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CYBER-AGGRESSION AS AN EXAMPLE OF DYSFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOUR OF THE YOUNG GENERATION IN THE GLOBALIZED WORLD

Abstract. The objective of this paper is to try to identify the specificity and frequency of cyber-agression as a form of problem behaviour characteristic for the contemporary youth known as Generation Y. Analysis of the results of research conducted among schoolchildren aged 15–16 indicates that cyber-agression is a common phenomenon in the group. It raises the need for reconstruction and re-evaluation of practices and standards developed to date and implemented to address the problematic behaviour of young people through the global network. In the paper, proposals for solutions in this area are presented, which can be used to create future prevention programs aimed at constructive online behaviour and foster rational choice-making regarding the use of the Internet and modern media.

Keywords: cyber-aggression, problem behaviour, globalization, youth.

Introduction

The transformations related to the processes of systemic transformation, globalization, and liquid modernity taking place in the modern world (Bauman 2000; Kocik 2006; Słony 2002; Kawula 2008) mainly affect the youth. They bring many positive changes, but also threats. The image of the functioning of young people in Poland drawn on the basis of selected statistical data on the changes in its structure and functioning is alarming. In the era of systemic changes in Poland, a number of unfavourable phenomena have emerged among young people. More and more individuals are accompanied by fear of the future, lack of prospects for change, disappointment, impotence. Today, the electronic media (computer networks, satellite television, the Internet, mobile phones) dominates the sphere of entertain-

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ment and leisure activities, with a significant impact on the development of new trends and culture phenomena. Through its broad coverage, speed, attractiveness of information, the media has largely influenced people's lives in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, increasingly filling in their free time (Wawrzak-Chodaczek 1997). The modern media enables people to make new friendships, exchange views, or purchase "consumer goods" in virtually every corner of the globe. Characterized by the increasing availability and attractiveness of the form, the Internet is an interactive medium allowing the convergence of the sender and recipient roles.

This paper presents the issue of violence committed through modern means of communication. The first part of the text is an attempt to characterize the contemporary generation of young people, often referred to as Generation Y, for whom the Internet and digital media have become an indispensable attribute of their everyday life. The second part is an analysis of the phenomenon of cyber-agression among youth as an undesirable effect of the progressive digitization of human life. Along with explanations of a terminological nature, the authors compare the features of "traditional" forms of aggression and the one occurring in the new media, which today, at the technological and cultural level, are both a tool and an environment where violent behaviour occurs. In the third part, an excerpt of the research conducted by the authors aiming at determining the dynamics and structure of this form of pathological behaviour of the young generation is presented. The information included in the paper may be used both in response to cyber-agression and, in the longer term, while creating a cognitive component of future prevention programs that will alert young people to constructive behaviour on the Web and will foster rational choice making regarding the use of the Internet and modern media (Prymak 2014).

Generation X – Y – Z

Over the years, in the course of development, humans have undergone constant transformations and redefinitions in the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral or transcendental spheres. Some of them result from biological conditions, whereas some are the sum of individualized experiences, their intensity, and the changes that are made through them. Taking into account such a perspective of human functioning, their life can be divided into stages which limits are determined by such variables as age, acquired competences, level of physical, intellectual or emotional development. Youth is one of the stages.

The importance of young people as a social or socio-demographic category, which, through its youth and dynamics, can be a factor in social change and influence the transformation of society as a whole, is also emphasized in the social sciences (Galas 2004). On the other hand, it is a group extremely susceptible to social transformations and progressive civilization development. Changes occurring in a wider socio-economic context make the differences between generations deepen. Various typologies and generative systematics can be found in the literature of the subject. Although their names sound quite enigmatic, each of the terms is a description of a specific category of people.

