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THE (DIS)ALIENATING FUNCTION OF THE MEDIA. THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN BUILDING A CIVIL SOCIETY

The article discusses the relationships between a sense of alienation and the use of mass media. This discussion was triggered by the idea of the media's significant power in the lives of individuals and their ability to meet fundamental needs. Given the fact that the level of a sense of alienation implies the level of citizens' socio-political activity, defining the role of the media focuses on their importance in the process of building a civil society.

Key words: media, sense of alienation, needs, civil society

Introduction

After 20 years of democracy in Poland the issue of the direction of development of Polish society has become a question of great significance. Systematic research and analysis suggests that civil society indicators are gradually deteriorating (Among others: BS/20/2008; BS/14/2008; Czapiński, Panek, 2009; BS/88/2011; *Dwadzieścia lat przemian (Twenty years of transformations)* ... 2009, p. 95). This fact encourages a search for mechanisms responsible for this state of affairs, and those that could stimulate motivation and mobilization of society to socio-political activity. Conducted research and reflections of scholars allow us to assume that one of the factors determining the status of citizens' involvement is the level of their sense of alienation.¹ This sense, in psychological terms, has negative consequences not

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¹ In fact, it is difficult to assess whether the lack of commitment is a consequence of a high sense of alienation, according to most authors, or perhaps a high level of sense of alienation is implied by a very low level of involvement. Most research is based on correlation indices, which speak only about the coexistence of variables, not about their mutual conditioning.

only for society as a whole, but also for the individual. Researchers stress that its high level accompanies such variables as: the lack of self-confidence, low openness, the lack of faith, the lack of purpose (Jones, Carpenter, Quintana, 1985, pp. 1503-1511), difficulty in making decisions, a sense of self-inadequacy, high levels of anxiety, loneliness (McClosky, Schaar, 1965, pp.14-40). It is also related to the lack of a sense of self-worth that could give life purpose and direction, the loss of internal and acquired values or a conflict of norms that hinders orientation in the social environment (Dean, 1961, pp. 753-758). These states increase social apathy, the lack of interest and involvement in socio-political issues.

It is hard to deny that the mass media have a significant impact on the lives of societies. Not only from a cognitive but also from a practical point of view, it is, therefore, important to verify the role of the media in the lives of individuals with different levels of a sense of alienation; this became the inspiration to undertake the present research. On the one hand, taking into account general opinions on media content, which describe it as mind-blowing, devoid of values, manipulative and a part of the theories operating in literature (such as the spiral of silence or even cultivating mainstream culture), it can be assumed that the media might involve a mechanism of losing motivation, discouraging people from operating in an environment dominated by corruption and self-interest, or a factor decreasing the quality of social capital (Putnam, 2008). On the other hand, perhaps the strength of this interaction could be used for social integration. The positive role of the media is suggested by the functions that some researchers assign to them. They stress the fact that the media reinforce norms and values that constitute the foundation of public morality. They try to see important and interesting changes in the natural and social environment, and inform people about them. In addition, they contribute to the preservation of cultural continuity, giving future generations the most important elements of the oeuvre of their ancestors, referring to effective action, especially to coping with dangers and taking advantage of opportunities. They also transmit those patterns of behavior which best determine the identity of individuals and communities, thus having an integrating effect on the social structure.

The fundamental issue in the discussion on the impact of the mass media is to adopt the perspective of the audience. If we assume that the audience are aware of their desires, are active in contact with the media and use them for a specific purpose, then the possibility of manipulation is minimized. The author agrees with the hypothesis, advocated by proponents of the *uses and gratifications* theory, that as individuals are aware of their needs, they actively look in the media for the contents that meet their expectations, providing appropriate reinforcements. The concept of needs helps explain many instances of particular behavior of individuals, of their activity and motivations, and their relationships with the social environment. The sources to satisfy needs may be different, they usually undergo fixation upon the delivery of satisfactory reinforcements to the individual. One of these sources may

be the media, which according to Denis McQuail provide the audience with four important benefits – information, entertainment, social integration and interaction as well as a sense of identity. These benefits correspond to the four fundamental needs highlighted by Seymour Epstein on the basis of the cognitive-experiential self theory. These are respectively: the need to maintain a stable and coherent system of experience representation, the need to obtain pleasure and avoid pain, the need for contact – establishing and maintaining relationships with other people and the need to strengthen self-esteem. Therefore, the media can be an important source to meet fundamental human needs.

The subject of research

The power of the media in the lives of individuals and their ability to meet basic needs has provided encouragement to explore the relationships between a sense of alienation and the use of mass media. The research aimed to determine the role played by the media in the lives of individuals with different levels of a sense of alienation, particularly emphasizing their place in fulfilling those people's needs. It seems interesting to find out to what extent the media replace actual activity and interpersonal contact for alienated people, and what their role is in the lives of people who are socially involved, internally strong and who experience support. The intention of the author in the process of designing the presented research was also to reflect on the media's function in the context of the process of building a civil society in Poland. It is interesting to see to what extent the mass media support these processes, providing positive role models and coordinating civil power, and how much they slow these processes down, demotivating people from being active in the socio-political field. Do the media build social capital, or do they perhaps act as a brake, hardly teaching people to trust other human beings? Furthermore, the studies identified how media were used by these individuals, penetrating the empirical ground of: confidence in the media, the frequency and duration of their use as well as the audience's preferred topics of content.

The adopted research model is of an exploratory character. It aims to investigate and identify a poorly understood research problem. The main research problem has been expressed in the form of an open research question:

What is the role of media in the lives of people with different systems of values on the sense of alienation scales?

The research tools

Two original research tools were used in the study – the “Z” Sense of Alienation Scale and the Media Use Questionnaire. The first tool is a modification of the Sense of Alienation Scale of Krystyna Kmiecik-Baran (1995). It consists of the measurements of three factors:

1. *A sense of powerlessness-power* – on the one hand, the conviction held by an individual that expected reinforcement does not depend on their behavior, and, on the other, a sense of power and a correlation between the effects of their behavior and undertaken activity. This dimension is associated with a sense of the individual's impact on the social environment, the degree of passiveness, which is the result of convictions about the individual's own strength and actions.

2. *A sense of political alienation-self-significance* – on the one hand a sense of political powerlessness, distrust of leaders and the belief that the system lacks forces and values with which the individual could identify, on the other, a sense of significance, of one's value, a sense of agency, of the possibility of exerting influence in a certain direction, a sense of accurate assessment of political reality.

3. *A sense of isolation-integration* – on the one hand, a sense of detachment from others, from prominent people and values with which it is worth identifying and which should be followed, and on the other a sense of communication with other human beings and the belief that there are values for which one acts. This dimension is related to some kind of social anchors – valuable anchor points that motivate the individual to action, giving them a peculiar power and boost. These can be both other people and systems of values.

