



*From a Historical
Hero/Demigod/Titan to
an Influencer*

*The Influence of Heroes on the
Young Generation—the Polish
Perspective. An Introduction to
Research*

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Abstract

For young people, there is practically no distinction between a celebrity and an authority, a demigod, and an influencer. In practice, the historical heroes are almost unknown in many conversations. On the other hand, popular influencers are completely unrelated to the older generation. A certain definitional chaos can be observed among contemporary Polish youth. In this article, we want to present basic definitional concepts that are an example of generational change. In our opinion, the change in meaning of the concept of a hero is best captured by a generation of young people who probably understand the concept of hero in a different way than it was understood 30 or 40 years ago. The research method will be a questionnaire, and the research tool will be an internet questionnaire. The research group will be selected purposefully—with a minimum of 30 respondents aged 19-24, using new media. The collected data will be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. It should be emphasized that research conducted on a purposefully selected group cannot be generalized for the entire population. However, it will shed light on the way of changing the meaning of this concept and the perception of contemporary heroes, who are often identified with influencers.

Keywords: influencers, heroism, celebrity, authority, youth

Resumen

Para los jóvenes, prácticamente no hay distinción entre una celebridad y una autoridad, un semidiós y una persona influyente. En la práctica, los héroes históricos son casi desconocidos en muchas conversaciones. Por otro lado, los influencers populares son completamente ajenos a la generación de más edad. Se observa un cierto caos definitorio entre la juventud polaca contemporánea. En este artículo, queremos presentar conceptos definitorios básicos que son un ejemplo del cambio generacional. En nuestra opinión, el cambio de significado del concepto de héroe se capta mejor en una generación de jóvenes que probablemente entienden el concepto de héroe de forma diferente a como se entendía hace 30 o 40 años. El método de investigación será un cuestionario, y la herramienta de investigación será un cuestionario por internet. El grupo de investigación se seleccionará intencionadamente, con un mínimo de 30 encuestados de entre 19 y 24 años, utilizando los nuevos medios de comunicación. Los datos recogidos se analizarán cuantitativa y cualitativamente. Cabe destacar que la investigación realizada sobre un grupo seleccionado a propósito no puede generalizarse a toda la población. Sin embargo, arrojará luz sobre la forma de cambiar el significado de este concepto y la percepción de los héroes contemporáneos, que a menudo se identifican con los influencers.

Palabras clave: influencers, heroísmo, celebridad, autoridad, jóvenes

Introduction

One of the most important problems of contemporary Polish society turns out to be the issue of the intergenerational gap, which is getting bigger every year. It is becoming noticeable that parents and children begin to possess not only different skills, even in the context of the current digital revolution, but also social competences, which result from fundamental differences in verbally describing their own experience. Members of the same family may use identical terms that have completely different meanings.

From our point of view, the difference in the terms used is increasingly emphasized, which affects the way of perceiving oneself. This can be seen, for example, in the context of the issues of heroism. We put forward the thesis that the current heroes, on the one hand, are strictly digital characters, and on the other hand, this means that compared to the heroes from several decades ago, their lifespan is significantly shorter.

People described as heroes for our parents and grandparents were timeless figures. Their life in the social mentality was generally longer, and their influence was even intergenerational. The aim of the conducted research is to show that the contemporary hero, for the young generation of adult Poles, remains in people's memory no longer than "one season," which, depending on the source, may refer to a period of time shorter than a year.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the basic differences in definitions and to show what are the features of a role model for young Poles, with whom they identify and who can be called a hero, a modern demigod. The preliminary analysis shows that for this age group (19-24 years old) the issue of definitional precision, operationalization of concepts is problematic and, from the cognitive point of view, causes an analytical chaos.

We assumed two basic sources for the analysis. First, Polish-language scientific publications are considered. In accordance with Polish standards, the majority of scientific journals have undergone digitization. For this reason, netography is an important part of the research material. In the context of the selection of literature, the authors adopted a research method known as "analysis and criticism of literature."

The second source for research is a focus group survey. Students (30 respondents) from the University of Social and Media Culture in Toruń, Poland, were surveyed. Therefore, the research method is a specially constructed survey, and the research tool is an internet survey. The collected data were

subjected to quantitative and qualitative processing. Focus group surveys are extremely useful. They allow you to look at the problem from the perspective of a specific group that we consider important. The point of view of the youngest generation of adult Poles clearly shows the trend in line with the current digital revolution. 30 students from one university were taken as the basis, because due to the upbringing process, they are similar and show convergence with the rest of the generation.

