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Internet activity and the sense of anlienation of young people in the media age

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The media have become man's natural environment. The younger generation matures in a highly developed society, and the media provide young people with the opportunity to satisfy their fundamental needs, including those related to interpersonal contact. But is it really so? This raises the question of the link between the Internet activity of young people and their sense of alienation. The article is an attempt at answering this problem. The research was carried out using the diagnostic survey method among 196 students of secondary schools in the Podkarpackie and Lesser Polish voivodeships.

KEY WORDS: internet activity, alienation, young people

Introduction

The 21st century, compared to the past centuries, is doubtless a time of intertwining of two worlds – the real and the virtual. Mass media, as a necessary component of the daily lives of people, along with the *mediatisation* of reality, have become the reason for the fact that today's civilisation has been hailed as the „media civilisation"[1].

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[1] T. Goban-Klas, Cywilizacja medialna, Wydawnictwo WSiP, Warszawa 2005, p. 6.

Thanks to the Internet, the media society has started to change even further. „Today, anybody can supply services and content, recommendations and advice (…) One can endlessly switch back and forth between the virtual and the real worlds – they are entirely fused"[2]. In the beginning, technological novelties were only an interesting addition to everyday lives. However, over several years, they have become indispensable. We cannot imagine lives without phones or the Internet. We have entered a time, when we are continuously active in the area of telecommunications – the 'always on' age[3]. Technology also constitutes a significant cause of social changes, it influences society and this influence is unconditional. The Internet had contributed to radical changes in the social functioning of an individual. „Irreversible changes in our mode of working, playing, perceiving the world and in the way we deal with each other"[4]. We are living a so-called digital life. Our phones have changed into photographic cameras, notebooks, calendars, dictionaries, game consoles, television sets and many more[5]. A virtual revolution had taken place. All our daily activities are conducted via the Internet. The search engine on the tablet, phone or laptop that is always open. Interpersonal communication is not about direct contact any more – it's become intermediated. Young Internet users in particular actively utilise this platform of communication to exchange information and messages related to their common interests, convictions or attitudes"[6]. The Internet had become for them a new reality, in which they function daily. As they say „[…] we do not use the web, we live in it and with it. […] Each of our formative experiences

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[2] D. Lombard, Globalna wioska cyfrowa: drugie życie sieci, Wydawnictwo MT Biznes, Warszawa, 2009, p. 14.

[3] D. Lombard, Globalna wioska cyfrowa: drugie życie sieci, Wydawnictwo MT Biznes, Warszawa, 2009, pp. 94-95.

[4] E. Aboujaoude, Wirtualna osobowość naszych czasów, mroczna strona e-osobowości, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego Wydanie I, Kraków 2012 p. 12.

[5] E. Aboujaoude, Wirtualna osobowość naszych czasów, mroczna strona e-osobowości, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego Wydanie I, Kraków 2012 p. 11.

[6] T. Smektała, *Public relations w internecie*, Wydawnictwo Astrum, Wrocław 2006, p. 53.

contained a natural degree of the Internet. On-line we made friends, argued, we prepared crib notes online, arranged to meet for parties and learning together, fell in love and split up[7]. The media have presently become a „cultural and social system[8]. However, the possibilities offered by the use of the Internet are determined to a much greater extent now by the intensity of the issue of social alienation. „We are living in a time, when people close to each other in the physical sense are removed from each other, and people far away from each other become close"[9]. Science utilises many definitions of alienation. One of the first concepts of alienation was proposed by Gwynn Nettler, describing it as „separation or isolation of man from other „natural" objects. He understands alienation as separation from society and from its culture[10]. Most concepts of alienation consider it to be a perceptible drop in quality of social relations (disappointment, loss of illusions, breakdown of the system of social expectations)[11]. The core of the alienation personality is the generalised feeling of alienation that is primarily characterised by the feeling of anomie, pointlessness, self-alienation, helplessness or abandonment[12]. It can be a particularly dangerous phenomenon in the context of young people, who are more than others threatened by experiencing isolation, and, accordingly, loneliness. During adolescence, they experience fast psycho-social development, the individ-

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[7] P. Czerski, Do analogowych, „Polityka", 2012, no. 10(2849), pp. 64–65.

