A digital gap in Polish families on the example of video games

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INTRODUCTION

Video games are becoming one of the most important digital and cultural industries (Wijman, 2017). This trend is reflected by statistics. For example the population of gamers is growing, with increasing amounts of money and time being spent on this hobby (see Lenhart et al., 2008; ESA, 2016; ISFE, 2012). Of course, this significantly affects different categories of social structures, including family life. Moreover, the growing population of gamers involves children, for whom gaming is not only a leisure activity, but also a sphere of socialisation and an opportunity to establish relationships with other people. Therefore, the relationship between video games and young gamers should be taken into consideration. However, in this presentation I will not limit myself only to gamers, but expand my considerations to the family environment. As a result, this presentation will discuss the most important conclusions from a study regarding the role of video games in the life of a modern Polish family. I decided to research this issue by focusing on families that live in rural areas in Poland – from where I myself come from – to emphasize the role of personal experience in social research.

As a result of the complicated reality of family life, the study employed quantitative and qualitative methods – a questionnaire survey and an interview. Such methodological triangulation [Silverman and Marvasti, 2008, p. 156-157] allowed me to capture the views and experiences of both parents and adolescents (mainly school age children). Moreover, family has multiple functions such as sexual regulations, reproduction, economic cooperation, socialisation, education or emotional support [Anastasiu, 2012]. Considering this complexity, I decided to focus on different aspects of video games presence in Polish families: the socio-demographic characteristic (including technological and cultural competencies) of young gamers and parents living in the studied families; the level of parental knowledge about video games; the issue of verbal communication between the child and the parent with regard to video games; the general role of video games in the life of a particular family and finally the role of social environment (social groups, schools, institutions) in supporting caregivers who rise young gamers.

Some alarming phenomena were observed in the group of twenty-four surveyed families, particularly in the aspects of low cultural and technological competencies of parents, insufficient level of parental control, limited parent-child communication and parental involvement in gaming activities among children, as well as the lack of support from the school and other institutions, which may be important for the

process of raising young gamers. In general, the observed situation might be theoretically explained by referring to the Margaret Mead's concept of culture divided into three different types (postfigurative, cofigurative and prefigurative) (Mead, 1970) and William Ogburn's idea of cultural lag (Ogburn, 1922).

This presentation will be an attempt to deepen the analysis of the impact that video games have on the family environment. This is particularly important due to the growing popularity of this medium as well as its specificity, which makes games notably different from non-interactive media, which can be unclear to or disregarded by older generations of parents, educators and teachers. Unfortunately, such negligence was observed among the surveyed parents, including families of kids who were significantly involved in gaming. I also hope that my presentation will demonstrate some complexity of this subject and draw your attention to the problems of a group that seems to be underestimated in the field of game studies, namely country dwellers, who often face the problem of limited access to knowledge and institutions.

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