The reliability of the "Z" Sense of Alienation Scale is $r_{tt} = 0.87$. The reliability of the three mentioned subscales is: for the sense of powerlessness-power $r_{tt} = 0.89$, for the sense of political alienation-self-significance $r_{tt} = 0.89$, for the sense of isolation-integration $r_{tt} = 0.87$. A significant advantage of a tool constructed in this way is the independence of the highlighted subscales.

The Media Use Questionnaire consists of five parts. The first of them is the Scale of Media Use, which has its theoretical basis in the classification schemes of benefits that an individual obtains during contact with the media, authored by McQuail, who grouped them into four basic categories: Information, Sense of Identity, Social Integration and Interaction, Entertainment. *Cronbach's alpha* for the whole scale equals 0.97. The reliability of the individual scales is, respectively: information: $r_{tt} = 0.89$, sense of identity: $r_{tt} = 0.94$, social integration and interaction: $r_{tt} = 0.94$, entertainment: $r_{tt} = 0.93$.²

The second part of the Media Use Questionnaire relates to the media's credibility in the perception of respondents. The respondents are asked to select the degree of trust in various media, on a five-point scale. Separate scales have been used for TV, the radio, the Internet and the press. The third and fourth parts of the Media Usage Questionnaire evaluate the frequency and time of media use. In the third part the respondents are asked to estimate how often they use particular media, on a five-

² In each of the above scales 4 paths associated with specific media can be distinguished. Thus, for information – TV: $r_{tt} = 0.83$; Radio: $r_{tt} = 0.86$; Internet: $r_{tt} = 0.95$; Newspapers: $r_{tt} = 0.82$. For sense of identity the reliability increases respectively – TV: $r_{tt} = 0.89$; Radio: $r_{tt} = 0.90$; Internet: $r_{tt} = 0.93$; Newspapers: $r_{tt} = 0.88$. For integration and social interaction: TV: $r_{tt} = 0.89$; Radio: $r_{tt} = 0.91$; Internet: $r_{tt} = 0.93$; Newspapers: $r_{tt} = 0.88$. The following coefficients were recorded for entertainment: TV: $r_{tt} = 0.91$; Radio: $r_{tt} = 0.91$; Internet: $r_{tt} = 0.95$; Newspapers: $r_{tt} = 0.91$.

Table 1. List of distinguished clusters with individual subscales of the “Z” Sense of Alienation Scale. Centers of gravity.

Cluster	Standard ten			Standard Variation		
	Power- lessness	Political alien- ation – self- significance	Isolation- integration	Power- lessness	Political alien- ation – self- significance	Isolation- integration
1	6.6	5.0	8.4	1.721	1.625	0.897
2	3.8	3.5	4.5	0.938	1.237	1.034
3	7.1	7.5	5.4	1.177	0.743	0.968
4	3.9	7.2	4.4	1.166	0.939	0.920
5	6.5	4.7	4.9	1.083	1.013	0.788

Source: Own research

point scale. Separate scales have been used for TV, the radio, the Internet and the press. The fourth part aims to answer how long the subject uses a given medium. The subject is asked to determine the number of hours which were devoted to the use of the medium during the past two days. The last part concerns preferred topics in the media used. The respondents are asked to check on the scale how much they like to receive content on a specific topic in the media. A five-point scale has been used, where 1 means *I do not like it at all* and 5 – *I like it very much*.

Research organization and sample selection

The study was conducted between October 2008 and May 2009, among the inhabitants of the Silesian Voivodship. The subjects only filled in the paper and pencil version of the prepared research tool. The study included a group of 900 adult men and women. The sample was selected with the help of quota and stratified sampling (*Rocznik Statystyczny (Statistical Yearbook) ... 2008*).

Types of individuals with different values on the sense of alienation scales

By applying a two-stage cluster analysis method for grouping, five internally homogeneous sets were distinguished, bringing together individuals with similar results on the sense of alienation scales (Table 1). These bundles include 95.7 percent or 861 out of 900 observations. The clusters proved to be similar in terms of numbers.

An analysis of the value systems of particular dimensions has enabled the identification and naming of crystallized types of individuals with different systems for measuring the sense of alienation: 1. *the isolated*, 2. *the politically*

Table 2. Cluster categories of individuals with different sets of values on the “Z” Sense of Alienation Scale

Type	Spectrum of alienation					
	Powerless- ness	Power	Political alienation	Political self-signifi- cance	Isolation	Integration
Isolated	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	low
Politically non-alienated with a sense of power	low	high	low	high	medium	medium
Politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness	high	low	high	low	medium	medium
Politically alienated with a sense of power	low	high	high	low	medium	medium
Moderately alienated	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	medium

Source: Own research

non-alienated with a sense of power, 3. *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*, 4. *the politically alienated with a sense of power* and 5. *the moderately alienated* (Table 2).

The distinguished types of individuals with the most common results in the sense of alienation are interesting from a theoretical point of view. The first type are *the isolated* (17.6%) who have a high sense of isolation. These individuals do not find significant people around them, nor values they could identify with and follow in their actions. Interestingly, a high level of sense of isolation does not co-occur with high or low values in other dimensions, but the results are average. In addition, a higher level of isolation does not exist in any other type.

The next three types: *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power* (21.4 %), *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness* (16.3 %) and *the politically alienated with a sense of power* (23.9 %) represent specific systems of values in two dimensions: the sense of power and powerlessness, and political alienation-self-significance (Table 3).

Thus, it appears that *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness* are the antitype of *the non-alienated with a sense of political power*. At the two extreme dimensions are individuals who feel a sense of subjectivity and internal political power, and individuals feeling political alienation and inner powerlessness.

Therefore, on the one hand we have strong individuals who understand the mechanisms governing politics, are interested in the operations of the authorities, individuals who simultaneously have an impact on their social environment, a sense

Table 3. Interdependence systems in the dimension of alienation among politically non-alienated with a sense of power, politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness and politically alienated with a sense of power

	Political alienation	Political self-significance
Powerlessness	Politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness	–
Power	Politically alienated with a sense of power	Politically non-alienated with a sense of power

Source: Own research

of power and who see a correlation between their actions and the consequences. These are people with initiative. One can assume that these individuals are responsible, to a large extent, for building a civil society – aware of their own actions, interested in the socio-political environment, task-oriented, aware of community objectives and their own strength.

At the other extreme we have people who do not have a sense of political subjectivity, do not see any political forces and values that are worth identifying with. They are not interested in the mechanisms of politics, do not understand its operations. At the same time they have a sense of inner passiveness, a lack of impact on the social environment, a lack of faith that their actions will bring about the desired result. It can be assumed that these are individuals who mostly need to be motivated to be active, not only because they are not interested in the socio-political environment, but also because they feel an inability to implement their own actions and a lack of influence. These are people who fail to take the initiative. Their weakness is dangerous because it has mainly internal sources – in their powerlessness. Thus, their activation should be initiated by strengthening their self-esteem and self-power, which could then be used externally.

