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The influence of modern technologies on family in Poland and Europe

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Introduction

In the early 70s the first – very simple and not handy – personal computers were launched in the US market. These were innovative products of hardly known small manufacturing companies Microsoft and Apple. The professional electronics industry did not consider these developments as a serious future technology path. Two decades earlier the Swedish telecom company presented a device that today is considered to be the first mobile phone. It weighed 40 kilos and was offered at the price of a new medium class car. Today, as the Doleoitte report “TMT Predictions 2013” [TMT 2013] reported, almost 2 billion people carry pocket devices with high better performance and computability than most scientific computers of 20th century were not capable of achieving.

The digital revolution that has changed the world, has now even more obvious and increasingly tangible influence upon the family environment. Alike the industrial developments of the late 19th century that created new professions, social patterns and habits, the great technology progress of the late 20th century has led to transforming human communications, ways of maintaining and initiating contacts among people, restructured the social and professional relations.

Our life patterns have changed influencing the way of spending free time, internal family communication, attitudes and relations. At first glance it is easy to conclude that the all-embracing presence of new technologies distracts family intimacy and affects the quality of relations in a negative way. But this picture is far too simplified. On the opposite pole we will find a number of advance solutions enabling family members to stay close to one another, keep in touch and be able to

help in various difficult situations. This would be never possible without the use of new technologies, that let people be in almost permanent contact.

Techno family against traditional family model?

Could we take a risk to use the new term “techno-family”? Yes, if we relate it to a wider social context. However complex the phenomenon is, it is obvious that there is a reverse relationship between the technological advancement the mankind is currently experiencing and a gradual degrading and weakening of family. Both are aiming in just opposite directions.

While technological advancements boost up into the sky, the family life is keeping its downward route. The integrity of family community seems to be somehow not easy to maintain in the world offering fast communication and mobile life patterns. However it is not the technology at our homes that is really the threat. The new developments changed the way societies work and live. They strengthened the role of corporate business models that developed new types of relations which became competitive to private lives, made people much more available and flexible. All this has successfully weakened the role of home place as the bastion of privacy.

However, one must notice that the currently used technologies are becoming more and more interactive. Let us see how family relations were historically changing along with the introduction of various technologies. With the entry of television the family moved from being an actively interacting, facing one another group of people, who talked, played, joked argued, to a more side to side relation, sitting next to each other with the attention directed towards the new centre, which was then the TV set. Personal computers made this distance even bigger by symbolic back to back relation, where all family members became engaged in their own individual worlds, separated and distant from the home intimacy and personal relations. Jokes describing relatives writing emails to communicate among one another when all living under one roof became reality. The new mobile technology and new communications means begin to change the this trend. The family more and more often use the new means to exchange information, entertain and educate together. The youth from the single direction Internet surfers turn gradually into a lively community exchanging loads of information and emotions by means of various handy social services and platforms. Is it the return to pre-TV times of community? Not in a direct way, but the new Internet culture can help to rebuild family integration. Below I shall point to dangers that influence our social lives in a negative way, but can be at the same time transformed into positive actions driving families to get together and share experiences.

First threat–Work versus home

Negative impact: Mobile technologies, phones and laptops, especially when using advanced cloud based applications provided by employers, easily and often imperceptibly bring our work duties and routines to home environment. This disturbs the life realms formerly secured for private usage only.

Positive transformation: At the same time, especially younger people learn how to use it for own benefit and easier time management. More and more employers allow for remote task driven work plans and more employees learn how to use it to manage the right proportions between work and private lives. Let's take an obvious example of a young mother who wants to stay home longer and devote more time to child care. If she is an accountant, marketing manager or a graphic designer, she can quite easily stay active and perform effectively part of her daily work duties without leaving home. New employment culture is able to understand and make use of this advantages for the benefit of both – work efficiency and private life protection

Sharing and spending time together

Negative impact: No doubt computers steal our time – hours of surfing on line, games making young people addicted to virtual worlds, unconditional habit of constant checking what's happening on facebook. It is all true.