In the ground-breaking 1989 a transformation process not only of the political system started. Progressing democratization and openness to the culture of Western society also led to the emergence of trends present there in our society. There was a crack in the continuity of the generation observed thus far. Researchers noted that the youth of that period represented a specific "new tribe", adapting to the following social, economic, and technological changes in a different way. The young generation of that period was referred to as Generation X (born 1965–1981), "the children of political transformation" (Martin 2005; Lancaster, Stillman 2003).

The following years brought the progressive digitization of life, the expansion of the Internet as a tool of uncontrolled exchange of thoughts and the miniaturization of electrical devices that enabled the use of its resources. The Millenials, Generation www, the Digital Generation, Generation E, N-Gens and finally Generation Y (Generation Yers) – these are just some of the names that define adolescents growing up in this reality. They include the part of the population born between 1982 and 2000. This is the generation that divested itself of territorial limits (due to progressive migrations) and, thus, of the traditional influences of local culture (Tapscott 2010). First and foremost, this is the generation that values the Internet.

The latest statistics show that in 2016 the number of Internet users reached more than 3.4 billion, i.e. 46.2% of the world's population. The number of Internet users in the UK reached 92%, 96% for Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands (We are Social 2016). Interestingly, in 2014 every fourth resident of the planet had an active account on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Qzone, and in 2016 this number increased to 31%. It is also a time when in some countries the mobile phone ownership and use ratio reached more than 100%, which means that there is more than one mobile phone per resident in the countries (We are Social 2016).

According to the data of *Fundacja Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej* (the Center for Social Opinion Research), over half of all adults in Poland

have been Internet users since 2010, with almost two thirds of respondents (64%) claiming to access the Internet at least once a week. The number of social network users is growing steadily – in 2008 less than one in two Poles had active accounts (47%), now the number has risen to 66%. The average number of hours spent per week online by the younger part of the Polish population (aged 18–24) is 17 hours, in the 25–34 age group it is 18 hours per week (Public Opinion Research Centre, CBOS 2015). Even more widespread use of global network resources is reported by young people – research conducted on a nationwide random sample of 65 high schools, technical schools and vocational schools shows that among Generation Y access to the Internet is almost universal – almost all tested people had it at home (97%). According to their declarations, the average time spent online by youth is three hours a day, with one in five respondents spending four to five hours per day, although there are also people (9%) who indicate between six and nine hours and nine hours or more (Public Opinion Research Centre, CBOS 2014). How important the Internet, along with the global network offering a free exchange of ideas, is for modern youth was proved by the 2012 protests against the plans of the Polish government to join the ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement) aimed at helping to shape the unified states' policies against intellectual property infringements. Young people of Generation Y, in general nihilistically oriented towards the actions of the institutional apparatus and reluctant to engage in social discourse (as opposed to traditionalists and Baby Boomers), undertook a series of actions and in fact forced suspension of the procedure for binding the state with the abovementioned agreement. All this in defence of their own identity that Generation Y is shaping through modern means of communication.

Cyberbullying in the Typology of Problem Behaviours of School Youth

In addition to unlimited information resources, the space of exchange of thoughts and communication or means of shaping the identity of the young generation, the Internet and other new common means of communication (such as the mobile phone) create an area to express behaviour exceeding the standards. The fact that in adolescence young people are prone to behaviour that is incompatible with social expectations makes it also probable. In the literature of the subject it is referred to as problem behaviours of youth. R. Jessor (2005) lists, in addition to using and abusing psychoactive

substances (cigarettes, alcohol, drugs or psychoactive substances), crime, offenses, hooligan acts, vandalism and other behaviours demoralizing minors; aggressive behaviour, violence, or peer bullying are terms that are clearly recognized on the grounds of psychology, as well as pedagogy.

The concept of violence is often used as a term superior to aggressive behaviour. The specific typologies that point to physical, psychological, verbal, sexual violence, violence against women, racist or structural violence are created, and diverse types are distinguished, such as humanitarian or instrumental violence, etc. (Pufal-Struzik 2014). These are phenomena that have occurred since the beginning of social organization and the association of people with their groups, also specific to the aforementioned traditionalists or Baby Boomers. The civilizational transformations associated with the expansion of new technologies and the increasingly widespread access to the Internet and mobile telephones have introduced another term into the social and scientific debate – violence used through electronic devices.