[8] J. Morbitzer, O istocie medialności młodego pokolenia, „Neodidagmata", 2012, 33/34, pp. 133–134.

[9] T. Goban-Klas, *Społeczeństwo masowe, informacyjne, sieciowe czy medialne?* [in:] „Ethos, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski", users.uj.edu.pl/~usgoban/files/spoleczen stwo medialne.doc, accessed on November 20th, 2016.

[10] A. Turska-Kawa, Poczucie alienacji a użytkowanie mediów. W poszukiwaniu nowych obszarów zastosowania teorii użytkowania i gratyfikacji. Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice 2011, p. 18.

[11] A. Turska-Kawa, Poczucie alienacji a użytkowanie mediów. W poszukiwaniu nowych obszarów zastosowania teorii użytkowania i gratyfikacji. Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice 2011, pp. 16–24.

[12] A. Jakubik, K. Piastowska, Osobowość alienacyjna a schizofrenia paranoidalna, „Studia Psychologia: 1, 2000, pp. 69–80.

ual begins to perceive themselves as a partner in social relations and ascribes a personal significance to these relations. Hence, the feeling of loneliness during youth may constitute a significant risk of development of improper changes to personality, and also cause pathological behaviour[13]. The author of the present study had hence set for herself the goal of diagnosing the feeling of alienation in youths in the context of their media activity.

Research methodology

Studies of the media activity of youths were conducted at four upper secondary schools in the Subcarpathian and Lesser Polish voivodeships on a sample of 196 people. The study included youths from the following schools: The general upper secondary school of Biecz, Rzeszów school complex, the Cyprian Kamil Norwid general upper secondary school of Rzeszów and the Juliusz Słowacki innovative school complex of Jarosław. The feeling of alienation in turn was studied in 98 pupils of two from the four schools named above. The breakdown of the research sample is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Gender and count of the studied pupils

	Secondary school of Biecz		School complex of Rzeszów		Secondary school of Rzeszów		Innovative school complex of Jarosław	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Female	31	64.5	23	46	39	78	22	45.8
Male	17	35,5	27	54	11	22	26	54.2
Total	48	100	50	100	50	100	48	100

Source: Results of studies conducted by U. Błądzińska, J. Kalinowska, B. Kusa, P. Czeluśniak as part of bachelor paper studies.

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[13] Z. Dołęga, Samotność młodzieży: analiza teoretyczna i studia empiryczne, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice, 2003, p. 26.

The research was conducted by the diagnostic survey method. The utilised tool was the questionnaire of the survey – *„My on-line activity*, developed by G. Wąsowicz and M. Styśko-Kunkowska[14], used to diagnose media activity of youths, and the survey questionnaire of the „Z" Alienation Perception Scale by Agnieszka Turska-Kawa[15] analysing the feeling of loneliness in respondents. For the present study, and due to the breadth of the collected material, the analysis only utilises a part of the obtained research results.

Research results

The analysis of results commenced with the diagnosis of media activity of upper secondary school youths. The table below presents the frequency of usage of the Internet by youths in the last year.

Table 2. Frequency of usage of the Internet in the most recent year

How frequently did you use the Internet in the most recent year?													
Never		Once a month or more rarely		2–3 times a month		Once a week		Several times a week		Once a day		More than once a day	
L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%
–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1		6		189	96

As the results indicate, 96% of those surveyed use the Internet more than once a day. This fact is not surprising, as we are dealing with the „always on" generation. The obtained data also confirms

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14 G. Wąsowicz and M. Styśko-Kunkowska, *Młodzież w Internecie – zagrożenie uzależnieniem. Podręcznik do kwestionariusza MAWI,* Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2014.

15 A. Turska-Kawa, Poczucie alienacji a użytkowanie mediów. W poszukiwaniu nowych obszarów zastosowania teorii użytkowania i gratyfikacji, Wydawnictwo Naukowe „Śląsk", Katowice 2011.

the results of research by other authors. For instance, the study „*Teenagers 3.0*", conducted in the year 2017 shows that the decisive majority of respondents stated that they used the Internet many times a day or the entire time: at home (80.0%), at school (39.2%), at friends (32.4%), in public spaces, where WiFi is available (29.7%)[16].