Between these extreme types there exists the category of *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. These are individuals who do not feel political subjectivity, are not interested in the political scene, however they do have an internal sense of power – the strength, the ability to act in difficult situations, faith in the effectiveness of their own behavior and actions. It can be assumed that they find and implement this power in non-political areas of social life. They have a sense of agency and self-power in the implementation of actions they undertake.

The moderately alienated (20.8) are the last type of the most common system of values within the sense of alienation. These are people who have average values at each dimension.

In relation to the selected types, the issue of how specifically they use the media seems interesting: whether and what media are the source of benefits and satisfy the needs of the particular types, what the differences are between them with regard

to trust in the various media, how much time they devote to their use, what type of content they like to receive the most. And finally – does the specificity of the media use by the distinguished types of individuals – especially by *the isolated* and *the alienated with a sense of powerlessness* – allow us to accept the hypothesis of the media's beneficial effects – enhancing or providing standards and patterns of behavior, or does it rather confirm that this is a demotivating and alienating impact?

Empirical findings

Gratifications sought in the media

The sense of alienation varies significantly among the subjects in terms of three benefits gained in contact with the media: the sense of identity, social integration and interaction, and entertainment. With regard to information, the examined types are homogeneous (Table 4), though distinct differences were observed in the case of searching for information on the radio and the Internet. In order to compare particular types in terms of the analyzed variables, multiple comparisons in Tukey's HSD post hoc test were used.

A sense of identity is mostly sought in the media by *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*, and hardly at all by *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. The benefit defined as social integration and interaction is most often desired in the media content by *the isolated*, and hardly at all by *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. Entertainment in the media is most frequently sought by *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*, and the least often by *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*.

The analysis of differences has been extended to particular media – television, the radio, the Internet and the press – in which the distinguished types look for benefits: information, a sense of identity, social integration and interaction, entertainment. The strongest and the weakest correlations are presented in Table 5.

Television differentiates the researched types within three benefits offered – there are no significant differences among them in the search for information on television. A sense of identity is mostly sought here by *the isolated*, rarely by *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. *The isolated*, more frequently than other types, look for social integration and interaction on television, while this medium is the least preferred within the scope of this benefit by *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*. Television as a source of entertainment is the most attractive to *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*, and least of all to *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*.

The radio is a medium that differentiates the distinguished types in terms of each studied benefit. Information is mostly sought by *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness* and least by *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*. On the radio, a sense of identity is the most desired by *the politically alien-*

Table 4. One-way analysis of ANOVA variance for the subscale in the Media Use Scale

Benefit: medium	Range	df	F	Statistical significance
information	Among the groups	4	1.912	n.s.
sense of identity	Among the groups	4	3.729	0.005
social integration and interaction	Among the groups	4	7.106	0.000
entertainment	Among the groups	4	4.881	0.001
information: TV	Among the groups	4	2.035	n.s.
information: radio	Among the groups	4	2.963	0.019
information: Internet	Among the groups	4	2.941	0.020
information: press	Among the groups	4	2.109	n.s.
sense of identity: TV	Among the groups	4	3.690	0.005
sense of identity: radio	Among the groups	4	3.513	0.007
sense of identity: Internet	Among the groups	4	1.282	n.s.
sense of identity: press	Among the groups	4	3.167	0.013
social integration and interaction: TV	Among the groups	4	9.128	0.000
social integration and interaction: radio	Among the groups	4	4.936	0.001
social integration and interaction: Internet	Among the groups	4	1.380	n.s.
social integration and interaction: press	Among the groups	4	3.865	0.004
entertainment: TV	Among the groups	4	6.681	0.000
entertainment: radio	Among the groups	4	3.999	0.003
entertainment: Internet	Among the groups	4	2.002	n.s.
entertainment: press	Among the groups	4	2.940	0.020

Source: Own research

ated with a sense of powerlessness, and the least by the politically alienated with a sense of power. The isolated, more often than other types, seek social integration and interaction on the radio, this benefit in radio content is the least attractive to the politically alienated with a sense of power. The radio is the most preferred source of entertainment for the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness, and the least preferred for the politically non-alienated with a sense of power.

In relation to the Internet, differences were reported among the distinguished types only in the case of information. It is the most attractive to the moderately alienated and the least to the isolated in this medium.

Table 5. The strongest and weakest correlations among the distinguished types of individuals and seeking gratification in particular media

		Isolated	Politically non-alienated with a sense of power	Politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness	Politically alienated with a sense of power	Moderately alienated
Information	Television*					
	Radio		↓	↑		
	Internet	↓				↑
	Press *					
Sense of identity	Television	↑			↓	
	Radio			↑	↓	
	Internet*					
	Press			↑	↓	
Social inte- gration and interaction	Television	↑	↓			
	Radio	↑			↓	
	Internet*					
	Press	↑			↓	
Entertainment	Television		↓	↑		
	Radio		↓	↑		
	Internet*					
	Press			↑	↓	

*lack of significant differences among the types of alienated persons

Source: Own research

Finding benefits in the press differentiates the examined types in terms of three fields – a sense of identity in the press is the most attractive to *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*, and the least to *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. *The isolated*, more frequently than other types, seek social integration and interaction in the press, while *the politically alienated with a sense of power* do so the least. Entertainment in the press is sought the most often by *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*, and the least often by *the politically alienated with a sense of power*.

Significant relationships and differences among the distinguished types of individuals in the benefits sought in the media were confirmed by Welch's Robust Test of Equality of Means and by the Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test.

Scientific theories do not specify in detail the needs issue of the alienated. Nevertheless, the study allows us to give a partial answer to the question of what needs alienated individuals have. Analyzing the benefits they look for in the media,

Table 6. Trust in media by the distinguished types of people. Asymptotic significance in the Chi-square test

Medium	Chi-square	df	Asymptotic significance
Television	10.238	4	0.,037
Radio	5.247	4	n.s.
Internet	1.723	4	n.s.
Press	16.445	4	0.002
Result	2.516	4	n.s.

Source: Own research

assuming a stable relationship between benefits and needs, we can draw conclusions on the needs of alienated people.

The isolated, in addition to social integration and interaction, look for a sense of identity in the media. Therefore, it can be assumed that this type, apart from the need for contact – establishing and maintaining relationships with others, also has an unmet need to strengthen their self-esteem.

The politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness, in turn, besides a sense of identity and information, seek entertainment in the media. Hence it can be argued that, in addition to a need for enhancing self-esteem and maintaining a stable and coherent system of experience representation, these people have an unmet need to avoid pain and obtain pleasure.

It has also been revealed that *the moderately alienated* often seek information in the media, which indicates that these people have an unmet need to maintain a stable and coherent system of experience representation.