I. The Conceptual Framework—The Polish Perspective

When we try to create a basic conceptual framework in the context of the analyzed topic, the most important problem turns out to be the existing definitional chaos in Polish scientific and journalistic literature. There are a multitude of linguistic solutions to such expressions as “hero,” “demigod,” “central figure,” “authority,” “idol” or even “expert.” It seems reasonable to create a precise conceptual grid, consistent with Polish conditions and experience.

A purely common-sense analysis leads us to reflect that not every individual deserves to be called a hero.¹ Certain criteria must be fulfilled. In Polish reality, especially political and historical, the phrase “national hero” is quite often used. The element that separates him from an ordinary “central figure/hero” is heroism, which is the most important criterion, but not the only one.²

In the work *Archetypical Patterns of Heroic Initiations* [*Archetypowe wzorce inicjacji bohaterkich*], Zenon Waldemar Dudek states that the hero is:

a unique figure, breaking with collective rights, an original, strong and expressive individuality. Often the hero is extremely talented and admired by the crowds—imitated and treated like a demigod idol. The strength of the hero often evokes extreme negative emotions in ordinary individuals—he is admired, but also hated and persecuted by the crowds when he does not live up to magical expectations and experiences moments of weakness.³

These supernatural expectations, of course, do not relate directly to magic, but rather to the belief that the individual can handle situations where others would surely fail.

1. It is worth noting here that in Polish there are two terms very similar to each other: “bohater” and “heros.” The first term translates as “hero.” The second as “demigod.” Today, demigod is a hero whose level of recognition borders on cult.
 2. Ewa Stawowy, «Stefana Czarnowskiego socjologiczna analiza kultu bohatera» *Rocznik Naukowo-Dydaktyczny WSP w Krakowie*, vol. 57 (1975): 51-66; Piotr Górski, «Socjologiczne ujęcia kwestii narodu: podobieństwa i różnice» *Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny*, vol. XLVIII, no. 4 (1986): 275-294; Michał Januszkiewicz, «W horyzoncie nowoczesności: antybohater jako pojęcie antropologii literatury» *Teksty Drugie*, vol. 3, (2010): 60-78; Robert Stawicki, *Kazimierz Pułaski (1745–1779) bohater ‘dwóch Narodów’ w 230. rocznicę śmierci* (Warsovia: Senate, 2009).
 3. Paweł Tarasiewicz, «Bohater a naród» *Cywilizacja*, vol. 35 (2010): 48-49.

Therefore, every hero must have three important traits. The first is personal qualifications. Secondly, acts of heroism. Thirdly, acceptance by the broad masses with eligibility for the title of hero. Until recently, it was assumed that all three features must exist. In today's digital world, it seems that some are more important, and often it is enough to meet only one of the above conditions.

Personal qualifications are closely related to the tradition of ancient Greece, where the central figure or character had to be a hero, someone between a man and a god, possessing both supernatural abilities (in relation to other people) and the love of the gods themselves. Interestingly, the Polish word "bohater," like the Hungarian "bator" has its source in the Persian "bahadur," which means a brave swordsman or athlete.⁴

An interesting issue is the connection of the hero with the deeds he committed. Quite often, it is about something extraordinary, on the verge of self-sacrifice. In this perspective, the hero plays a culture-forming function, and his actions are to be imitated. However, in the Polish reality of the 21st century, an interesting trend is observed. The actions of the hero cease to be related to moral correctness.⁵ In other words, the more heroism is related to professed moral or religious values, the more the act is stripped of heroism by mass media. The more moral the act, the less heroic. For the contemporary Polish reality, often created by mass media as well as digital tools, heroism is measured only by effectiveness, not a factor determining the reason or cause of the act itself.

Undoubtedly, the aspect of recognition of heroism relates to the above. This one is not constant. People who received the nickname "Great" during their lifetime are stripped of their greatness and heroic glory by today's analysts. A heroic deed can easily be diminished by lack of prudence, and a single mistake can be taken as a veil for a lifetime of great deeds. Currently, such an openly quoted example is the figure of John Paul II, who is posthumously stripped of all dignity.⁶ What is more important, this tendency is contradictory to the generally prevailing custom in Poland, in line with the Latin maxim: *de mortuis aut bene aut nihil* [one should speak/write about the dead only well or not at all].⁷

4. See the entry "Bohater," in Aleksander Bruckner, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego* (Krakowia: W.L. Anczyca I Spolsky, 1927).