Interesting is also the fact of responses to the question about how the time spent by youths on-line compares to the preceding year. The obtained data is shown in the graph below.
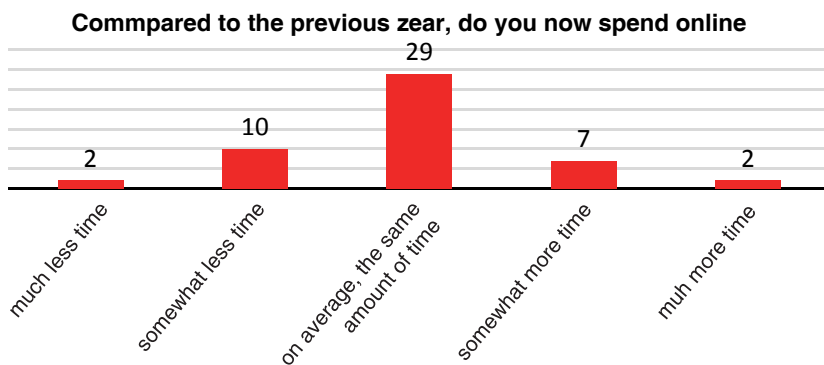
Commpared to the previous zear, do you now spend online

Diagram 1. Volume of time spent on-line as compared to the previous year

Close to 60% of youths declared that they spend the same amount of time on-line as they did the previous year. For close to 40% of respondents, this time has changed (dropped or increased). The causes that influenced the change of on-line activity were caused primarily by perfectioning in what the relevant person is doing in reality (learning, extracurricular activities, hobby) and caring for their future. Upper secondary school youths are already at an age, at which they

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[16] Report from the study Nastolatki 3.0 [Teenagers 3.0] conducted by the Workshop for Educational applications of Information and Communications Technologies of the Polish Research and Academic Computer Network, Warszawa 2017, p. 7, https://www.nask.pl/pl/o-nask/eksperci-nask/publikacje-naukowe/688,Raport-z-badania-Nastolatki-30.html, of 24.05.2018.

start thinking about their future more seriously than in the past. Hence, the time spent learning is very important to them.

A further problem that was studied applies to the on-line activity most frequently chosen by youths. The results are included in the diagrams below.
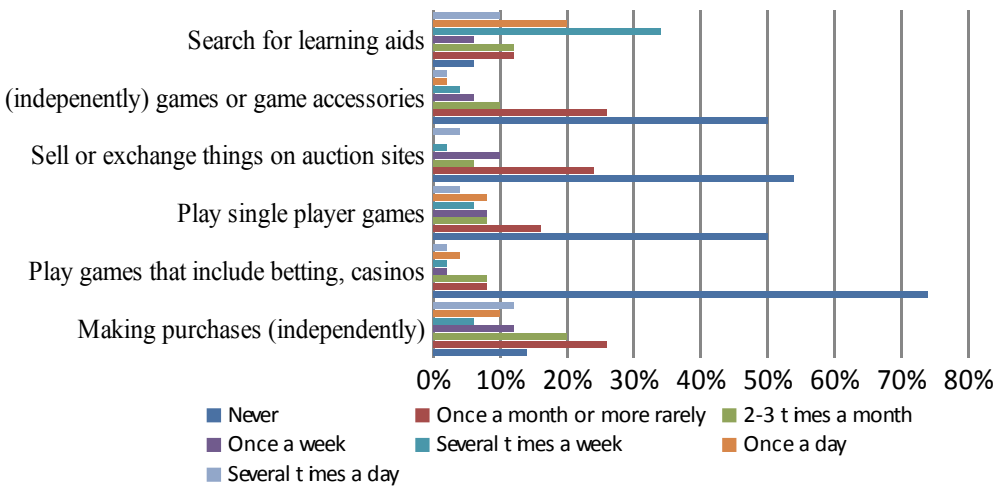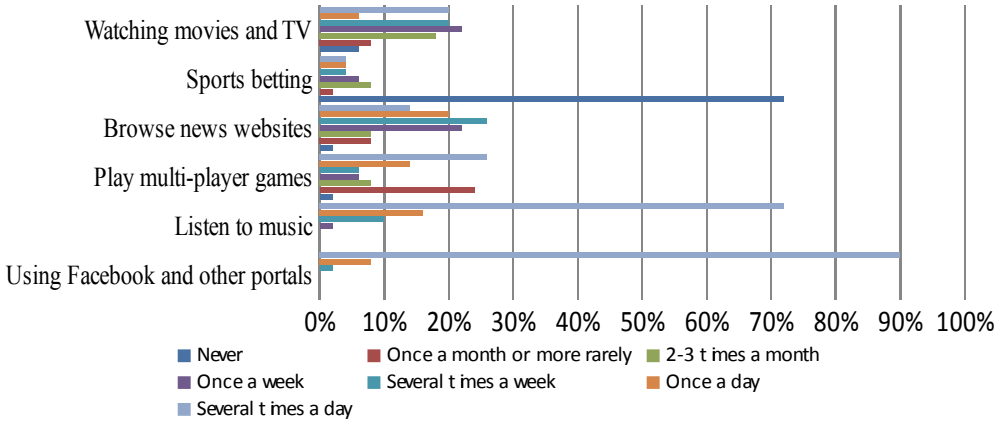
Diagrams 2 and 3. Frequency of on-line activities in the most recent year