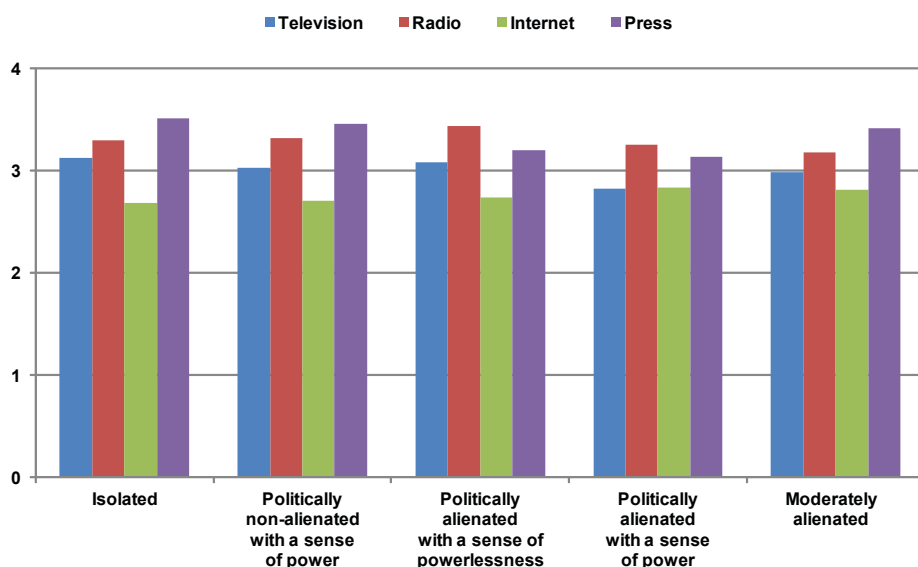
On the basis of the conducted research it is difficult to assess explicitly the priority needs of *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power* and *the politically alienated with a sense of power*, since these individuals, in reference to the different media, constituted groups that most rarely sought benefits offered by the media in McQuail's classification.

Trust in media

The distinguished types of people, presenting different types of systems on the sense of alienation scales, differ significantly in terms of confidence in television and the press (Table 6). A sense of alienation does not differentiate confidence in the radio and the Internet significantly. Neither does it significantly differentiate overall confidence in the media.

Considering average values, the highest level of confidence in television is presented by *the isolated*, and the lowest by *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. A similar dependence was observed in the level of confidence in the press.

Figure 1. Trust in the media represented by the distinguished types of individuals. Mean



Source: Own research based on the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

The isolated are characterized by the highest level of trust, while the lowest trust is manifested by *the politically alienated with a sense of power*.

Despite the lack of categorically significant statistical relationships in the group it is worth noting some characteristic differences of psychological relevance. Generally, *the politically alienated with a sense of power* trust the media the least, presenting the lowest rates of trust toward television and the press. Nevertheless, they are characterized by the highest levels of trust in the Internet among all those tested. The greatest confidence in the media is displayed by *the isolated*. They have the highest level of trust in television and the press, but, interestingly, the lowest trust in the Internet in the group. Perhaps this is related to the special nature of the Internet, where the individual is not provided with specific information – as in the case of newspapers or a television program, but they have to find it themselves among many other pieces of information. Taking into account the other distinguished types, a tendency of greater confidence in the Internet among *the politically alienated (with a sense of powerlessness and power)* is clearly marked here. *The politically alienated (with a sense of powerlessness and power)* are also characterized by much smaller trust in the press. People *with a sense of power (non-alienated and alienated)* present low confidence in television (Figure 1).

Consequently, political alienation noticeably differentiates trust in the press, a traditional medium that has always enjoyed high credibility, and in the Internet,

Table 7. Frequency of media use by the distinguished types of individuals. Asymptotic significance in the Chi-square test

	Chi-square	df	Asymptotic significance
Television	10.860	4	.028
Radio	14.725	4	.005
Internet	13.187	4	.010
Press	2.140	4	n.s.
Result	1.549	4	n.s.

Source: Own research

the result of the technological revolution of the 1990s. People who do not trust politicians and political leaders feel tired with the Polish political scene, they do not see it as offering values with which they could identify, moreover, they have more confidence in the Internet and less in the traditional press. Large and moderate political commitment and trust are characteristic of people who have more trust in the press and less in the Internet. Non-alienation also affects the growth of confidence in television among people *with a sense of power*.

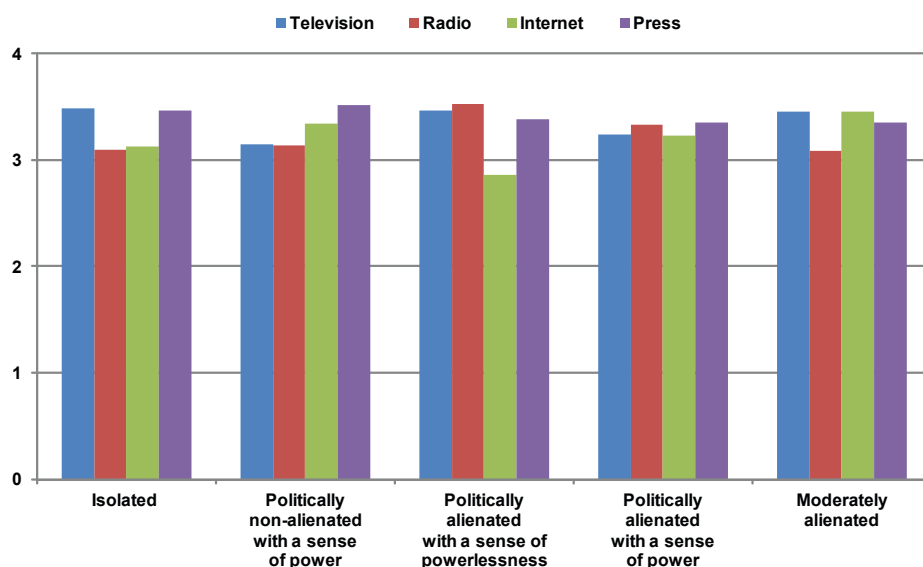
Frequency and duration of media use

Types of people with different value systems on the sense of alienation scales differ significantly in the frequency of television, radio and Internet use. A sense of alienation does not differentiate respondents in terms of frequency of use of the press or general frequency of media use (Table 7).

The isolated spend the most time watching television, the least time is devoted to television by *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*. Among radio users the largest group are *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*, whereas the least numerous group are *the isolated*. The Internet is indicated by *the moderately alienated* as the medium to which they devote the most time, while the least time is devoted to it by *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*.

