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## In the face of change – reading in a new cultural context

### KEY WORDS

Readership, e-reading, new technologies, e-book, book market

### ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to present modern readership habits and the impact of new technologies development on them. Those technologies and social changes can also pose a danger or provide support for the development of readership; however, the point is how to skilfully make use of them.

Readership plays a significant role in modern societies. It is considered not only a socio-cultural tool giving people equal chances in life and facilitating dialogue between different cultures, but also an important economic development factor. Nevertheless, the level of readership keeps successively decreasing in developed countries. Poland is not an exception – on the contrary, the level of readership is decreasing faster than in other developed countries.

This article is an outline of opportunities and barriers as well of new technologies affecting readership. The relations between those opportunities or barriers and the level of readership are also discussed. The article includes a range of examples of positive solutions from abroad, suitable for introduction in Poland.

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When electronic media and then the Internet began to develop dynamically, many observers expressed their fear that it would lead to the decline of reading. According to this vision, people would spend their time staring at TV screens or surfing the web instead of sitting in a chair with a book. However, this did not happen (or at least not to such an extent). There is no denying, however, that many changes

are taking place. New trends, which can be observed around the world, include a decline in readership, readers' metamorphosis and the emergence of new ways of contact with books. There is no simple dependence of more electronic media = less reading. What is more, those who use the Internet most often also read the most.<sup>1</sup> This is partly due to a better education, partly due to the fact that the Internet makes it easier to find out about a book and obtain it. The Internet has not had a negative impact on reading; in fact, these two types of activities are rather positively correlated.

Upon observance of this phenomenon, a science-based concept of "interaction" began to be used, which in chemistry refers to the interaction of substances consisting in mutual stimulation or irritation. The Internet allows people to do what they used to do – not excluding reading books. The cultural consequences of the development of a global network have, of course, a major impact on reading practices. Digital media democratise access to culture in spatial and temporal dimensions. Thanks to digitisation and archiving, a cultural event such as an author's meeting or a festival is no longer rigidly linked to one time and place. It is the recipient who chooses when to view them. The Internet also allows feelings and ideas to be expressed spontaneously, creating a degree of directness and intimacy that was previously characterised only by face-to-face communication.

Below, I present the basic trends of changes in reading.

## Decline in readership

Readership has been steadily declining in many countries in recent years. Researchers adopt different methodologies and select respondents differently, which must be taken into account when comparing research data from different countries. However, some trends are clear.

The European Commission's report on participation in culture shows that readership has decreased by 3% (from 71% in 2007 to 68% in 2013), taking into account the average of all EU countries (EU-27).<sup>2</sup> Only the Czechs, who are among the most ardent readers not only in Europe but also in the world, prove that enthusiasm for reading does not have to weaken. A study by Jiří Travníček shows

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<sup>1</sup> J. Kopeć, D. Michalak, I. Koryś, "Hybrydy cyfry i druku", *Teksty Drugie*, no. 3, 2015, p. 429–441.

<sup>2</sup> Special Eurobarometer 399, *Report: Cultural access and participation*, European Commission 2013, p. 10.

that in 2013, the percentage of readers aged 15 and over in the Czech Republic was 84%.<sup>3</sup> In Finland, the Finnish Statistical Office conducts time budget surveys every 10 years. An analysis of readership data over the last three decades shows that the importance of reading in Finns' time budgets is declining. From 1979 to 2009, the percentage of respondents who mentioned reading as one of their activities decreased from 78% to 56%, while the average time spent reading per day decreased by 12 minutes – from 48 in 1979 to 36 in 2009.<sup>4</sup>

In Germany, the frequency of leisure activities undertaken by adults has been examined from 2014 onwards. This is a new method of reading research and it is not possible to compare data from many years, but even such a short time horizon makes it possible to read certain trends. First of all, television consumption is growing – by over 2% from 2014. 78.9% of Germans turn on their televisions often. The use of the Internet has slightly decreased. The drop is minimal, only by 0.2%, but it is puzzling because the authors of the study expected an increase at this point. In the ranking, however, this decline caused the Internet usage to drop from seventh to eighth place, while the Internet overtook cooking and baking. Reading was 14th in this ranking. 19.7% of Germans often reach for books, which is less than in previous years. More and more Germans say that they never reach for a book (24.2%).<sup>5</sup>

The Polish Book Chamber proposed a new approach to the readership research model practised in Poland. It consists in observing not readership, but reading as a cultural model of behaviour. One of the tools used was the creation of new indicators, such as a text diet, which made the book text equal to any other text, press release, blog, e-mail, text message or Facebook post.<sup>6</sup>

All respondents, regardless of what activities they performed during the day preceding the survey, were asked what kind of texts they read at that time. Nearly 44% of the respondents had no contact with the written word in any form. Every fifth person read text messages or notifications from social networking sites, and almost 15% read short posts and messages on the Internet.