Table 3. Causes of spending more time on-line

I spend the same amount of time or more amount of time on-line, because:	Does not fit me at all		Fits me very weakly		Fits me weakly		Fits me in average		Fits me strongly		Fits me very strongly	
	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
I discover new, fascinating websites and they draw me in	12	6	20	10	32	16	36	18	68	35	28	14
It's nice to forget about one's daily worries	20	10	24	12	28	14	24	12	58	30	42	21
The internet draws me in regularly and I use it more and more	24	12	32	16	46	23	58	30	20	10	16	8
I prefer to be on-line than meet friends in real life	138	70	43	22	15	8	–	0	–	0	–	0
Time spent off-line is a time when I feel bad	128	65	62	32	6	3	–	0	–	0	–	0
I discover new opportunities offered by the Internet and I can't let go	25	13	42	21	40	20	60	31	18	9	11	6
I want to forget about my worries	34	17	40	20	35	18	34	17	28	14	25	13
I frequently spend more and more time on-line, because it is a nice feeling	24	12	20	10	32	16	64	33	40	20	16	8
I prefer to be on-line than talk to people in real life	58	30	32	16	54	28	32	16	12	6	8	4
Time spent off-line is a struggle	40	20	43	22	89	45	24	12	–	0	–	0
I get to know new games and I can't let go of them	74	38	30	15	26	13	42	21	24	12	–	0

I need to take a break from reality	60	31	56	29	26	13	28	14	26	13	–	0
I spend more and more time on-line, because I feel good then	58	30	28	14	24	12	58	30	14	7	14	7
I don't really care about people in the real world	60	31	58	30	32	16	34	17	12	6	–	0
I miss something when I am off-line	82	42	32	16	35	18	21	11	12	6	14	7
I need to relieve stress	50	26	28	14	32	16	46	23	28	14	12	6
This improves my mood	52	27	20	10	12	6	60	31	36	18	16	8
I feel better among people who I only know on-line	48	24	40	20	40	20	32	16	28	14	8	4
Without the Internet, life is empty	69	35	49	25	42	21	28	14	8	4	–	0
I am fascinated by the world of the Internet that knows no boundaries	72	37	32	16	24	12	36	18	12	6	20	10

The obtained results indicate that the most popular on-line activity of youths is using Facebook and other social media sites (90%), with the second being listening to music (70%). The achieved results align with data from research by, for instance, B. Komorowska (popularity of social media sites 86%, listening to music and watching films on-line (81%). These are the most frequently chosen forms of activity of upper secondary school pupils[17]. The on-line activities chosen most rarely or never are those related to on-line gambling and shopping. Youths frequently does not come into contact with sports betting (72%), gambling or casino games (74%) and active participation in auction sites (54%). These results are identical with the results of M. Styśko-Kunkowska and G. Wąsowicz (85% of persons did not come into contact with sports betting, 87.8% with gambling and casinos, and 73.5% with auction sites[18].

The table below presents the results of research concerning the time spent on-line.