Despite the lack of overall statistically significant differences, it is worth noting one trend. In each of the selected types except *the politically alienated with a sense of power*, one medium can be indicated that has the highest frequency among all types and one that has the lowest. Thus, *the isolated* indicate television as the most frequently used medium; at the same time this group has the highest frequency of television use among all the types, while the radio is the most rarely used, and this result is simultaneously the lowest among all the types. Similarly, *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power* indicate the press as the most commonly used medium, the most rarely used being television. *The politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness* show the radio as the most frequently used, while the Internet

Figure 2. Frequency of media use by the distinguished types of individuals



Source: Own research based on the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

is the least frequently used. The Internet, however, is indicated as being the most frequently used by *the moderately alienated*, who simultaneously use the press the most rarely (identical to the result of *the politically alienated with a sense of power*).

The tested types differ significantly in terms of media use time (calculated as the number of hours devoted to their use in the past two days) (Table 8).

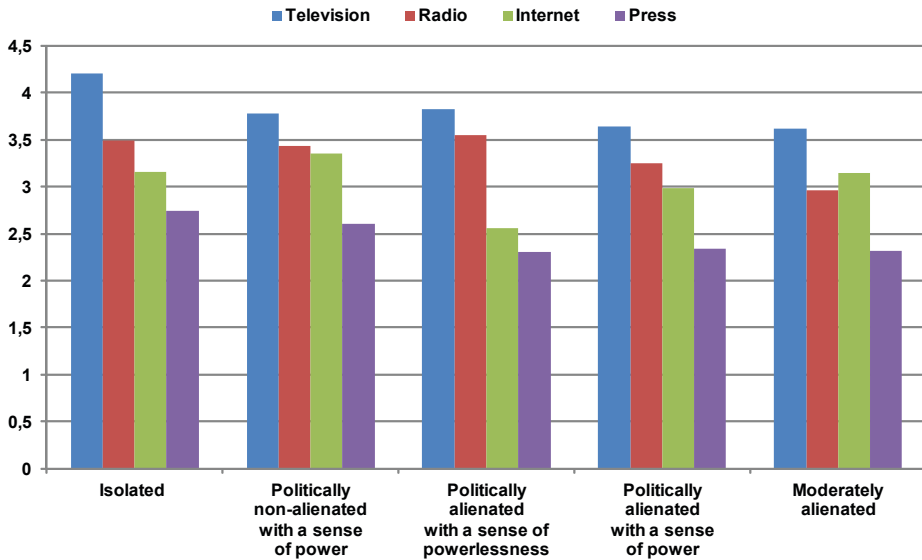
The isolated spend the most time on television; *the moderately alienated* spend the least. The greatest amount of time is devoted to radio use by *the politically alien-*

Table 8. Media use time by the distinguished types of individuals. Asymptotic significance in the Chi-square test

Medium	Chi-square	df	Asymptotic significance
Television	18.971	4	0.001
Radio	14.217	4	0.007
Internet	16.330	4	0.003
Press	21.208	4	0.000
Result	27.501	4	0.000

Source: Own research

Figure 3. Media use time by the distinguished types of individuals



Source: Own research based on the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

ated with a sense of powerlessness, whereas the least – by *the moderately alienated*. The Internet is the most commonly used by *the politically non-alienated with a sense of political power*, the least – by *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*. The press is often read by *the isolated*, but rarely by *the moderately alienated*.

Generally, a similar trend can be indicated in each of the groups except for *the moderately alienated*. The respondents spend the greatest amount of time on television, then the radio, the Internet and the press (Figure 3). Perhaps this is related to the specific use of particular media. Both television and the radio are media that do not require any special activity or concentration. They can be used parallel with the performance of other tasks such as cleaning, cooking, practicing a hobby – drawing or crafts, conversation with others. On the other hand, the Internet and the press require users to focus their attention and their own activity – it is difficult to use them parallel with other activities. Hence presumably the trend that stood out in most of the subjects.

Preferred themes in the media

The level of alienation differentiates the preferred themes in the media used. Only with regard to travel-related topics are there no significant statistical differences (Table 9).

Table 9. Preferred themes in the media by the indicated types of individuals. Asymptotic significance in the Chi-square test

Theme – medium	Chi-square	df	Asymptotic significance
political – TV	19.938	4	0.001
political – radio	12.453	4	0.014
political – Internet	18.015	4	0.001
political – press	24.105	4	0.000
sports – TV	12.635	4	0.013
sports – radio	9.176	4	n.s.
sports – Internet	3.748	4	n.s.
sports – press	15.730	4	0.003
musical– TV	1.865	4	n.s.
musical – radio	6.229	4	n.s.
musical – Internet	2.047	4	n.s.
musical –press	13.862	4	0.008
religious – TV	7.139	4	n.s.
religious – radio	10.667	4	0.031
religious – Internet	13.606	4	0.009
religious – press	11.749	4	0.019
social – TV	6.439	4	n.s.
social – radio	16.157	4	0.003
social – Internet	4.228	4	n.s.
social – press	9.504	4	0.050
erotic – TV	17.518	4	0.002
erotic – radio	16.073	4	0.003
erotic – Internet	17.231	4	0.002
erotic – press	24.170	4	0.000
travel – TV	5.300	4	n.s.
travel – radio	1.090	4	n.s.
travel – Internet	4.910	4	n.s.
travel – press	5.779	4	n.s.
cooking – TV	8.747	4	n.s.
cooking – radio	3.101	4	n.s.
cooking – Internet	4.489	4	n.s.
cooking – press	18.340	4	0.001
cultural – TV	3.906	4	n.s.
cultural – radio	10.282	4	0.036
cultural – Internet	2.684	4	n.s.
cultural – press	8.765	4	n.s.
economic – TV	14.244	4	0.007
economic – radio	7.815	4	n.s.
economic – Internet	17.102	4	0.002
economic – prasa	11.570	4	0.021
agricultural, gardening – TV	8.160	4	n.s.
agricultural, gardening – radio	19.765	4	0.001
agricultural, gardening – Internet	7.925	4	n.s.
agricultural, gardening – press	17.731	4	0.001
celebrity – TV	13.216	4	0.010
celebrity – radio	6.955	4	n.s.
celebrity – Internet	6.304	4	n.s.
celebrity – press	16.817	4	0.002