Positive transformation: New mobile technologies tend to be used much more for communication and exchange of information than rather keeping people immersed in Internet browsing. This is a true reunifying role of new media that keep people in constant contact with the others. Game consoles that offer a wide range of team activities are a very good example for this. Skype communication lets families whose children live in foreign countries keep everyday visual and vocal contacts, that virtually often bring the distance down to a minimum, let them share joys and concerns as if they were living together. Today communication means constant exchange of pictures, videos, information, jokes and documents. One can easily notice that the youth today most of the time are swapping loads of information among each other and keep in constant touch with their groups of interest. So, it's just our task to learn how to participate in it and how to make a proper use of the tools.

Upbringing

Negative impact: Technologies are often used as an upbringing substitute. Showing a movie or a game on a tablet seemingly solves many problems and many parents eagerly make use of the help. This leads easily into many problems, slows social and intellectual development of the child, and diminishing the role of parent in the upbringing processes at early growth stages.

Positive transformation: Internet and its vast resources are abound in valuable content, which properly managed by the conscious and understanding parents can be used to support education and child's development. If a tablet is used not as simple toy but a source of knowledge to widen the common family experience, to make it deeper and more worthy, this can turn out to be a great tool that not only gives a real education but also keeps the relatives close together. When sharing photos with friends and family we deepen emotional bonds and allow common experiences be cherished together over and over again to build a new experience of being together.

The scattered generations

With the rise of the new forms of communication and ways to access enormous amount of information on the Internet, the traditional relations between generations have undergone a dramatic change. The present generation is not any more building its identity in the opposition against the "old order". The difference between these generations communication codes is simply too big. The young build their world independently and are aware that the generation gap is too big to make any kind of revolt. Similarly, the natural succession of knowledge and experience that used to be the natural link connecting the generations plays no longer any role in the world where all past and present information is available immediately and with greatest accuracy. The relation is even the opposite now. Today it is rather the grandchild who tries to build the intergeneration unity by teaching its grandparents the use of the new technologies and new communications forms.

How to approach

The education system seems to be not ready to answer the challenges of these changes today. It rather tends to protect the traditional teaching methods or make chaotic efforts to update its methods, usually by engaging new equipment into old teaching routines. However, the first and most urgent task is to support the engagement of new technologies in family environment. In the world that is driven by the market demands and marketing messages, teachers should be the right moderators able to guide young users and their parents to be able to use the new solutions for their benefit and development.

Polish modern family

Taking into account that due to historical and economic reasons Polish society is still behind in access to new technologies and is on its way to make up for the gap between more developed western economies, we can observe the differences and predict future changes in social behaviours. The conclusions may be very useful especially when working on new education programs and forecasting future needs.

Supply of computers in private households (%):

Description	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
General	58,9	66,1	69	71,3	73,4
By household type					
Households with children	80,7	86,6	90,8	93,6	94,6
Households without children	48,3	55,7	58,2	60,4	62,8

Access to Internet in private households (%):

Description	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
General	47,6	58,6	63,4	66,6	70,5
By household type					
Households with children	61,4	75,3	82,9	88,3	91,5
Households without children	40,9	50,7	53,7	56,0	60,0

Source: GUS Report *Information Society in Poland* (2012)

When analysing the GUS (Main Statistics Agency) Report *The Information Society in Poland* [GUS 2012] it turns out that households with children have significantly wider access to computers and Internet. It clearly shows that presence of children and active family life induces to use new media. This confirms the thesis that in a more or less conscious way the new technologies are a natural companion of family life. The report also shows that majority of users prefer to go online, work and play on computers at home. This means that the family circle is the right place to engage the technologies for the benefit of children and community.

Poland vs Europe

The very important observations can be derived from the report *EU Kids Online: national perspectives* [2012]. The Polish part of the report was prepared by **Dr Lucyna Kirwil** of Szkoła Wyższa Psychologii Społecznej w Warszawie (University of Social Sciences and Humanities) [Kirwil, 2011].