In pedagogical, psychological, and sociological literature, very general terms defining a wide range of phenomena related to the use of modern communication technology to implement violent behaviour can be found (Pyżalski 2011). In English language publications, the term "cyberbullying" is often used to describe such behaviours (Radkin, Fisher, 2012; Smith et al. 2006). This concept is defined as a relatively new form of intimidation by means of an act of electronic transmission of a message in the form of a text, sound, or image transmitted by means of an electronic device – a computer, mobile telephone or other form of wireless communication, games, consoles or pagers (Remond, Kern Romo 2014). Cyberbullying means using intentional threats, harassment, intimidation, or embarrassment on a person or group of people, triggering a justified fear; sending confidential, private information about a harassed person without their consent; breaking into accounts (email, social networking, Facebook, Twitter, Google+) and/or stealing their identity to harm their reputation, or intimacy (Reymond et al. 2014). In the broader sense of the term, cyberbullying is defined as "violence used through e-mails, instant messengers, messages, photos and videos sent via mobile phones, websites, blogs or other" (Patchin, Hinduja 2006, p. 151).

While the concept of cyberbullying as a definition of the issue being tackled has been a permanent practice in determining violent acts using modern means of communication, it is not the only term in use. Other definitions can be found in the literature. The term *online/Internet harassment* is also used to identify wilful harassment via the Internet, restricted to online activities and directed directly against another person (Pyżalski 2011).

This phenomenon is reduced to explicit and intentional acts of aggression done online and directed towards others. Offensive commenting or deliberate humiliating others on the Web may serve as its examples (Ybarra, Mitchell 2004).

Recognizing all the terminological implications, the authors use the term *cyber-aggression* later in the paper. This is a broad concept that combines the designations of both cyberbullying and Internet harassment, with the greatest degree of relevance to the aspects of the phenomena described further in the paper.

Regardless of the term used, these activities can be distinguished from other activities traditionally defined and aimed at harming, harassing or influencing another person by the following characteristics:
 a) no time limit – the victim may be harassed without time limit, at any time when the electronic device is turned on; actually 24 hours a day;
 b) no space constraints – the abuser may be located on the other side of the globe;
 c) anonymity – there is a strong likelihood that the victim is unaware of the identity of the abuser who remains anonymous;
 d) resulting from this, difficulties in identification, especially by adults who may not be as technologically aware as children and adolescents;
 e) unspecified duration – humiliating photos or comments may remain online or be downloaded almost by anyone, leaving indelible marks (Goodno 2011);
 f) due to the potentially unknown and inexhaustible number of victims of the compromising content provided/published by the abuser, the victim remains in a sense of grievance (Bauman 2011).

The Scale of Cyber-Aggression in the Light of the Author's Research

The author's research, aimed at diagnosing the current scale of cyber-aggression, was conducted in the 2nd quarter of 2014. It covered 586 third-year students of junior high schools in Bialystok. The diagnostic survey method was used in the study. The authors used the research tool *Scale to study the types and frequency of problem behaviours of middle-school youth* aimed at diagnosing the frequency of problem behaviours, including cyber-aggression, among school youth. The research tool consisted of single choice questions of scale provided with cafeteria-style checklists representing a descriptive scale, forming a sequence of degrees indicating the frequency of the

studied phenomenon. The studies used a five-level scale: 5 – very often (over 10 times), 4 – frequently (5–10 times), 3 – sometimes (3–4 times), 2 – seldom (1–2 times), 1 – never (0 times). The respondents were asked to choose one of the five cafeteria responses, which allowed calculating the arithmetic mean scores for cyber-aggression among school youth. The reliability of the subscale was confirmed by Alfa Cronbach's statistics, which showed that the tool is a consistent measuring tool (Alfa Cronbach = 0.897). All calculations were made using the SPSS Statistics 22 program.