As indicated by results of the studied, youths treat the Internet as a source of fun (61%) and the place where they can discover new, fascinating websites (68%). This is confirmed by the study entitled „*Internet addition (netoholism) among Polish upper secondary school youths*", which showed that in most cases (74%) being on-line is identified as a form of entertainment. The third place in turn (57%) as evaluated by those surveyed, surfing the web was an effective way to combat boredom[19]. As research indicates, being off-line does not cause significant discomfort in these pupils. 60% of the studied

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[17] B. Komorowska, *Aktywność internetowa dzieci i młodzieży – wskazania dla praktyki pedagogicznej,* Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II.

[18] M. Styśko-Kunkowska, G. Wąsowicz, *Uzależnienia od e-czynności wśród młodzieży: diagnoza i determinanty,* Instytut Studiów Społecznych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2014.

[19] I. Białokoz-Kalinowska et al., *Uzależnienie od internetu (siecioholizm) wśród młodzieży licealnej – konsekwencje zdrowotne i psychospołeczne,* Klinika Pediatrii i Zaburzeń Rozwoju Dzieci i Młodzieży Uniwersytetu Medycznego w Białymstoku, Białystok. 2011, http://yadda.icm.edu.pl/yadda/element/bwmeta1.element.psjd-7769c8b2-758f-4b9e-8cab-35595d16e2d6, p. 374, [accessed on: 24.05.2018].

youths do not believe that life without the Internet is empty. Despite the fact that contemporary youths that are so strongly enveloped by the internet, and if would seem that they do not imagine their daily functioning without it, we cannot talk here about pathological reactions of youths to lack of Internet access or a dependency on it. The obtained data does not confirm the results of the study „Teenagers 3.0", according to which over half of those surveyed feels irritated if the Internet stops working or if they do not have access to it (64.2%)[20]. One may surmise that this is caused by the field of research and the age of the surveyed youths. For upper secondary school pupils, the Internet is significant, but contact with people, especially in real life, is important. In this case, this is confirmed by the study „Teenagers 3.0", according to which the young generation evaluates more highly real people from their social circle – parents, friends – than persons from the virtual space[21].

In order not to feel loneliness, important is the fact of spending time in the company of others. This has significance in particular in the real world. Man is a social creature, which, just like air, needs the presence of others. However, one of the fundamental needs of man is direct contact with another person. It is contact like this that builds strong bonds. Along with the development of intermediated communication, these bonds weaken. Communication using the Internet is not able to fully replace direct face-to-face communication. Hence, interesting has become the fact of searching for the answer to the question with whom contemporary youths spend

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[20] Report from the study Nastolatki 3.0 conducted by the Workshop for Educational applications of Information and Communications Technologies of the Polish Research and Academic Computer Network, Warszawa 2017, p. 17 https://www.nask.pl/pl/o-nask/eksperci-nask/publikacje-naukowe/688,Raport-z-badania-Nastolatki-30.html, of 24.05.2018.

[21] Report from the study Nastolatki 3.0 conducted by the Workshop for Educational applications of Information and Communications Technologies of the Polish Research and Academic Computer Network, Warszawa 2017, p. 71 https://www.nask.pl/pl/o-nask/eksperci-nask/publikacje-naukowe/688,Raport-z-badania-Nastolatki-30.html, of 24.05.2018. p. 71.

time, both in the real, as well as in the virtual world. Are youths accompanied only by acquaintances, or by parents as well, and do they spend their time on-line with parents, too.

The table below presents the results of trials concerning spending of time by upper secondary school pupils.

Modes of spending free time	Does not fit at all	Fits very weakly	Fits weakly	Average fit	Fits strongly	Fits very strongly
1. Surfing the Internet with mum and/ or dad	**56%**	26%	3%	10%	5%	–
2. Spending free time with friends in the real world	1%	2%	5%	14%	32%	**46%**
3. Shopping on-line with mum and/ or dad	**34%**	22%	18%	16%	9%	2%
4. Spending free time outside	1%	3%	18%	26%	**30%**	22%
5. Playing on-line games with mum and/ or dad	**98%**	2%	–	–	–	–
6. I devote my free time to develop my skills and passions (in e. g. sports, art, music, languages, etc.)	1%	12%	10%	20%	25%	**32%**
7. Watching films/ TV on-line with mum and/ or dad	24%	**30%**	2%	26%	14%	4%
8. Listening to music on-line with mum and/ or dad	**50%**	16%	4%	16%	10%	4%

The table above shows that youths do not spend time on the Internet with their parents. They are at such an age that acquaintances are more important to them than family. The only activity performed together with parents is watching films or TV on-line, however, this activity is not significant. The analysed pupils, however, are keen to spend free time together with their acquaintances outside. Important is also the development of their passions.