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<sup>3</sup> D. Michalak, I. Koryś, J. Kopeć, *Raport: Stan czytelnictwa w Polsce 2015: wstępne wyniki*, Biblioteka Narodowa, Warsaw 2016, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> *Raport: Buch und Buchhandel in Zahlen 2016*, Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels e.V., Frankfurt am Main 2016, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Report of the Polish Book Chamber "Kierunki i formy czytelnictwa w Polsce", Warsaw 2013-2014, p. 145.

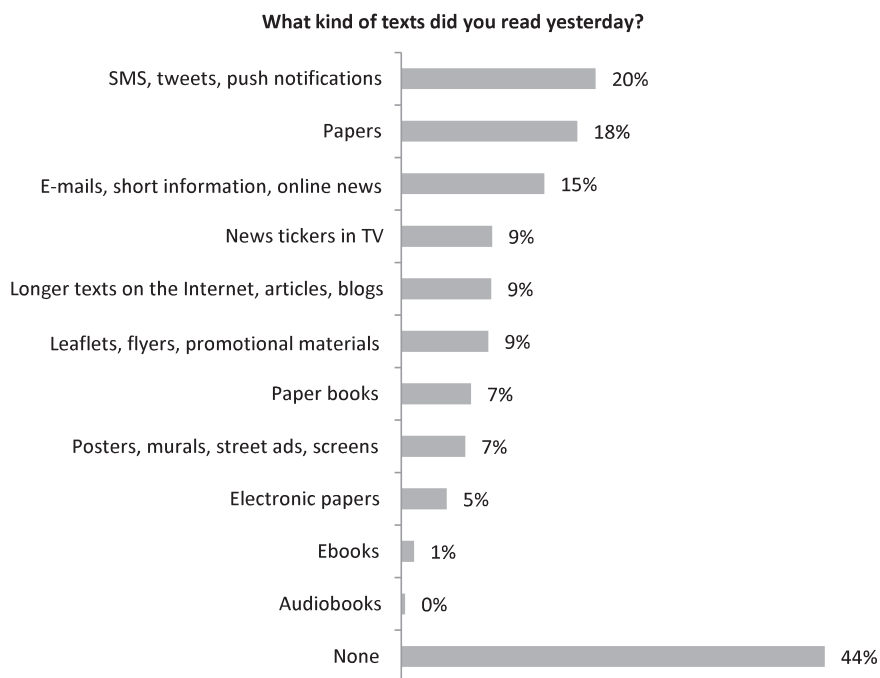


Figure 1. The text diet of Poles

Source: PIK, own interpretation

The situation on other continents is no different from that in Europe. A survey conducted by the US Pew Research Center in March and April 2015 showed that 7 out of 10 Americans (72%) had reached for at least one book in the previous 12 months (including every format). This is a lower score than four years ago. Since 2012, the result has been relatively stable and oscillates around 74%. The average American has read 12 books in the last 12 months and the median was 4 books.<sup>7</sup>

Readership has also declined in Taiwan, although the population is considered one of the most culturally developed in Asia. The Taiwanese people currently read on average two books per year, while in China, Japan and South Korea, people read 4.3 books, 8.4 books and 10.8 books per year respectively.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the global downward trend in readership, the decline in Poles' readership is striking in the international context. Reading as a cultural pattern of behaviour has changed a lot in Poland over the last 25 years. The reduction of reading

<sup>7</sup> A. Perrin, *Book reading 2016*, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/01/book-reading-2016/> accessed February 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Executive Yuan, Republic of China (Taiwan), <http://www.ey.gov.tw/access> February 2017.

practices in Poland took place in three stages: first, in 1994, the intensity of reading decreased sharply, then in 2006, the declared reading of books started to decrease, and since 2008, both indicators have decreased significantly.

In order to fully understand the level of the decline in readership in Poland, it is also important that we speak with increasing openness and determination about the fact that we do not read books.