Chart 1 shows the frequency of individual forms of cyber-aggression behaviours among school youth.

Chart 1
The frequency of cyber-aggression among school youth
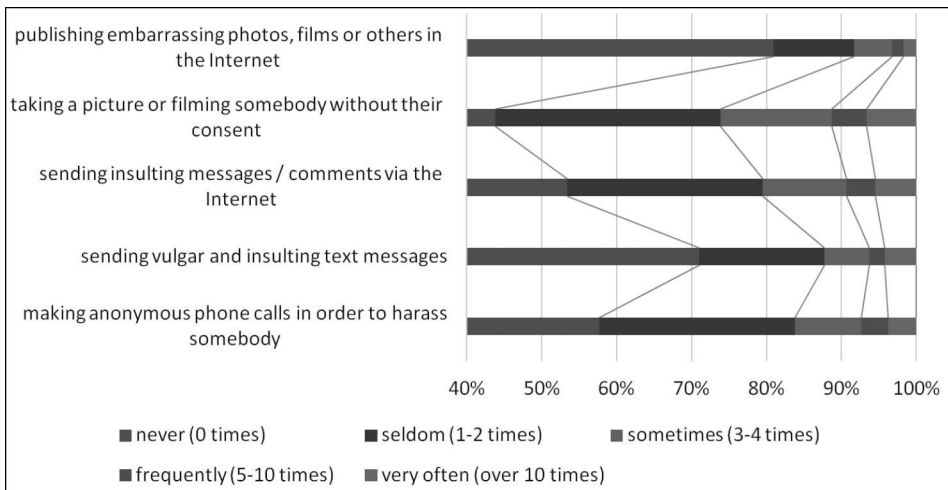
Source: own study.

The most frequent form of cyber-aggression used by young people aged 15–16 is capturing others in photos or movies without their explicit consent. In the age when most students have mobile phones (smartphones) with built-in photo and video functions, more than half of young people have confirmed this type of behaviour (at least 1–2 times). Every fourth student (26%) has violated the privacy of others in such a way – often (5–10 times) or very often (over 10 times). The second, in terms of popularity among young people, form of behaviours meeting the criteria of electronic violence is verbal aggression on the Internet. It is expressed in sending offensive messages and/or commenting to others via the Internet (instant messengers such as Facebook or web forums). Nearly 50% of re-

spondents have experienced this type of act. Every tenth student (9.4%) declares very frequent and frequent use of this form of expression and communication of hostile content. The frequency of anonymous phone calls to annoy other persons is similar. Over 40% of students have confirmed having used this type of activity. The lowest frequency reported is when posting compromising pictures or other videos on the Internet. However, taking into account the vicious potential of this type of behaviour, the indicators of this form of cyber-aggression are still relatively high. Every fifth student at least once or twice in their life has published online material compromising another person.

It should be emphasized that all forms of behavioural problems mentioned and described in the context of cyber-aggression (if they are not incidental and give grounds to a sense of threat or violate their privacy) meet the descriptive criteria of the offense of stalking, characterized and introduced into binding law by the Act of February 25, 2011 amending the Criminal Code Act (Journal of Laws 2011 No. 72 item 381).