5. Atlas, Karina, «Ciemniejsza strona bohaterstwa», (Accessed August 17, 2022). <https://psychologiapraktyce.pl/artykul/ciemniejsza-strona-bohaterstwa>; Aneta Kozak-Śmigiel, «Problemy moralnego obowiązku. Czy moralni święci istnieją?» *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska*, vol. XL, no. 2, (2015): 137-144; Susan Wolf, «Nie chciałabym, by moje dzieci wyrosły na moralnych świętych [wywiad]» (2021), accessed August 17, 2022: <https://filozofuj.eu/susan-wolf-nie-chcialabym-by-moje-dzieci-wyrosly-na-moralnych-swietych-wywiad/>.

6. Karol Kleczka, «Zbyt szybko kanonizowaliśmy Jana Pawła II» *Znak Miesięcznik* (accessed 13 January 2022) <https://www miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/zbyt-szybko-kanonizowalismy-jana-pawla-ii/>; Mariusz Agnosiewicz, «Krytyczne podsumowanie pontyfikatu Jana Pawła II [I]» *Racjonalista* (accessed august 17, 2022). <http://www.racjonalista.pl/kk.php/s.1384>; Widzyk, Anna «Berliner Zeitung: Kruszy się mit Jana Pawła II» *Deutsche Welle* (November 20, 2020); Andrzej Sidorski, «Kościół i pedofilia. To Jan Paweł II złagodził w 1983 roku kary dla księży molestujących dzieci» (june 4, 2019), <https://oko.press/kosciol-i-pedofilia-to-jan-pawel-ii-zlagodzil-w-1983-r-kary-dla-ksiezy-molestujacych-dzieci/>; Sebastian Klauziński, «Jan Paweł II już nie taki święty. Młodzi winią go za tuszowanie pedofilii [SONDAŻ]» (accessed december 23, 2020); Mateusz Mazzini, «Jan Paweł II nie jest bez winy. Świat o skandalu w Watykanie» (november 12, 2020).

7. Encyklopedia pwn, «Encyklopedia zwrotów i wyrażeń obcojęzycznych PWN». (accessed August 17, 2022). <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/de-mortuis-aut-bene-aut-nihil:3891110.html>

In the online Dictionary of the Polish Language, the hero is: “a person who has shown bravery, [as well as] a person who temporarily attracts the attention of the environment. [Also] the main character in a literary work, film, opera, etc... a character representative of a given work, period. [And from Greek mythology it is] a character with superhuman qualities.”⁸ As can be seen, only this one concept makes it difficult to understand the multitude of analytical possibilities.

One must agree, however, that the definition created by Zenon Waldemar Dudek is the most complete, if not perfect. Considering contemporary conditions, the classic Polish definition of a hero is considered to be the text of Stefan Czarnowski, who stated that:

the hero is an elected representative of some group or cause [...] he is a representative in a certain sense: he embodies the very principle of the group system. Thanks to the hero, the group is confirmed as a human collectivity, and at the same time the hero imagines the rights of the group to what it sees as a guarantee of its permanence.⁹

The hero is chosen, and young people are very fickle in this regard. Today, however, heroes can be characters who play such roles as authorities, idols, experts, etc. It seems reasonable to specify the personifications of contemporary young heroes in the 21st century.

It is now observed that there are more and more people who want to be admired and that want to be emulated by others. Thus, in purely quantitative terms, there are many more contenders for the title of hero than there were only twenty years ago. The social world, thanks to the digital revolution, has become more confusing, incomprehensible, and chaotic. Ordinary individuals almost blindly look for direction indicators that would lead them to the right path, which may turn out to be quite deceptive. Since the dawn of time, people have sought support in oracles. You do not even need to look for them nowadays. There are more and more advisors, specialized in one specific field, who, to the measure of the hero, direct the actions of ordinary units.¹⁰ Maciej Bennewicz made an interesting thesis: “Postmodernism has abolished saints, leaving only idols, this surrogate product of authority. Idols, however, say what others want to hear, they say things that are simple, easy, and popular. So even if many experience an awakening, many also remain hidden, in the shadow of their own homes, treating the discovery made like others, the purchase made is only for them.”¹¹

8. «Bohater» (accessed August 6, 2022), <https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/bohater;2445498.html>

9. Joanna Hajduk-Nijakowska, «Proces mityzacji współczesnych bohaterów» *Colloquia Anthropologica et Communicativa: Mit, prawda, imaginacja* (Breslavia: P. Kowalski 2011): 221.