Figure 2. Readership levels in Poland in 1994–2015

\* I do not include data for 1992 and 1998 in the graph for the BN report due to their incomplete comparability  
Source: TNS OBOP and TNS for BN 1994–2015

Janusz Kostecki notes that although the picture is slightly deformed because research has not been conducted regularly, some phenomena seem to be very clear. At the end of the Polish People's Republic, reading was declared by about 3/5 of Poles over 15 years of age. In 1994, readership and the declared reach of books fell. The next decade (until 2004) was characterised by some stabilisation and deviations were within the limits of statistical error. In 2006, there was another significant decrease in the number of people declaring that they read. The reach of books shrank by 8 percentage points, and two years later, by another 12 percentage points.<sup>9</sup>

The pessimism of researchers is deepened by the observation of changes in the declared intensity of reading by Poles.<sup>10</sup> Since 1994, the percentage of occasional

<sup>9</sup> J. Kostecki, "Potencjał poznawczy współczesnych ogólnopolskich badań czytelnictwa w Polsce" [in:] *Na co dzień i od święta. Książka w życiu Polaków w XIX i XX wieku*, eds. A. Cham-era-Nowak, D. Jarosz, Oficyna wydawnicza Aspra-JR, Warsaw 2015, p. 679.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 680.

readers has exceeded the percentage of active readers, and the gap is still growing. Poles declare themselves as readers less and less often, and if they read, it is sporadic.

Also according to the PIK survey, nearly 2/3 of the respondents did not declare even superficial contact with books, in any form, during the last year. In the study entitled “Directions and forms of transformation of reading in Poland”, the basic question concerning book reading was asked referring to the broadest possible experience of respondents within the last 12 months. They were asked to include contacts with books in any form, i.e. paper, e-books or audiobooks, and secondly – both reading the book in its entirety and partially. 37.2% of the respondents responded affirmatively to the study.

### **Tendency: Two types of readers – classic and modern**

There is no consensus as to in which direction reading is going to evolve. It is not known how much the reader changes when choosing a modern style of reading books or whether the relation is altered with the change of the medium of the text. Today we have a whole kaleidoscope of activities connected with traditional reading practice once developed exclusively on the basis of printed books. E-book readers even imitate the rustle of pages, as well as the impression of reading on real paper using the *paperwhite* technology. Today’s digitally accessible books give the reader turning to new technologies a whole range of new experiences. In a world that is accelerating, the greatest luxury for readers on the European and North American book market, however, is not access to the latest technologies, but simply finding time for reading.

Meanwhile, in *The Pleasure of the Text* Roland Barthes provokes the reader with a sensual metaphor, at the same time gently leading them into the depths of his reflections on the relationship that is created during reading. Barthes depicts the relationship between text and reader as an intimate relationship, full of contradictions and complications, in which an important element is the relationship of the reader with themselves. Barthes encourages: “you want [...] not to devour, to gobble, but to graze, to browse scrupulously, to rediscover – in order to read today’s writer – the leisure of bygone readings: to be *aristocratic* readers”.<sup>11</sup> The biggest global players, by adding various functions to their readers, show their ideas about the role of digital books in the future culture. The two main directions we can observe today are, firstly, the direction of an individual relationship with a book transferred to another device; secondly, reading that exploits social bonds.

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<sup>11</sup> R. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the text*, trans. Richard Miller, New York 1998, pp. 12–13.

When studying the impact of digitisation on the book and reader market and analysing the changes taking place due to the emancipation of books on the Internet, it should be remembered that the way of reading is determined by the reader themselves. Differences in reading paper and electronic books represent different goals and expectations for traditional and modern readers. Moreover, each reader can pursue different ways of reading, depending on the type of book, mood or circumstances.

It is worth looking at the reading choices of Americans, because the United States, where e-books and audiobooks account for about 20% of the market, is the largest digital book market in the world. At the same time, classical reading is maintained on a stable, high level. Americans are referred to as “hybrid consumers”. The younger Americans are, the more likely they are to reach for books – in any format. As much as 80% of “young adults” (in this case defined as people aged 18-29) reached for at least one book in 2015. However, many young Americans turned their backs on digital books in favour of printed books this year. Hits like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Oldschool* sold better in the paper version. What is more, fold-out books have appeared, as well as experimental books and colouring books for adults (their sales increased by 95% this year), which as electronic editions have no raison d'être at all.

## Decrease in the focus on reading

While there is strong criticism of reading texts online, and, among others, the US National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) treats online reading as an activity that interferes with “proper” reading, it is increasingly noted that although reading short news, blog posts or articles on the Internet cannot be treated as equal to reading novels, many people today spend a lot of time reading and sharing digital texts and the reader is reduced to a consumer of content.