The above observations are confirmed by the results of previous empirical explorations. Research conducted in 2009, within a grant of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MNiSW), on a random sample of 1243 secondary school students from our country showed that Polish middle school students are relatively frequently involved in electronic aggression; about 80% of respondents made at least one act of electronic aggression in the year preceding the research (Kowalski, Limber, Agatston 2010). A high level of electronic aggression was revealed in research conducted by the Jacek Pyżalski team (2009) among a group of 600 teachers; 20% of them indicated that they had had to intervene in their professional career at least once in relation to electronic aggression situations. Some teachers (5%) admitted that they themselves had been victims of this form of aggression on the part of pupils (Kowalski 2010). The structure and dynamics of the cyber-aggression phenomenon are also illustrated by the results of research conducted in 2010 on a sample of 2143 middle school students. Analysis of the results of the study showed an almost universal occurrence of electronic aggression with a lower perceived potential among youth. During a year, seven in ten students experienced or committed acts such as sending or receiving an unpleasant text message. Analysis of the prevalence of electronic aggression shows that middle school students use aggression through channels of synchronous communication, such as chats or instant messaging. More than half of the respondents confirmed aggression through a chat, 40% via an instant messenger. The second most popular communication channel was internet forums. The most commonly described be-

haviours took the form of: insulting other people while chatting, sending instant messages via messengers (e.g. Gadu-Gadu) to offend/threaten people, commenting on internet forums in order to humiliate/annoy/scare others, offending/insulting while playing online games (such as Tibia, World of Warcraft, Counter Strike), or deliberate exclusion or not giving access to the circle of online friends to somebody in order to harm them. Approximately from 30 to over 40% of middle school students are involved in this type of behaviour (Pyżalski 2012).

Summary (practical implications)

The findings of the authors' research clearly confirmed the prevalence of violent behaviour through the Internet and modern media among the young generation. They also argue for the need for measures aimed at raising young people's awareness on cyber-aggression and thereby reducing the frequency of this form of problem behaviour among the young generation. The Internet user who through it (using e.g. a computer, telephone) harms the dignity, good name, freedom of conscience, or the image of a human being, despite the common conviction of cyber-aggression abusers, does not remain anonymous in the network, and law enforcement authorities (police, prosecutors) are equipped with a number of tools and means to identify them. It is important to spread the knowledge among middle school students, especially since today's law deals increasingly with cases of harassment, defamation, impersonation of someone or other forms of infringing personal freedom and respect for another person.

The fact that in the digitized world the young generation cannot imagine functioning without constant access to digital networks and modern media can be used to reduce the frequency of cyber-aggression. The transfer of elements of education related to shaping correct attitudes and behaviours in the network to the virtual world, often criticized as a space to which also pathological phenomena (cyber-aggression, addictions) are transmitted, has many advantages. The use of forms supported by graphics and videos in educational content targeted at reducing the frequency of cyber-aggression makes the knowledge more accessible and attractive to youth. The activity undertaken by *Polska Sieć Polityki Narkotykowej* (PSPN, the Polish Network of Anti-Drugs Policy) may be a positive example of activities aimed at counteracting other types of problem behaviours of young people. The Network has been created by therapists, doctors, lawyers, prison staff, social workers, educators, and NGO representatives. The authors of its web-

site publish video games depicting the effects and consequences of drug use on commercial websites (PSPN 2012). The recipients have the opportunity to take on the role of an application hero, adopt their perspective, make choices, and track the potential consequences of wrong decisions. The educational program *"PrawoTeczka – prawo dla młodzieży"* (LawFile – law for youth) initiated by the District Council of Legal Advisers in Poznań is another example of activities using modern media in the fight against problem behaviours of young people. As a result of the activities within the program, every student, parent or teacher can download a free law lesson in the form of an attractive multimedia presentation from the prawoteka.pl site and run it at home or at school (ORRP Poznań, 2010). Any eLearning initiative can help in teaching constructive online behaviour. Due to the Internet and modern media, these local initiatives have the opportunity to reach a much wider audience.

The conclusions presented in this paper and the practical implications outlined above can help to build better targeted and more coherent preventive measures aimed at minimizing cyber-aggression and enhancing constructive behaviour on the Web. Thus, they can contribute to a change in the image of contemporary youth – Generation Y which, through its openness to changes, dynamism, and innovation, but also awareness of values and threats connected with the Internet and modern means of communication, can participate in further changes in the image of society.

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