10. Jan Jaroszyński, «Autorytety w świecie stereotypów - krytyczna ocena medialnego obrazu osobowości» *Kultura - Media - Teologia*, vol. 3, no. 3, (2010): 59-69; Wojciech Staszewski, «Coznaczy dziś bohaterstwo? Jakich mamy bohaterów? Pytamy przedszkolaków i profesorów», *Gazeta Wyborcza*, (Accessed march 16, 2018).

11. Maciej Bennewicz, «W poszukiwaniu Mistrza. Albo», *Wszystko co najważniejsze* (Accessed July 18, 2015): <https://wszystkoconajwazniejsze.pl/maciej-bennewicz-w-poszukiwaniu-mistrza-albo-jak-celebrytyzm-zabija-ostatnie-autorytety/>

The classic type of hero is the authority figure. In the Polish encyclopedia we can find the following definition:

in Polish *autorytet* [German: *Autorität*; in Latin: *Auctoritas*: “dignity,” “power”], a category or psychosocial phenomenon described in the human sciences to denote the profound influence exerted by a person or institution on the development of the mind or relations between people who accept its statements or norms submissively, while respecting and recognizing its authority, authority or competence; the authority of law, competence, personal, conscience, and religious is usually distinguished.¹²

The above definition, however, is a classic one and was constructed many years ago. It does not respond to the changes that have occurred in the last two decades. As noted by Jacek Ziolkowski: “almost anyone who in some way deserves this attribute in the eyes of others can now be colloquially referred to as an authority.”¹³ Therefore, some simplifications are made. In colloquial language, a specialist with high qualifications, having the hallmarks of an expert in each field, has already begun to be treated as an authority—understood *sensu stricto*. On the other hand, authority *sensu largo* is an unattainable goal for anyone who wants to influence others. Such a person has many positive qualities, and the masses have no doubt that they are dealing with an authority.¹⁴

However, individuals who do not fully meet any of the adopted criteria aspire to the title of authorities, *i.e.* heroes of the 21st century in a new version. It is in this aspect that the definitional inaccuracies and cognitive chaos begin to appear.

The term “celebrity” is very well known in Poland. In accordance with the accepted and dictionary-acceptable definition: “a celebrity is a widely known person (*e.g.* actor, musician, journalist, politician) whose private life is the object of media interest, especially gossip; a celebrity usually shares information about himself with journalists, wanting to benefit from it.”¹⁵ As it is common to say and write in Poland: a celebrity is known for being famous¹⁶—and that is enough to be widely known, which is key in the world of show business. Celebrity is an extremely interesting example of the mutation of both authority and heroism. A person referred to as a celebrity is a celebrity, because this is how the masses perceive it and that is sufficient. It does not matter what the person did, said, or

12. «Autorytet» (Accessed august 6, 2022) <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/encyklopedia/autorytet.html>

13. Paweł Dariusz Piórkowski, «Autorytety. Idole, pozory, eksperci i celebryci» (Stare Miasto: Wydawnictwo Witonet 2016): 30.

14. Filip Kobiela, «Autorytet epistemiczny w sytuacji epistemicznej», *Filozofia Nauki*, Vol. XXIV, no. 93, (2016): 123-139.

15. «Celebryta» (Accessed august 06, 2022), <https://dobryslownik.pl/slowo/celebryta/217396/>

16. Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, (New York 1992): 72-90.

what attributes he has. It is the hero of the headlines of the news, and such a nickname is given to him or her. The media and digital tools ennoble the position of a hero and an authority, which causes that these concepts themselves come closer to each other—an act of semantic approximation is currently taking place, which results in the common perception that we are dealing with synonyms.

An almost religious hero, therefore more than a celebrity at present, is an “idol.” In the Dictionary of Polish Language, we can read that an idol is: “a person who is the object of someone’s special admiration, bordering on a cult.”¹⁷ As Paweł Piórkowski notes: “The main problem of contemporary idols is their arrogance, conviction of their own superiority and the huge social influence they have on their audience. What is important, this audience is rather young people, whose key life choices have not been made, and the idol, which for them is a substitute for authority, becomes an indicator of a good life and personal success.”¹⁸

Unfortunately, the most unfavorable factor in the contemporary reception of reality by young people is the fact that the mass media make celebrities and idols into authorities and specific heroes. As early as 1922, Walter Lippmann pointed out that images are deliberately created in our heads, and now we see especially the mass media doing this.¹⁹ Maciej Hłowiecki directly writes about the creation of “telereality” and the “creation of buffoons.”²⁰