Reading research suggests that the obstacle to reaching for a book is not so much the transformation of the relationship between work and leisure time, but a release from everyday stress, switching to a state of tranquillity needed for quiet reading.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary entertainment is distracting to the reader and makes many people, especially children, lack the quiet skills they need to sit back, read and develop their own interest in a book. In his essay “Za długie, nie przeczytam” [Too long, didn't read], Jacek Dukaj notes that the media career of “the curse of Internet reading” began with the publication of Nicholas Carr's article “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” in *The Atlantic* (July 2008). Carr expanded on his concerns in his book *The Shallows*,

<sup>12</sup> Report of the Polish Book Chamber, op. cit., p. 44.

in which he conducted an experiment on neurological changes in people who had permanently started using the Internet. It turned out that the acquisition of Internet proficiency precluded the preservation of the old reading ability. These people, even when they want to, cannot “switch” their brains back. “I think in staccato rhythm. I am able to receive short messages ‘in parallel’ from many sources, but I am no longer able to read *War and Peace*”.<sup>13</sup> The very possibility of access to the web makes it difficult to focus. It is difficult to switch the mind to “book thinking” when it demands more and more new stimuli from us. It is not enough to close the browser or leave the computer – the mind is waiting in readiness.

Critics of the introduction of new applications and social media into electronic readers point to the risk of invasion of privacy, the impact of other people’s highlights on the private act of reading and the aforementioned distraction caused by the awareness of the “presence” of others in the book. Maryanne Wolf and Mirit Barzillai argue in their article “The Importance of Deep Reading” that it is very important to read carefully in order to immerse oneself in reading. The researchers cite three factors that ensure behaviour that brings happiness, according to Aristotle. It is, firstly, a life focused on action, secondly on pleasure and, thirdly, on contemplation.<sup>14</sup>

Today, we have plenty of pleasure and action, but the last factor – contemplation – is missing. Aristotle believed that culture can be judged by how it cultivates these lifestyles. According to Wolf and Barzillai, today’s society is moving from a print culture to a digital culture and it is important to grasp how this change affects it. Digital education seems to be ideally suited to the needs of an active and enjoyable life. The emphasis on uninterrupted streaming, availability, flexible multitasking, fast and interactive ways of communication and countless forms of online entertainment are conducive to these forms of living. At the same time, this form is less conducive to the slower and more time-consuming cognitive processes that are necessary for a contemplative life and which are at the heart of what Wolf and Barzillai call the heart of “deep reading”. “Deep reading” means the area of sophisticated processes that drive understanding and include inference-based deductive reasoning, analytical skills, critical analysis and reflection. Experts need milliseconds to start this process; the young mind needs years to develop it. Researchers point to the potential dangers posed by the emphasis of digital culture on immediacy and discouraging deeper reflection in both reading and thinking.

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<sup>13</sup> J. Dukaj, “Za długie, nie przeczytam...”, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 17.08.2010, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Arystoteles, *Dzieła wszystkie t. I*, trans. K. Leśniak, Wydawnictwo naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2003, p. 406.



In 2001, the following test was carried out: one group read a story in its traditional form and another group read the story presented online (hypertext). Readers on the Internet not only took more time to read, but at the end of the day they were seven times more likely to report misunderstanding of what they had just read. Microsoft's research conducted on a group of two thousand Canadians shows that Internet users succumb to the temptations of procrastination on a massive scale. They read texts on the Internet superficially, and the increasing popularity of multitasking makes them unable to concentrate on one task for too long. According to these studies, in the last 13 years, the "attention span", i.e. the duration of human concentration, has been reduced by one third. This change concerns mainly persons aged 18 to 24 years. 77% of people admit that the first reflex when occupied with nothing else is to reach for their smartphone. In addition, the statistical user does not read more than a few paragraphs. A web acronym was created for this reaction: TL;DR – which means Too Long; Didn't Read.

Reading books for pleasure requires many years of training. In educating readers, it is important to support the family environment. Therefore, in environments with low cultural capital, it is more difficult to find book lovers. Such a perspective presents the Gordian knot of cognitive advantages and challenges for present and future generations, which, if left unanswered, may result in a noticeable diminishing role of contemplation in our society, which is already noticeable today.<sup>15</sup>

Although distraction is possible with any medium, online reading offers the most opportunities. Terje Hillesund shares the view that there are differences in the way of reading resulting from the material form of the text. In his study of the reading behaviour of academics in the humanities and social sciences, he found that there were real differences in reading objectives and reading patterns. Reading for professional purposes is sometimes superficial, indicative, reviewing, fragmented, interrupted, even if it concerns content that is difficult to read. Continuous reading, from the first to the last page, remains inseparable from the reading of the novel. Scientific texts are also often "individualised" – by underlining, making notes, adding comments, etc.<sup>16</sup>

In printed books, we pay little attention to form and focus on content instead. New forms also attract attention with their material side, i.e., the role of touch in reading. First impressions of using readers and e-books are associated with aes-

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<sup>15</sup> M. Barzillai, M. Wolf, "The importance of deep reading", *Educational Leadership*, 2009 (66), pp. 32-37.

