion in Poland, the groups experiencing the highest level of digital exclusion are the elderly, followed by those with a low level of education and in a poor financial situation (Orange Foundation, 2021). The results presented in the Report are consistent with the data of the Central Statistical Office. It can therefore be concluded that Polish seniors do not have digital competences that would allow them to fully use new technologies to meet the needs of their everyday life. While taking up the issue of seniors' activity in cyberspace, Barbara Szmigielska, Anna Bak and Małgorzata Hołda (2014, p. 14) draw the conclusion that "[...] the process of withdrawing from various forms of activity by elderly people manifests itself – among others – in that they do not use the Internet". Researchers note that a low level of the Internet use leads to lower involvement in social, professional and cultural life, which ultimately results in social and economic exclusion (Szmigielska, Bak, Hołda, 2014, p. 15). The multidimensional exclusion of seniors is a phenomenon that resounds very strongly in the social debate. Numerous nationwide and local solutions, programs and projects of a social, educational and preventive nature, which are to contribute to the improved value of old age and the elderly, focus on comprehensive activation, which should also include media education.

Challenges of media education for the elderly

As it is discussed above, media education is an important element of lifelong learning. The developing digitization to a certain extent forces individuals to adapt to the ongoing transformations. The social life is increasingly entering the area of e-services, and thus the lack of digital skills will determine the quality of human life in the near future. Seniors are becoming a special group, and for various reasons, they constitute a digitally excluded group. According to the analyzes (Fundacja Orange, 2021, p. 27), motivational exclusion is the primary form of exclusion in Poland, related to the need to develop and acquire new competences enabling fuller social functioning. In the context of the elderly, it becomes reasonable to undertake activities focused on media education and showing the possibilities offered by new technologies in meeting the needs of everyday life. Low awareness of the opportunities offered by the use of new media determines the lack of motivation, or even reluctance. This state of affairs is also driven by the fact that the development of digitization and the media is also conducive to the spreading of false information and harmful content, which may lead to disinformation.

Media education should be an important element of lifelong learning, with a particular emphasis on the old age. With the increasing penetration of an individual's life by education, its quality increases, as does the importance of social and self-development. The dissemination of such terms as lifelong learning, continuous education, and lifelong education indicates the need for various educational forms adapted to the age and expectations of recipients (Białożyt, 2020, p. 86). According to Ryszard Gerlach (2007, pp. 54–74), current times require constant learning, as it ensures individual and social development. Józef Półturzycki (2008, pp. 69–80) states that modernity brings to people new challenges and tasks. Education and knowledge gained at school are no longer enough to last a lifetime. Modern people must constantly update their knowledge and competences; otherwise, their participation in the society will be incomplete. With the ongoing changes, the contemporary social participation is increasingly closely related to one's digital competences.

In the context of the elderly and the development of their digital competences, a significant role is attributed to educational activities, which may include references to media education. The institutions that significantly contribute to the education of seniors are Universities of the Third Age. Other organizations, acting for the broadly defined activation of the elderly, including their educational activation, should also include Senior Clubs, Support Centers, Senior Activity Centers. As noted by Stefan M. Kwiatkowski (2018, p. 16), the unprecedented acceleration of civilization, which covers all spheres of modern life, generates the need, and even the necessity, for learning, at various levels and through various forms of education, both at school and academic institutions, as well as at courses, trainings, workshops, through professional work, as well as through relationships with other people. Therefore, all institutions working for the activation of seniors contribute to the creation of a space conducive to education, including media education. As noted by Norbert G. Pikuła (2020, p. 7), "Universities of the third age play a special role here. (...) In a world undergoing progressive digitization, taming the use of 'modern technologies' should be one of the primary educational activities of universities of the third age."

On the basis of the conducted analyzes, it can be concluded that the challenges in the area of media education for seniors are not only associated with providing them with the access to new technologies, but also with motivating them to actively engage in acquiring new skills. It is urgent to reinforce motivation and build interest in using new technologies within all spheres of life. Encouraging people of retirement age to use new media is also becoming more and more relevant, as an educational activity in old age is undertaken by the vast majority of seniors with higher education. People with lower education are not much involved in educational activity; according to the data, only 11% of U3A students are seniors with primary and vocational education (GUS, 2019). This state of affairs is consistent with the current state of knowledge and numerous studies, where the relationship between education and undertaken activities is clearly visible, especially for the educational activity. In the view of the above, within the media education of seniors it is necessary to focus also on seniors with lower education and strengthen their digital competences, because "The age-related deficit of competences necessary to use the web in a valuable way is currently one of the most serious aspects of social and digital exclusion" (Orange Foundation, 2021, p. 27).