Another term that deserves attention is “talking heads” (in Polish: *gadające głowy*). This is a joking phrase referring to the 1980 documentary film directed by Krzysztof Kieślowski. This black and white documentary was created to present a “portrait of Poles.” A group of people of different ages were asked the same questions. The format of the film was that everyone was filmed close-up, so only the bust, the proverbial “talking head,” was visible. The impact of the film on the mass culture of that time was enormous. To this day, it is assumed that the term refers to experts who present their views in a substantive way, but only their heads are visible in the video reception, which is not conducive to the reception itself, which is immediately associated with boredom. In Polish dictionaries, a joking translation was adopted that “talking heads” is: “a television program consisting solely of presenting a discussion held by people gathered in a studio.”²¹

The last type of hero that should be paid attention to in this work, and who grew out of the digital revolution and the new level of analysis carried out by young Poles, is the “influencer.” This newfangled notion is gaining popularity. “Influencer is a public figure who, through his activity in Social Media,

17. «Idol» (Accessed august 6, 2022), <https://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/idol.html>.

18. Piórkowski, «Autorytety», 26-27.

19. Walter Lippmann, «Public Opinion» (New York, 1998).

20. Maciej Hłowiecki, Maciej, «Strażnicy, żeglarze i błazny. Autorytety i media» en *Strażnicy, żeglarze i błazny. Autorytety i media* (Lublin: John Paul II Institute 1997): 64-73.

21. WSJP, «Gadające głowy» (Accessed august 6, 2022). <https://wsjp.pl/haslo/podglad/22731/gadajace-glowy>

has gained a wide range of followers, has lasting and strong relationships with them, and has a large impact on their decisions and opinions on a given topic. Influencers can be, among others: bloggers, youtubers, celebrities or people who are more popular on the Internet.”²² The essence of this type of hero is that he exists mainly in a global network. Therefore, an influencer must have (a blog, a vlog, a profile, an account, etc.) to be, to exist. Deeds and characteristics are therefore largely virtual, just like the contemporary reality of young people. Heroism and valor consequently have a digital dimension as well.²³

II. The Mythization of the Hero/Demigod/Titan/Central Figure...

According to most specialists, the process of mythizing the characters referred to as “hero” is quite common:

A complete demythization of reality cannot even be imagined, because “purified experience” is also a myth. The mythical organization of reality is an inalienable part of human nature, and therefore the idea of “purifying experience” from myth seems absurd and impossible to carry out as an undertaking of dehumanization of humanity. Equally absurd—and structurally identical—would seem to be a conscious attempt by the system to self-desystematize.²⁴

Myth is an element of culture commonly dominating in the mass media, and the heroic myth occupies a special place in it. The reasons are simple: it is about meeting the basic psychological needs of the recipient of each culture. Every time an individual looks for the meaning of existence, the purposefulness of each behavior or deed, as well as answers to the simplest questions, which, despite their triviality, rise to the rank of the most important, we are looking for heroes capable of providing answers²⁵—we think of *The Witcher* (in Polish: *Wiedźmin*) as an example.²⁶

A characteristic feature of modern times is that, as never before, the division of heroes is clearly visible when adopting an age criterion. The hero becomes the personalization of the same values for this group. We can analyze such idea, that the continual desacralization of modern man has distorted the content of his spiritual life, but without destroying the patterns of his imagination: in areas out

22. KS, «Kim jest influencer—Definicja» (Accessed august 7, 2022). <https://ks.pl/slownik/influencer-kim-jest>

23. Bartłomiej Kawalec, «Kim jest Influencer? Po zasięgach i charyzmie ich poznacie» (Accessed 4 June 2023, <https://www.whitepress.pl/baza-wiedzy/275/kim-jest-influencer-po-zasięgach-i-charyzmie-ich-poznacie>).

24. Dariusz Nowacki and Krzysztof Uniłowski (eds.), «Wszecchobecność mitu» in *Dwadzieścia lat literatury polskiej: 1989-2009* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego 2010): 44-49.

25. Adrian Jaworek, *Wiedźmin jako modyfikacja mitu bohatera* (Accessed 13 January 2023) <http://www.laboratoriumkultury.us.edu.pl/?p=30473>.