<sup>16</sup> T. Hillesund, "Digital reading spaces: How expert readers handle books, the Web and electronic paper", *First Monday* 2010, vol. 15, no. 4, p. 22 <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2762/2504>, access February 2017.

thetics, weight, fit to the hand, manual navigation, legibility (including screen size, contrast, glare, the ability to adjust the font).

As a result, the author identifies two challenges to maintain readability of long texts. The first is to preserve the conditions for long-term, continuous and imaginative reading, and the second is to create favourable conditions for such reading to broaden or deepen knowledge. However, digital text will always be different from printed text and, consequently, the way and experience of reading will be different. Reading for imagination is not fostered by displaying the text on monitors on desktops or laptops. However, e-readers seem to be sufficiently similar to previous reading experiences.

The second challenge seems to be more difficult. Attentive, focused reading can be continuous or intermittent; in the latter case, we actively use our hands to flip through pages, underline, take notes – in physical unity with the printed text.

There should be special, dedicated software for reading, blocking distracting elements, less needed links and illustrations, software focused on reading, e.g. switching to “reading mode” (for continuous reading, removing everything that interferes with it) and “study mode” – also for continuous reading, but with the ability to navigate, highlight, add notes and comments. It should allow links to the most frequently read resources, such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias, and the “study mode” should be easily linked to creative applications, such as word processors, to easily move notes, quotes and bibliographies. Pages with rich text resources should also have versions to read on e-readers.

## Social Reading

Social reading can be understood as discussions about books with friends or other readers in book clubs or as use of applications and activity in social media. However, it can be understood even more broadly. Social reading is increasingly defining a new way of reading that has become possible through the digitisation of books. One can comment on books at the same time as one reads or add notes on the so-called dynamic margins – so that other readers can see them, too. Conversation becomes an integral part of the text, redefining the notion of “content”.

Differences between individual and common reading are the basis for understanding marketing strategies in the competition between Barnes & Noble and Amazon – the authors of the report “Jak czytają Polacy? [How Poles Read] quote J.R. Stevens.<sup>17</sup> Both booksellers compete with each other to be market leaders, also

<sup>17</sup> M. Kisilowska, M. Paul, M. Zając, *Jak czytają Polacy?*, Centrum Cyfrowe, Warsaw 2016, pp. 39-42.

when it comes to the sale of e-readers. In the article “The Kindle vs. the Nook: Two models of social reading”, Stevens argues that the B&N strategy is more social and open to going beyond the familiar framework. Amazon goes in the opposite direction, focusing on the classic relationship between the reader and the text. Through the Public Notes tool, readers can check which fragments have attracted others, which fragments are marked as important and how many people share this interest. The Nook offers additional features to accompany reading if it is carried out in special locations (libraries, Barnes & Noble bookshops), encouraging reading together, discussion, and the exchange of opinions and quotes from books read via Twitter and Facebook. With Nook Friends, users can even exchange e-books. As a result, Nook users are more involved in social networks in order to recommend, review and exchange opinions, while Kindle users rely more on statistical opinions.

Another strategy based on reader to reader interaction was introduced in 2011 by the Japanese Kobo network. Reading is a way to win prizes. The principle is simple – the longer one reads, the more rewards and achievements they can win. For example, a reader can receive a “Juggernaut” for reading 10,000 pages. Another award – “Afternoon Rush Hour” – is for those who have read for five days at the same time in the afternoon. Users can share your achievements and awards using built-in social media interfaces. Representatives of Kobo argue that this system increases interest in e-reading.

Introducing social applications into e-readers is a step towards using the possibilities of the Internet while reading. However, not all readers like such innovations – sometimes the awareness of other people’s presence in a book, other people’s emphasis or comments, are perceived negatively and evoke a sense of alienation of the text. Each producer opted for a different way of using text and applications. Differences between them can be seen on the level of use of text space, the possibility of interaction between users and content, and each other.