So, do contemporary youths, those that were analysed, feel lonely? Selected results of research were presented in the table below.

Table 4. Selected symptoms possibly indicating a feeling of alienation among youths

No.		I definitely agree		I rather agree		I rather disagree		I definitely disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	I rather feel low self-esteem	20	20.4	**29**	**29.5**	**31**	**31.7**	18	18.4
2.	I believe that I am not submissive	5	5.1	24	24.5	**36**	**36.7**	**33**	**33.7**
3.	There are many situations, in which I do not know how to behave at all	13	13.2	32	32.7	**41**	**42**	12	12.2
4.	One rather cannot include me among those that show initiative	12	12.2	21	21.4	**43**	**43.9**	**22**	**22.5**
5.	I frequently feel that I am not myself	10	10.2	22	22.4	**21**	21.4	**45**	**46**
6.	I belong to the group of strong people	**30**	**30.6**	**36**	**36.7**	26	26.5	6	6.2
7.	My home is something that's very important to me	**76**	**77.6**	**16**	**16.4**	3	3	3	3
8.	I feel needed, e. g. by my family, friends	**57**	**58.1**	**25**	**25.6**	10	10.2	6	6.1
9.	There are values, for which it is worth living and working, e. g. home, work, justice	**72**	**73.4**	**17**	**17.3**	3	3	6	6.3
10.	I do not have anyone to return to	5	5.1	4	4.1	17	17.3	**72**	**73.5**
11.	It's generally clear what's most important in life	**44**	**44.9**	38	38.7	12	12.2	4	4.2
12.	My relationships with others are superficial	11	11.2	14	14.2	**41**	**41.9**	**33**	**33.7**
13.	I do not have friends	5	5.1	4	4.1	**16**	**16.3**	**73**	**74.5**

As the research results show, youths perceive themselves as being strong, self-certain, with initiative, able to behave in various life situations. This confirms the properties of the so-called Z generation. Encouraging is the fact that home, family, friends pose a significant value for the respondents. For 93.6% of those surveyed, their home is very important, and 83.7% of upper secondary school pu-

pils feel needed by others. They do not describe their relationships as superficial. Only 9.2% of those surveyed stated that they have nobody to return to. It may be suspected, hence, that the youths analysed do not feel alone. The results of the study are more optimistic than the results achieved by S. Rebisz, I. Sikora and K. Smoleń-Rębisz (13% of those surveyed declaring a feeling of general emptiness around them, believing that they have an overly limited circle of friends and acquaintances; every eighth of those surveyed frequently feeling abandoned (12.3%) and experiencing a lack of people around them (11.2%), every ninth pupil surveyed (approx. 11%) declaring experiencing the feeling of loneliness and alienation)[22].

Summary

The Internet is a tool of satisfaction of many personal needs of man. It offers, among others, the possibility of achieving social approval, dominance, making contacts, free activity. In particular among youths, who, abusing the Internet to satisfy their needs, make numerous acquaintances only on-line, reflecting significantly in the feeling of alienation in the real world. However, despite frequent use of the media, functioning at the same time in two worlds, the real and the virtual, upper secondary school pupils do not feel lonely. What is significant, they are also aware of having values significant in life, such as home, work, justice. These are very encouraging survey results, in particular considering the fact of contemporary youths spending so much time on-line. The business psychologist J. Santorski formulates a valuable hint concerning coping in the contemporary world, saying: „*Victorious will be the one who will fuse the knowledge of state-of-the-art technologies with the world of traditional values*"[23]. One must not forget that the fellow being, in

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[22] S. Rebisz, I. Sikora, K. Smoleń-Rębisz, Poczucie samotności a poziom uzależnienia od internetu wśród adolescentów, „Edukacja – Technika – Informatyka" no. 1/15/2016, p. 95.

[23] J. Santorski, Pytania na drogę. Newsweek, February 2005, p. 2.

particular the one closest, is the most important value. Already the ancient philosopher Aristotle concluded that „Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god."[24]

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[24] Aronson E.: Człowiek istota społeczna. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2004, p. 12.

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