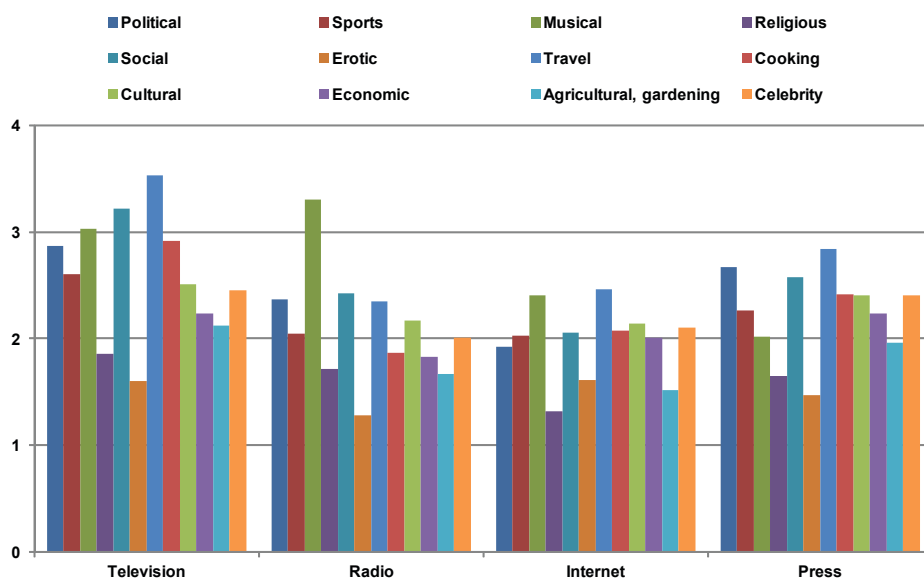
Source: Own research

Political programs both on television, the radio, the Internet and in the press are commonly used by *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*, while the least by *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*. Sports topics on television are the most attractive to *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*, and in the press to *the isolated*. Both on television and in the press, sport is the least attractive to *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*. Musical themes in the press are the most interesting for *the moderately alienated* and the least for *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*. Religious themes on the radio, the Internet and in the press are preferred by *the moderately alienated*, and the least preferred by *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. Social content on the radio and in the press is the most attractive to *the isolated*, it is chosen the most rarely by *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. Erotic themes in all the analyzed media – television, the radio, the Internet and the press – are mostly preferred by *the isolated*, whereas the least by *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*. Cooking themes in the press are the most attractive to *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*, but are rarely chosen by *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*. Cultural content on the radio is preferred by *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*, and is the least popular with *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. Economic themes on television, the Internet and in the press are the most attractive to *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*, the least attractive to *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*. *The isolated* among the respondents most often indicate agricultural, gardening programs on the radio and in the press, while these are the least preferred by *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. Celebrity themes on television and in the press are the most attractive to *the isolated*, they are chosen the most rarely by *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*.

Attention should be paid to two important trends in the analyzed variables. Firstly, *the isolated* and *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power* differ essentially in their preferred themes. The first type – *the isolated* – usually indicate the following content: social, sports, erotic, gardening, agricultural, celebrity. The other type in turn – *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power* – prefers: political, sports, cultural, economic themes. It is worth noting the disparateness of these issues. The first type of content, in which *the isolated* audience dominates, primarily provides entertainment and useful data on coping with life. The latter type, on the other hand, preferred by *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*, provides content enhancing intellectual and developmental resources, with particular emphasis on the socio-political aspect.

The second trend is the fact that *the politically alienated* (both *with a sense of powerlessness* and *power*) constitute a group for which none of the proposed content (except for cooking) is attractive enough. The vast majority of indications is at the low or lowest level. This is particularly worrying among *the alienated with a sense of powerlessness* – individuals without a sense of agency or impact

Figure 4. Preferred themes in particular media. Mean values



Source: Own research

on the socio-political environment, without inner power, initiative. It is worth asking at this point: how can we reach these people, mobilize and strengthen their resources? Since the media are not a satisfactory source of meeting their needs, other sources might need to be sought. The presented analyses of media content preferred by certain types only took into account the overall media content, without singling out specific types of television genre such as film, TV series, information programs, etc. Perhaps these individuals constitute the audience of certain TV series in which content that serves to activate and cement a civil society could be presented? Certainly posing such a question marks the beginning of new exploration and research.

Analyzing the themes preferred by the subjects in particular media, it can be stated that television is the most preferred broadcaster. An exception to this rule is content related to music which is most often listened to on the radio, eroticism which is a bit more attractive on the Internet, and the economy which is preferred in the press. The press, just after television, is the most attractive to the audience, the exception being religious content which is often listened to on the radio. It is difficult to determine the advantage of the radio over the Internet or vice versa, because each of them has some content that is most often received in that medium.

For the Internet this is content related to travel, cooking, eroticism, economy, celebrities. For the radio – politics, sports, music, religious, social, culture, agriculture, gardening (Figure 4).

Discussion of results

The principal objective of the study was to verify the role of media in the lives of individuals with different levels of a sense of alienation. The empirical enquiries oscillated around two fundamental variables. The first of these was a sense of alienation which, as previously indicated by scholars, may be an important mechanism contributing to the mental health of individuals and the state of citizens' involvement. The starting point for the research process was Melvin Seeman's concept of a sense of alienation, which was extended to the political context. The other field of analysis was the use of mass media in a broad sense. At the core of the study lay considerations on the benefits sought by individuals in the media in response to their needs. The basis for the empirical analysis was the uses and gratifications theory approached by Denis McQuail, who presented a typology of four benefits obtained in contact with the media. The benefits obtained in contact with the media indicated by McQuail correspond to the four needs that Seymour Epstein regards as being fundamental. The differences in the use of media by the distinguished types of individuals were verified in the course of conducted studies and analysis.

The isolated most often seek integration and interaction in the media. These are people who have no sense of an external anchor, who feel the absence of persons close to them and respected values in which they could find support and which would assist them in difficult situations. For these people, a job or home do not constitute values as such. They find it hard to indicate people to whom they can always turn. It may be assumed that thanks to the media, individuals with a high *sense of isolation* can gain some insight into the living conditions of others, social empathy, identification with others and a sense of belonging. The media also provide them with topics for conversation, often as a substitute for real companionship. They also receive assistance in fulfilling social roles. *The isolated* seek identity on television more often than other people. TV broadcasts confirm the rightness of their individual value system, give them an opportunity to identify with valuable characters, to find models of behavior. With respect to the content they prefer, it is dominated by social, sports, erotic, gardening, agricultural and celebrity topics. These groups of content above all provide entertainment and useful data regarding coping in life.

The isolated exhibit the highest level of confidence in the media³ and devoted most of their time to them in the past two days. However, they perceive television

³ With regard to the level of confidence in the media and frequency of use, the data were also indicated in the analysis; there were no significant differences among the studied groups. However, because of their great importance for the analysis, it was decided to mention these results. Differences in the level of confidence in the radio and the Internet and media in general, as well as the frequency of use of the press and media in general, proved to be statistically insignificant.

and the press as the most attractive. They represent the highest level of trust in these media among the respondents. They spend more time than others on watching television and a lot on reading the press. Over the past two days they used these media the most frequently. The Internet and the radio are the least attractive mass media for this group of people. The radio is a medium most rarely used by them. Regarding the Internet, they represent the lowest level of trust among the respondents. Moreover, they seek information in contact with this medium less often than other people. It is worth mentioning that the Internet is an interactive medium to a large extent, which can affect its lower attractiveness for people with *a sense of isolation*.