Social reading can be understood in a different way. The phenomenon of digital times are fanfiction stories Fanfics, because that is their popular name, tell fictional stories of idols, celebrities, famous characters, as well as continue the adventures of favourite literary heroes. It is estimated that fanfics account for 33% of the book resources on the web. The most popular platforms are FanFiction.net, Archive of Our Own and Wattpad. In the latter service, there are 45 million registered readers. The service boasts that in a world where the user is able to focus for 7 seconds, a place has been created where users spend a total of more than 15 billion minutes a month reading. Books are published here thanks to the support of the community. One needs only want to write and share their work with others. These

can be chapters of one's favourite book, stories, longer forms, but also poems. The portal is extremely popular, especially among young readers, who make up 85% of the website's users.

Using the Internet is the domain of young people, where it is as popular among women as it is among men. In the youngest age group, 65.3% of the respondents declared Internet usage on the day preceding the survey, while in the oldest group – 11.5%.

### Young people's readership

The Educational Research Institute conducted a readership survey of children and young people, whose aim was to assess the social range of books among students finishing primary school (12 years) and middle school (15 years). The survey was conducted in schools. 1,721 primary school students were examined: 53% boys and 47% girls, and 1816 middle school students: 52% boys and 48% girls.

Students in the study declared the frequency of performing selected activities in their free time. The results show the place of the book in the leisure budget of 12- and 15-year-olds.

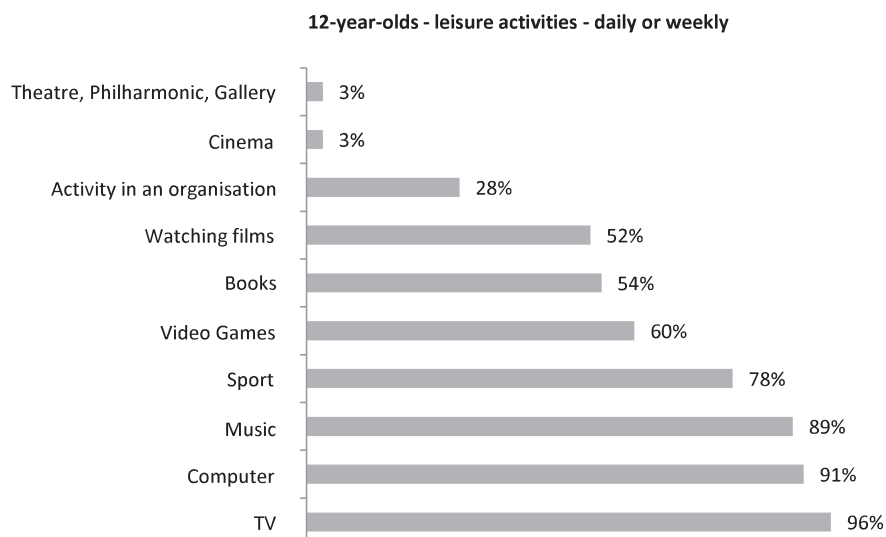


Figure 3. Map of activities for 12-year-olds

Source: IBE 2014, own interpretation

Twelve-year-olds are independent children, but are still largely dependent on their parents for organising their time after school. Apart from sport, which is a favourite form of spending time for 77% of teenagers, and meeting friends, 12-year-olds spend most of their time at home. This is done mainly in front of a TV set (96%, 75% of them daily) or a computer (91% systematically, 65% daily). These are the basic elements of a child's lifestyle, both for those who read and those who do not. However, in the case of similar joint activities, significant differences result from the gender of teenagers and their socio-cultural environment.

Systematically 48% of 12-year-olds read at least once a week, and 20% even every day. 27% of girls and 16% of boys are among daily readers. Daily and systematic reading is also influenced by the family's cultural capital, expressed in terms of the number of books owned, along with the wealth of the children's personal books. As many as 42% of the readers who declare that they read books every day are among the students who have more than 20 books treated as their own.

Interestingly, the tendency to daily reading increases with the increase in grades received in Polish language classes, but the majority of daily and systematic readers are not among the top students, but among book collectors. Book ownership also reduces differences in reading levels between boys and girls. While girls read more statistically, there are no differences among book owners. 23% of students reach for a book several times a year. 8% of 12-year-olds do not open books at all.

Books are perceived at this stage as quite an attractive form of spending time, a great cure for boredom. Most of the time, however, teenagers find time in their schedule to read in the evening, just before bedtime. They prefer to read books in their room or corner, in bed or on the sofa. The weekend is a good time to read, because a book is a simple idea to fill the time, it does not require any effort or company. In teenagers, the practice of daily reading also depends on the seasons and place of residence. During the summer holidays, students from farming families have less time to read books because they have to help with the farm. Students in the city can spend their summer holidays reading books.<sup>18</sup>

Middle school students complain about chronic lack of time and fatigue. In addition, intensive learning, preparation for final exams and a growing variety of extracurricular activities mean that in the face of such competition, a book has a chance to win only if reading has become a previous habit.