26. The main character of a series of books by the Polish fantasy writer Andrzej Sapkowski and related media activities, such as a TV series or a computer video game.

of control, a degraded mythology persists and lives.²⁷ Simply put: we all need heroes, suited to our times, needs and imaginations. The mass media, in the era of the digital revolution, intensify the process of desacralization of man and the mythologizing of specially selected heroes, which can be seen especially in the culturally dominant, broadly understood cinematography: with films and series watched by the masses.

Therefore, the role of the mass media is crucial. The mass media are now directly constructing the reality that until recently was created by the communities themselves.²⁸ Ludwik Somma claimed that: “the mythical and symbolic experience of the world is a constant and rudimentary component of human life, and the sacrum-profane opposition is in its essence tantamount to the real-unreal (meaning-meaningless) opposition.”²⁹

It goes without saying that in Poland the process of mythologizing heroes is extremely important. This is directly related to the factors that shaped our sense of identity the most: religion, history, the politics. The religious hero is undoubtedly the Polish Pope, John Paul II. However, in the context of historical and political events, the figure of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the creator of the independent Polish state in 1918, is known by all Poles. Still, there is growing criticism of the actions of these heroes, especially in the mass media, and an attempt to “knock them off their pedestal” (in Polish: “*strącenia ich z piedestału*”).³⁰ On the other hand, in a rather aggressive way, they are replaced by a new generation of heroes, quite often created by the mass media.

The “popular culture hero” is a relatively new phenomenon. It results from the globalized nature of the massification of cultural phenomena, which today are strongly influenced by the United States, or the general dissemination of the English language. Interestingly, this new type of hero, for whom the concept of an idol was reserved until recently, was initially associated with the premature death and tragic life of certain people. Actors Rudolf Valentino, who died at the age of 31 in 1926,³¹ or James Dean,³² who died at 24 in a car accident in 1955, quickly gained the status of immortal, cult legends. After the tragic deaths, candles were lit in American homes, and a few female admirers committed suicide. Thanks to the mass media, the process of mythologizing not only include actors (e.g. Marilyn Monroe³³), but it also started to involve singers or celebrities (e.g.: Elvis Presley³⁴

27. Andrzej Miś, «Czy narodziny filozofii były śmiercią mądrości?» *Teksty Długie*, vol. 1, (1993): 123-124.

28. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Spoleczne tworzenie rzeczywistości* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1983).

29. Ludwik Somma, «Antropologia kultury wsi polskiej XIX w.» (Gdańsk, 2000): 69.

30. WSJP, «Wielki Słownik Języka Polskiego», (Accessed august 17, 2022). <https://wsjp.pl/haslo/podglad/63595/ktos-stracil-z-piedestalu-kogoscos>

31. Robert Oberfirst, *Rudolph Valentino: The Man behind the Myth* (New York: Citadel, 1962).

32. David Dalton, *James Dean. The Mutant King. A Biography* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2001).

33. Lisa Kennedy, «Marilyn Monroe, A Life Cut Short, An Eternal Legacy», *The Denver Post*, (Accessed august 2, 2012) <https://www.denverpost.com/2012/08/02/marilyn-monroe-a-life-cut-short-an-eternal-legacy/>

34. «There's only one King—that's Jesus. The Christian Faith of Elvis Presley» (Accessed august 16, 2017) <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/theres-only-one-king-thats-jesus-the-christian-faith-of-elvis-presley/111996.htm>.

or Michael Jackson³⁵). They have become the heroes of the young generation, in a new previously unknown style.

Currently, a lively discussion is taking place in Poland on the essence of heroism in the Third Republic of Poland (after 1989). Prof. Hanna Świda-Ziemia, a sociologist, stated, among other things, that: “It’s bad weather for the hero today. We are postmodernistically fragmented and there are no clear patterns of conduct. A few models are created by the media or individual circles, but there are no big names here, no one really admires anyone.”³⁶ An interesting thesis was put forward by Maria Szyszkowska, who is a philosopher:

I think the hero of our times is the average man. (...). He is definitely someone self-confident, determined, someone who eats lunch and not dinner, has a credit card and a mobile phone, and is very happy to use English words as well as Polish (...), including accents. This is someone who dreams of more money and who would like to show up on TV from time to time. He would also be a politician. He goes to church and declares his love for the pope, but that doesn’t stop him from doing all kinds of petty scams and finding loopholes in the law. This man also declares some higher values, for example, he talks about patriotism, because that’s how it should be said.³⁷

However, an interesting analysis of the hero of contemporary Poles was presented by the publicist Anna Tatarkiewicz:

The hero of our time is the sucker, the antithesis of the smart guy. In a way, it is a role model. The transformations that have affected Poles have caused a fight between people who are considered suckers, who have views and fight for them because they want to change the world, and smart people who do not have views. The literary prototype of the sucker, my favorite since my youth, is Don Quixote - a man who does not allow himself to be manipulated, follows his noble path. Unfortunately, most succumb to different pressures. I think that Copernicus used to be a “big sucker.” From the point of view of his contemporaries, he was a sucker, he might even have been burned at the stake. For a smart guy, a non-conformist is just a sucker, someone who often finds himself on the sidelines of

35. Aneta Ostaszewska, *Michael Jackson as a Mythical Hero. An Anthropological Perspective* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2021).

36. Bronisław Tumiłowicz, «Kim jest bohater naszych czasów?» (Accessed August 7, 2022), <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/bohater-naszycz-czasow/>

37. *Ibid.*

his own free will. The sucker-nonconformist, however, does not let himself be manipulated, nor does he go to Big Brother.³⁸

The classic, ancient, and contemporary hero are two sides of one coin. They have a lot in common, but they are also different. For young Poles, so much affected by changes, crises and pandemics, this problem is an important element of identity and at the same time a source of moral disorder. At the same time, Poland itself lacks a thorough analysis of this phenomenon. For this reason, it

is important to conduct an appropriate study that would capture the essence of the changes of the youngest generation of Poles in the era of the digital revolution.

In the context of the omnipresent process of visualization³⁹ it seems reasonable to look at Polish cinematography and what it offers. Visualization, or imaging, is a process where visual impressions dominate social communication. In recent decades, the role of the senses in receiving the message broadcast by the visualizer and decoded by the recipient has radically increased.⁴⁰ According to recent research, film, or visual work in general, plays an important role in the lives of young people nowadays. A young man spends his free time in front of the TV screen.⁴¹ We considered this aspect important and devoted the next subsection to it.

III. Movies

Undoubtedly, cinematography is an important factor shaping a particular reality. In this respect, Poland is no different from other European countries. The growing importance of the film's influence is especially noticeable after the end of World War II. The communist authorities, introduced into the post-war reality by the USSR, were aware of the power of this new medium of communication.⁴² In independent Poland, the Third Polish Republic existing since 1989, the globalization of the media message and the importance of film have increased even more with the increase of cultural factors from Western Europe and the United States.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Krystian Chołaszczynski, Karolina Dziewulska-Siwiek, and Mateusz Kaleta (eds.), *Wizualizacja w mediach, nauce i technice* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo AKSiM 2022).

40. See Joanna Marszałek-Kawa, and Danuta Plecka (eds.), «Leksykon wiedzy politologicznej» (Toruń, 2018): 271.

41. See Bogusław Skowronek, «Ciało, emocje, rozum – raz jeszcze o mechanizmach odbioru filmu» *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska*, vol. II, (2017): 163-174.

42. People's Poland—the name of the country used for propaganda purposes in 1944-1989 by the communist regime. Poland was then a non-sovereign country dominated by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The country was part of the Eastern Bloc, a group of countries in Central and Eastern Europe under the domination of the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

The beginnings of Polish cinema, in which the essence of heroism is sought, dates back to the Polish Film School in the years 1955-1965. After this decade, when topics related to the results of World War II were not so positively received, the era of historical and costume cinema (historical films with lots of realism of past eras) came, when heroes were sought in the former glory of the country (before 1795). With the collapse of the communist system, new trends and a younger generation of creators came to the fore. The fact is, however, that after World War II film began to displace literature and this trend was no longer unstoppable (an unstoppable trend).⁴³

Interestingly, until the fall of communism, filmmakers were simply looking for heroes for their works, and in independent Poland the trend of the “antihero movie” was dominant, which was associated with social sentiments, especially negative ones. Another aspect of the Polish film hero is the dominance of men, especially in terms of biographical cinema. It is only in recent years that female role models have been more willingly used, and by female artists, mainly to contradict the dominant values in the culture resulting from the dominance of the Catholic religion.