The isolated are people with a strong need for contact – establishing and maintaining relationships with others. Referring to the conducted analysis, it can be assumed that they regard the media as a satisfying source for meeting this need. It should be stressed that among these individuals one-third are rural residents, there is also a large percentage of the oldest people, over 65 years of age.⁴ This could explain the lower attractiveness of the Internet due to its lower availability and difficulty of use. There is also a large proportion of divorced people, among whom elevated levels of a sense of isolation may be associated with disappointment with contacts with other human beings. People between 25 and 34 years of age constitute the highest percentage here. These are usually individuals taking their first jobs, beginning their independent lives. The crisis on the labor market, real estate market problems may cause disappointment, be demotivating and affect the high level of a sense of isolation. Among the isolated, people under 24 years of age constitute the smallest group.

The non-alienated with a sense of political power look for entertainment in the media, especially television and the radio, the most rarely. These are also the media in contact with which these individuals receive less social integration and interaction as well as information in comparison to the others. *The non-alienated with a sense of political power* are strong individuals who have an internal sense of self-importance. These are individuals with a sense of agency, aware of the relation between their behavior and the expected reinforcements. They are self-confident, do not have difficulty in making decisions. They are characterized by an inner strength that allows them to determine worthy goals and achieve them. They have a strong political subjectivity and believe that there are values in the socio-political system which they can identify with. Respected values and set objectives provide them with support in their operations. With regard to preferred content in the media, they point to political, sports, cultural, economic content as being the most attractive to them. These types of content expand intellectual and developmental resources, with a particular emphasis on the socio-political aspect. Individuals from this group indicated materials on celebrities as their favorite the most rarely.

⁴ The article does not present a detailed socio-demographic analysis of the particular types, only some of the characteristics have been indicated here. For more, see Turska-Kawa (in print). The book also contains a diagnosis of more fields of the media use by the different types.

The Internet and the press are the most attractive media to *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power*. They most often read newspapers, in the last two days they devoted the greatest number of hours to the Internet. At the same time *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power* represent a lower level of trust in the Internet than *the politically alienated (with a sense of power and powerlessness)* and *the moderately alienated*, they also watch television the most rarely.

Among *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power* there are more men than women. A very large proportion of them are young people under 24, there are few divorced and widowed people among them. In comparison to the other types, most of them have a higher education. Most of them live in larger towns (population of 100,000-200,000), but simultaneously there is a fairly large proportion of people living in villages and the smallest towns. Almost half of them live in the Central Silesian sub-region, there is a relatively large group from the Rybnik-Jastrzębie sub-region. *The non-alienated with a sense of political power* are, therefore, primarily young, educated people, which could justify their interest (although critical) in the Internet as an interactive, modern medium. These are individuals with strong political subjectivity and a sense of agency and self-importance. The media, television and the radio in particular, are not their desirable source of meeting needs. They do not look to them to satisfy the need for contact – establishing and maintaining relationships with others, nor to preserve a stable and coherent system of experience representation, nor to obtain pleasure and avoid pain. It can be anticipated that high social activity implies that they have a number of other sources that meet the needs of *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power* better than the media.

The politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness more often than the other types seek a sense of identity on the radio and in the press, entertainment on television, the radio and in the press, and information on the radio. The radio is the medium preferred by most of *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness*. It is most often used by them, they listened to the radio more than others in the past two days. This medium also enjoys the greatest confidence among this group of people. The least attractive medium for *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness* is the Internet. They use it the most rarely and devoted the least number of hours to it in the last two days. The press also has a low use incidence rate and level of trust. It is difficult to identify the media content preferred by this group. The only content they rate better than the other types is cooking, whereas political, sports, music, erotic, economic content is less attractive to them than to other people.

The politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness are individuals who have no internal sense of impact on the socio-political environment, but have relatively strong faith in the external support of significant people and values. These are individuals with a weak sense of connection between their own actions and their effects, which may translate into a lack of initiative. Weak faith in the sense of self-efficacy is associated with passiveness and uncertainty of behavior in specific

situations. Among these people, a sense of the lack of self-strength coincides with the lack of a sense of political subjectivity, the inability to discern their individual impact on the political environment. Individuals from this group show a general lack of confidence in the political scene, they do not perceive its strength and values that could be worth following. They do not believe in the effectiveness of politics, nor in the declared promises of politicians. They are tired and weary of the Polish political scene. A sense of integration with other people and highly valued qualities remains at an average level among them, so this is an area from which they can draw a kind of strength and support in action.

Among *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness* by far the most are women, more than twice as many as men. The largest percentage are people aged 25-34, there are also quite a lot of middle-aged people. A small proportion are from the youngest group, which could indicate a greater sense of power and self-confidence in their own capabilities. In comparison with the other types, there are many divorced and widowed people among them. More than half have completed a secondary education. Nearly half live in large and very large cities, the vast majority come from the Central Silesian sub-region.

The politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness are individuals for whom the media are a desired source of meeting needs, of obtaining pleasure and avoiding pain, enhancing self-esteem and maintaining a stable and coherent system of experience representation. The media provide them with opportunities to escape from reality or to divert attention from problems, to relax physically and emotionally. Weak faith in self-efficacy and the passiveness associated with this as well as the uncertainty of behavior in specific situations can be amplified by the models of behavior provided in the media, the ability to identify with valuable characters, seeking confirmation of the validity of an individual system of values in the mass media. In particular, the radio provides them with information about significant events, advice on practical matters, offers assistance in choosing an opinion on a given topic or satisfying curiosity and general interests.

The politically alienated with a sense of power are people who definitely less often than the others seek identity on the radio, in the press or television, social integration and interaction on the radio or in the press, and entertainment in the press. Among the respondents, *the politically alienated with a sense of power* represent the lowest level of trust in the media in general, and in television and the press in particular. They also very rarely use both television and the press. They do not prefer any specific topic in the media. At the same time, they describe religious, social, cultural, agricultural, gardening content as less attractive than other respondents. The Internet is the medium most preferred by *the politically alienated with a sense of power*. They represent the highest level of trust in the Internet and the average frequency of its use.

The politically alienated with a sense of power are individuals who have a sense of inner strength, but they experience tiredness with and a lack of interest in the

political scene. These are people who feel a strong sense of social impact on the environment and the relationship between the actions they take and the expected reinforcements. They can successfully fight for their rights and defend their own opinion. They are not characterized by passiveness, they are active in operation. They also have an average sense of social anchor – they are able to identify persons and values that are important and provide them with support. They feel needed and important to others. However, these are people who have a weak sense of political subjectivity. They feel tired with the Polish political scene. They do not believe in the effectiveness of politicians' actions nor in politicians' actions for the good of society. They do not recognize values in politics that they could identify with. They do not feel the possibility of an accurate assessment of political activities, because they believe that politics is governed by illogical rules, cunning and the ability to push oneself forward.