It turns out that although Polish children are using computers and Internet even more often than average of EU youth, they also are using it rather alone, in their own rooms, without control. In western countries Internet is used much more as a shared activity, often by means of mobile devices and game consoles. This is therefore the area where parents should be educated and understand that modern devices can be used as tools for building a joint entertainment and study. Today it is still often the area that is used to isolate relatives from themselves.

Methods of going online

Devices used by children to go online	% children in Poland	% children in Europe
Computer used with together others	58	58
Own PC	52	35

Mobile phone	34	31
TV set	35	31
Own laptop	13	22
Game console	11	26
Other mobile devices	5	12

Note¹: The test group of Internet users in Poland consisted of 960 children aged from 9 to 16 years old. The whole test group in Europe was 25.142 children aged 9 to 16.

Source: Kirwil, L. Polish Kids on the Internet. Threats and security.

Places of going online

Places from which children are going online	% children in Poland	% children in Europe
School	66	63
Own room	63	49
Friend's home	52	53
Shared room at home	27	62
Next of kin's home	38	42
Public library	12	12
Internet cafe	5	12

Note¹: The test group of Internet users in Poland consisted of 960 children aged from 9 to 16 years old. The whole test group in Europe was 25.142 children aged 9 to 16.

Source: Kirwil, L. Polish Kids on the Internet. Threats and security.

The research also shows that the Polish parents have not yet learned how to talk and recognise the threats together with the children. They still rather tend to ban and limit access to computer than surfing on line together and talking about dangers that can be encountered on the Internet.

Conclusions

The presence of new technologies in the lives of modern families is inevitable. Instead of fighting against them, their integrating and positive functions need to be supported. To achieve it, parents and children should be equipped with the proper understanding of technology and contemporary cultural challenges. The role of the education system is to deliver the proper skills to be able to choose the right tools and solutions. It seems we missed the right moment to get involved, but it is never too late.

At present, there are not even codes showing what is proper and not proper as far as the use of mobile devices is concerned. There are no guidelines recommending which Internet sites or apps are professionally approved and can be securely used in for children education and entertainment. To say what is worthy is left to

marketing business experts who focus on commercial side of products and their market potentials. That's why today culture lacks codes of behaviour, promotes overuse of mobile technologies as a means of pure entertainment and fun, imposes no boundaries or real content filtering.

It's only in our hands to control our social relations. The new developments and modern technologies may well serve for the benefit of social life and can keep the family bonds closer together. We need to use our wit and learn the dangers to be able to react and turn them into benefits. That's the real challenge for the modern education system.

Abstract: The author of this article undertakes to analyse the influences of modern technologies on contemporary family. He points to new dangers that appear in the area and at the same time seeks ways for transforming them into positive factors that can strengthen family inner integrity. New terms are being defined to describe the prime problems for pedagogical approach to the problem. The article contains up-to-date statistical data from the following reports: GUS *Społeczeństwo informacyjne 2012*; *Technology, Media & Telecommunications (TMT) Predictions 2013*; *EU Kids Online: national perspectives 2012*; *Polskie dzieci w Internecie. Zagrożenia i bezpieczeństwo-2011* (opr.L.Kirwil).

Key words: new technologies, family, techno-family, upbringing, threats, Internet

Streszczenie: Autor artykułu postanowił przeanalizować wpływ nowoczesnych technologii na współczesną rodzinę. Wskazuje on na pojawiające nowe się zagrożenia i jednocześnie szuka sposobów na przekształcanie ich w pozytywne czynniki, które mogą wzmocnić wewnętrzną integrację rodziny. Zdefiniowano nowe pojęcia w celu opisanie pierwszorzędowych problemów pedagogicznego podejścia do tego problemu. Artykuł zawiera aktualne dane statystyczne z następujących raportów: GUS *Społeczeństwo informacyjne 2012*; *Technologia, Media i Telekomunikacja (TMT) Predictions 2013*; *EU Kids Online: perspektywy krajowe 2012*; *Polskie dzieci w Internecie. Zagrożenia I BEZPIECZEŃSTWO-2011* (opr.L.Kirwil).

Słowa kluczowe: nowe technologie, rodzina, techno-rodzina, techno-wychowanie, zagrożenia, Internet

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