In the era of digitization and the progression of new technologies, we are also witnessing the misuse of the virtual world. Great amounts of false content and hazards associated with the use of the Internet should also be covered by topics of media education for seniors. The development of the ability to use digitization safely, and to filter news and available content can protect the oldest generations from the dangers associated with new media. Therefore, it becomes crucial to promote safe use, to show possible solutions that will serve older generations, but also enable a valuable participation in the social life through the development of digital competences.

Media education of seniors must take into account their needs, low motivation, physical and psychological health, the disability type and degree, if any, as well as predispositions and individual experiences. Although it is a developmental stage in human life, the period of old age is associated with a person's specific conditions and attitudes, which cannot always be changed. An important problem of media education for seniors is definitely creating a space that activates the oldest age groups. Relatives, family or friends may play a large role in motivating the elderly to develop their digital competences. "Activities related to the development of digital skills should be linked with these people's social relations. This will benefit both their ability to learn effectively and their social inclusion needs. In particular, such actions should be considered in the case of single people" (Orange Foundation, 2021, p. 27).

The ongoing socio-cultural transformations also contribute to expansion of a catalog of skills and competences that a modern person should possess. To a certain extent, the omnipresent development forces educational activities that will cover various spheres of a person's life and respond to emerging needs. Media education undoubtedly fits into the assumptions of lifelong learning and is its important element in modern times. Regardless of age, one should deepen their practical skills in order to function better in everyday life, using the Internet and new media. Elderly people in Poland are a group that has low digital competences, which is why activities in the area of media education are of particular importance in this age group.

The aim of the presented article was to discuss issues related to media education in the context of the elderly. Numerous changes, civilization development and technological progress generate the need to adapt and understand what is inevitable. Digitization, the Internet, and new media are terms that are increasingly reflected in people's everyday life. Failure to use

them may lead to digital exclusion and, in consequence, social and economic marginalization. With the progressing aging of societies, there is an increasing demand for media education among the elderly. This will enable fuller social participation of seniors and will also reduce the risk of exclusion and marginalization.

Abstract: The article addresses the issue of media education of the elderly in Poland. It aims at presenting the problem of media education of senior, representing a specific issue in various areas of the social life. E-participation, e-services, and e-inclusion are new challenges, but also dimensions of social functioning that permanently shape the life of modern man. According to available data, Polish seniors present a low level of digital competence. The article analyzes the available data associated with the task faced by the media education in the most senior age groups. With the progressing aging of the population, there is a growing need to undertake media education activities among the elderly. This will enable their fuller social participation and also reduce the risk of their exclusion and marginalization.

Keywords: media education, elderly people, digital exclusion, digital competences

Streszczenie: Artykuł porusza problematykę edukacji medialnej osób starszych w Polsce. Artykuł ma na celu zaprezentowanie zagadnienie związanych z edukacją medialną osób starszych, która stanowi pewnego rodzaju wyzwanie dla różnych obszarów dziedzin życia społecznego. E-uczestnictwo, e-usługi, e-integracja to nowe wyzwania, ale także wymiary funkcjonowania społecznego, które na stałe kształtują życie człowieka współczesnego. Jak wynika z dostępnych danych Polscy seniorzy prezentują niski poziom kompetencji cyfrowych. W artykule dokonano analizy dostępnych danych odnoszących się zadanie jakie stoją przed edukacją medialną najsatsrzych grup wiekowych. Wraz z postępującym procesem starzenia się społeczeństw, wzrasta zapotrzebowanie na podejmowanie działań z zakresu edukacji medialnej, wśród osób starszych. Pozwoli to na pełniejsza partycypację społeczną seniorów a także zmniejszy ryzyko wykluczenia i marginalizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja medialna, osoby starsze, wykluczenie cyfrowe, kompetencje cyfrowe

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