Among *the politically alienated with a sense of power* there are slightly more women than men. Most of them are aged between 45 and 54, the oldest are the fewest among them. In comparison with the other types this group mostly comprises people with a primary or secondary education, nearly half have completed a secondary education. Most of *the politically alienated with a sense of power* live in towns with a population of 100,000-200,000, compared with the other types the fewest live in largest cities with a population of over 200,000. Comparatively, this is the smallest group among all the types living in the Central Silesian sub-region, significantly more of them live in smaller sub-regions – Częstochowa and Bielsko-Biała.

On the basis of the conducted research it can be assumed that for *the politically alienated with a sense of power* the media do not constitute a desired source of meeting the needs distinguished by Epstein. The media are not supportive for this group in finding confirmation of their individual system of values, do not meet their general curiosity, these people do not look in them for a sense of belonging or a substitute for real companionship or emotional relaxation.

The moderately alienated seek information on the Internet more often than others. The Internet is generally the medium they most prefer. They most frequently use it and represent a fairly high level of confidence in it. They form a group that does not confirm the tendency shown by the other types when it comes to the structure of time spent on various media. The other types mostly use television, then the radio, the Internet and the press. *The moderately alienated* use the Internet more frequently than the radio. Other media are not attractive to *the moderately alienated*. The press is the most rarely read by them, in the last two days they most rarely listened to the radio, read the press and watched TV (it is worth mentioning that in their opinion they watch television quite often). They have the lowest level of trust in the radio among the respondents. Generally, they devoted the least time to the media in the last two days. *The moderately alienated* are individuals who have an average sense of impact on the socio-political environment and the inner strength to act. They also have a relative sense that there are closely related people

around them who can give them support and values that they can identify with and which should be followed.

Among *the moderately alienated* there are slightly more women than men. Most of these people are between 25 and 34 years of age, but there are slightly fewer people between 35 and 44 and 45 and 55 years of age. The unmarried represent the largest proportion of this group, there are slightly fewer married women and men. More than half of these people have a secondary education. Most of them are urban dwellers from towns with a population of 100,000-200,000, a relatively large proportion are residents of big cities. Most of them come from the Central Silesian sub-region.

For *the moderately alienated* the media are not a desirable source of satisfaction. Only the Internet is granted trust and is often used by them; it satisfies their need to maintain a stable and coherent system of experience representation, providing knowledge about significant events, being a source of advice on practical matters, the choice of an opinion on a topic or satisfying curiosity and general interest.

Conclusion

In the course of the research it turned out that the distinguished types of individuals with various systems for measuring the sense of alienation have different perceptions of the media as a source for meeting needs, they are characterized by different profiles of media use. Generally speaking, lower activity, lower commitment, the lack of social support, the lack of a sense of agency imply the perception of the media as sources for satisfying needs. It can be assumed that the types who feel an inner strength in some field of socio-political life find other attractive sources of satisfaction apart from the media. The media are present in their lives, but they are not the primary source of benefits in the McQuail typology. In turn, in the lives of individuals who do not have a sense of inner strength or feel isolated, the media play an important role. They are a source of gratification meeting the fundamental needs of these individuals. But the question to be considered at this point is whether this is a positive function, and to what extent the mass media place themselves in a position that degrades the social capital. The results obtained do not allow us to state clearly whether the media, which are entrusted with greater confidence by the types with poorer results on the sense of alienation scales, by meeting their fundamental needs in a satisfactory way, taking more of their time than working on social integration, providing specific reinforcements in response to the individuals' needs, or in a way replacing actual activity, actually deepen alienation. The fact is that the media provide the desired support to the types with poorer results. However, the cost of such gratification in the context of the whole of society seems to be high. There is a danger that by eliminating the positive tension associated with satisfying specific needs, the media focus the commitment and time of individuals in a satisfactory way, thus replacing direct contact with indirect contact. It seems

that this is a kind of vicious circle – individuals with a higher sense of *isolation and powerlessness* prefer the media as a source of satisfying their needs, and the gratification received thanks to this content may discourage them from seeking sources of strength and integration in actual socio-political activity, thereby in some ways the media can deepen alienation. This is an important mechanism in the context of citizens' mental health on the one hand, and in the processes of building a civil society on the other. It can be assumed that individuals who are *politically isolated and alienated with a sense of powerlessness* are not its strong element, because they have difficulties with taking action for the common good and with social integration. These difficulties among *the isolated* can emerge from problems in interpersonal contacts, the inability to find people and values that are worth following. In turn, among *the politically alienated with a sense of powerlessness* these difficulties arise from the lack of abilities in self-organization, designation and determination of important social objectives as well as mistrust and lack of interest in the political field, having no subjectivity in the socio-political system. *The politically alienated with a sense of power* do not feel political subjectivity either, but they have an inner strength that is probably found and successfully implemented in other social fields. Perhaps it is running a business or working at a job, perhaps a hobby. The starting point for the analysis of a civil society is a self-fulfilling, active, autonomous individual who participates in economic, political, cultural, association's etc. activities. *The politically alienated with a sense of power* do not find fulfillment in the field of politics, they reject it, have no sense of impact over it, are not interested in its mechanism. But it cannot be excluded that they fulfill their sense of power in the field of culture and various associations, which though not connected with politics may be important for building and strengthening a civil society. The strongest type in the context of social integration are *the politically non-alienated with a sense of power* – individuals with a sense of inner strength, a sense of agency, faith in the relationship between their own activities and their effects, who simultaneously are interested in the mechanisms governing politics, who find values in the political field that are worth identifying with.

One question remains open – can the mission and content of the media be managed in such a way that by using the confidence and attractiveness of the media we would raise the level of power and integration of individuals? Can the role of the media be used to build a civil society? It seems possible. However, it requires a detailed analysis of the media content whose audience are people with higher levels of a sense of alienation. Getting this content orientated toward strengthening the self-esteem of these individuals on the one hand, and providing valuable patterns and behavior models to reinforce their sense of strength on the other, is immensely important for increasing their level of motivation and mobilizing them to action. In their research on the sense of alienation, many authors point to the importance of processes occurring in the cognitive structures of individuals. Researchers agree that people with a high and low sense of alienation represent

different ways of perceiving the world and themselves. Albert Ellis pointed out that the cause of a sense of alienation, and loneliness in particular, is an irrational system of judgments (Ellis, 1962); the research of Aaron T. Beck and his fellow researchers has shown that alienated people often have negative expectations with regard to themselves, their future and their situation. Negative perceptions of oneself and the world can lead to failures in the field of social relations, as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, Erbaugh, 1961, pp. 561-571). The media should overcome these feelings, reinforcing the sense of power and mitigating the feeling of isolation.

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