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<sup>18</sup> Z. Zasacka, *Czytelnictwo dzieci i młodzieży*, Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, Warsaw 2014, pp. 29-34.

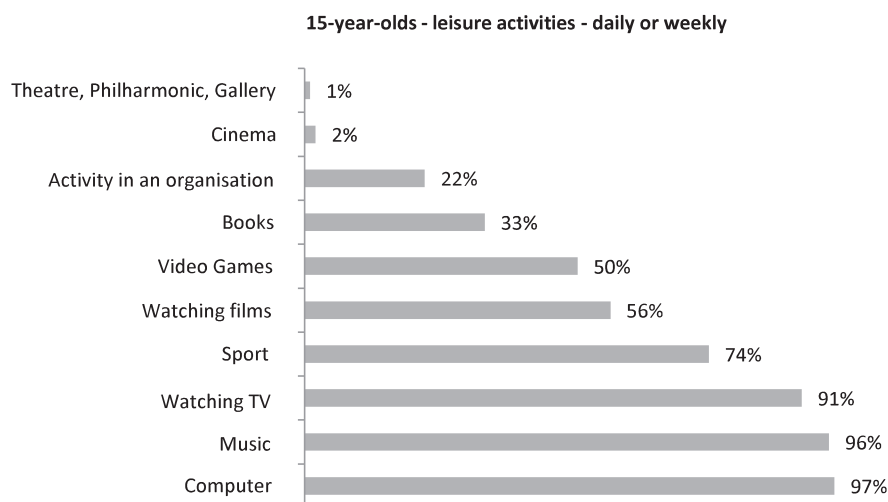


Figure 4. Activity map of 15-year-olds

Source: IBE 2014, own interpretation

It is a common pastime for 15-year-olds to listen to music and use computers. Television and computer games are still popular, but less than for 12-year-olds. Among the regularly practised activities is also watching films at home and practising sports.

33% of junior high school students (38% of girls and 28% of boys) read systematically at least once a week. 15% of 15-year-olds have a daily reading habit. For 40% of teenagers, reading in their free time is almost non-existent.

Reading books is one of the leisure activities of young people which are influenced by the family environment: with the increase in the level of education of parents, the frequency of reading increases, and vice versa. Interestingly, although girls are statistically more likely to read, the gender difference in reading activity changes when the cultural capital of parents is taken into account. Girls who are daily and systematic readers (reading at least once a week) outnumber boys if they come from families with basic vocational training. In situations where the parents have a higher education, the gender gap begins to decrease and disappears in houses where books are collected. Having one's own books is much more important for the education of a future reader than having top grades at school.

Can reading be an attractive way of spending free time? If a book is interesting, "absorbing", reading it is an attractive enough activity that it competes with its main opponents: computers and television. Books can be an attractive form of

spending time, as they are associated by teenagers with “relaxed” home practices, outside of the rigid daily schedule<sup>19</sup>

What should be done to encourage young people to read?

The promotion of books is one of the priorities of cultural policy in most countries. Most countries have integrated strategies to promote reading. Libraries are given a leading role in reading promotion programmes. Particular attention is paid to developing good habits in children and youth. In France, for example, every general practitioner is required to identify young patients having trouble reading.

### **Active child readers**

Grzegorz Leszczyński believes that a library intended for teenagers must tempt them with modernity of collections, provoke questions and force them to reflect, and not irritate with mentoring narratives and sermons of caution. Instead of moralising books, he brings up controversial ones – the reading of which will force teenager to face their own problems, because “the disdainful pop culture of eternal chortling and ignorance will not help them to build an inner order. This is supposed to be a library for readers who live and struggle with their own fate, not elsewhere, but here and now”<sup>20</sup>

Polite books discourage the rebellious teenager effectively and permanently. Books and readership are threatened by the book itself – boring, pedagogical, barren. And the people of the book industry themselves, ready to kill the joy of reading for fear that evil lurks in this joy, and not in the life surrounding the library.<sup>21</sup>

Libraries are increasingly becoming cultural centres. The British run reading circles at libraries and have the Six Books Challenge, which is organised by the state Reading Agency. Participants – school children – undertake to read six books per year in addition to the mandatory reading. After proving their acquaintance they receive a certificate with which they can apply for attractive prizes. Bebetecas – Portuguese reading rooms for children – are also well known. These are usually special rooms in children’s libraries, each of which resembles a common room with gadgets (from mascots, through educational games, to musical instruments). The aim is to enable children to have contact with books and spoken literature in the form of fun. The classes are specially designed for different age groups: infants,

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-34.

<sup>20</sup> G. Leszczyński, *Bunt czytelników. Proza inicjacyjna netgeneracji*, Wydawnictwo SBP, Warsaw 2010, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

children aged 18-36 months and then 3-5 years. They include, among other things, reading aloud, recognising words and practising imagination. Japanese bunko have a similar function, except that they are privately funded. They are created in places where books can be gathered and where there is space to play (even in Shinto temples, not to mention supermarkets).

The South Korean Miraculous Libraries, established in 2003 on the initiative of a television station and a non-governmental organisation, have a similar character. However, for several years now, the newly established National Library for Children and Youth has been coordinating similar actions in Korea.

### Children's and youth book market

There are several cultural and social reasons for the expansion of the offer of literature for children and youth at the beginning of the 21st century. One of them has a global character and his name is Harry Potter. The success of the phenomenon was a surprise for the publishing market, where there was a belief that today's youth are computer game and television enthusiasts, who are not likely to turn into readers and therefore do not constitute a target group worth investing in. Until that moment, youth were not important addressees of the publishing offer. The unbelievable success and popularity of J.K. Rowling's series about the young wizard changed this approach and initiated an explosion of numerous varieties of fantasy for young people, as well as a revival of the whole book market for young people.<sup>22</sup> "Harry Potter is a living embodiment of marketing," notes Brown in his book *Wizard! Harry Potter's Brand Magic*. In 2016, *Time* estimated the market value of the Potter brand at \$25 billion. The novel series by J.K. Rowling is an example of such an effective application of marketing in practice that it has become a model of effective, yet unconventional marketing. Two years after the first book's publication in 1999, British media reported on Harry Potter's phenomenon, quoting teachers who were afraid of the mass truancy of students in connection with the premiere of the third part of the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. "Preventing the accusation of inciting to mass truancy, Bloomsbury immediately announced that the book would be available at 3:45 p.m., when lessons were over. This CSR decision on how to sell was surprising to everyone, but it was also a great advertising trick."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> S. Brown, *Magia Harry'ego Pottera. Kreowanie globalnej marki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2008, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.



For several years now, the great hopes associated with Young Adult literature, have emerged on the Polish market. The first success was fantasy literature and a fashion for vampires, initiated by Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga and for dystopias, such as Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games*. Last year, the biggest hit were contemporary novels such as John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (140,000 copies sold in 2014).

The sales phenomenon and fashion on the book market, which has been implemented very quickly in Poland, also turned out to be colouring books and books like *Wreck This Journal* and *This Is Not a Book* by Keri Smith. These are peculiar "not-books" as the title itself indicates. Smith's publications contain instructions on each page on how to treat the "not-book", including "make a shoe out of this book" or "lose this page (throw it away, accept the loss)".

However, the digital offer of books for children and young people is not good. The number of titles published as e-books for young readers in 2014 was between 400 and 1100. Given that today's teenagers are referred to as the digital generation, the paucity of the offer in this segment seems surprising. The audiobook offer addressed to young readers in 2014 consisted of about 600 titles. There are also no Polish applications that would enable the use of the digital offer.

Polish publishers do not use the potential of e-reading and there are many indications that the lack of trust in new technologies on the Polish book market will lead to an even deeper decline in readership. However, while promoting reading, one needs to keep up with the times. Changes in leisure activities or new technologies cannot be treated as evaluative. As Krajewski says: "Something can only become popular if its use, viewing and experiencing is based on our personal choice, which is not imposed on us from the outside, which we are not forced to do by others. What is regarded by individuals as coercion, or what is assigned to us, cannot become popular".<sup>24</sup>

Young people spend a large part of their day in front of a computer or with a smartphone in their hands, and that is probably not going to change. It is possible, and even necessary, to take advantage of this phenomenon and ensure that popular and attractive content related to books or reading is included in new communication channels (social networking sites, video services or communication applications). Meanwhile, publishers or public institutions, whose duties also include the promotion of reading, rarely use newer technologies than websites and Facebook. At the same time, young people who are present on Snapchat or Reddit also look at Wattpad and read fanfics. From there, it is not far to reach for more

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<sup>24</sup> M. Krajewski, *Kultury kultury popularnej*, Wydawnictwo naukowe UAM, Poznań 2003, p. 37.

serious and, what is more important, longer texts. Whether this potential next stage of reading will take place on paper or just on an e-reader screen does not matter much.

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