If we look at the first phase of the development of heroic cinema, i.e. in the years 1955-1965, the theme of the recently ended World War II dominates. The main character often establishes an almost emotional contact with the recipient, analyzing, like a hero, important topics about the essence, existence and being of an individual and a nation, in the context of the still unexperienced war trauma of 1939-1945.⁴⁴

Andrzej Wajda’s film “Ashes and Diamonds” (in Polish: “*Popiół i Diament*”), with its main character, Maciek Chelmicki, is considered the most important representative of this period. A very interesting treatment was used: a young boy whose youth was interrupted by World War II looks like a typical Pole from the 1950s, dressed in the most fashionable clothes of those years.⁴⁵ This ahistoricism spoke directly to the Poles of 1958, who were embittered by the wrong direction of changes in their country.⁴⁶ The protagonist’s glasses became almost symbolic, as they expressed the attitude towards the surrounding reality. Zbigniew Cybulski, who played Maciek Chelmicki, created an exemplary character that was used in many other Polish film productions. According to some, a similar ahistoricism was used in the character of Travis Bickle in Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* or in *Mean Streets* by the same director.⁴⁷

43. Agnieszka Tambor, «Przemiany bohatera w powojennym kinie polskim—od Supermana do Wonder Woman» *Postscriptum Polonistyczne*, vol. 2, no. 20 (2017): 193-194.

44. Rafał Marszałek, «Kino powojenne. 1945–1989» (Varsovia: Akademia Polskiego Filmu, 2008).

45. A.KRG, «Popiół i Diament - 1958» (Accessed february 22, 2022, video, 1:39:08).

46. «Polski październik 1956”/”Polish October 1956,» also called the Polish October Revolution or Gomułka’s thaw. In connection with the takeover of power in the Polish communist party by Władysław Gomułka, it was a period of liberalization of the system and limiting communist terror in Poland. However, since 1957, there has been a slow retreat from the reforms.

47. See Tambor, “Przemiany”, 196.

In the 1960s, the recipients of Polish film productions were the young generation who did not remember the horrors of World War II. Therefore, the subject of settling accounts with the past was no longer of interest to them. Their need for heroes was completely different, new. In the communist system, economic problems deepened, and criticism of the authorities is impossible due to the ubiquitous censorship. The cinema did not keep up with these social phenomena. Television, on the other hand, flourished. Already in 1963, the millionth television subscriber with a television set was officially registered. After another six years, there were over 3 million families with a TV.⁴⁸ For Poles, this meant revolutionary changes. Therefore, in this period, a new type of hero was created by television production.

Unexpectedly, Hans Kloss⁴⁹ became the hero of the 1960s in Poland, as the main character of the TV series: *More Than Life at Stake* (in Polish: *Stawka większa niż życie*).⁵⁰ Hans Kloss combined two types of hero. On the one hand, it is an extension of the romantic myth of the knight in shining armor. On the other hand, the hero played by Stanisław Mikulski is “the antithesis of the martyrdom approach to history.”⁵¹ Therefore, we do not have a suicidal hero giving his life on the altar of his homeland, and we have dealt with such people before. In his film biography, we have no tragedy, no death at the end of the series, no failure, and no reflection on the reasons for the defeat, etc. Suddenly, in a Polish movies and TV series, we have someone who, in the most difficult, hopeless moment, finds a way to turn defeat into victory. The spectator suddenly got a positive picture. The series was broadcast in the years 1965-1967 and was modeled on the great success of the adventures of James Bond (the first film was made in 1962). Both Hans Kloss and James Bond surround themselves with beautiful women and take part in events that should end with the hero’s death, but due to their personal skills of dealing with difficult situations in a natural way, they result in the adoption of a kind of immortality of these heroes of the 1960s. Of course, in that period we have more heroes who grew up thanks to the refreshment of the traditions of the First Republic, but none of them achieved such success as Hans Kloss.⁵²

With the economic and political transformations of 1989-1990, Poles needed a new type of hero. It was a time of admiration for the mass culture of Western Europe, especially that coming from the United States. Cinema and television were dominated mainly by English-language screenings. Therefore, the Polish market lacked a response to these huge influences of foreign culture.

48. Dzieje, «60 lat Telewizji Polskiej» (Accessed october 24, 2012) <https://dzieje.pl/rozmaitosci/60-lat-telewizji-polskiej>.

49. Lieutenant Hans Kloss, a fictional character and hero of the TV series “Stake Larger Than Life.” According to the script of the series, the real Hans Kloss, an Abwehr officer, was impersonated by a very similar Polish spy, Stanisław Koliccki, who acted on behalf of the USSR intelligence.

50. Pr3z3mo 91, «Stawka Większa Niż Życie”, odc.1 Wiem, kim jesteś HD», (Accessed ecember 6, 2021, video, 54:49) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx7v_u7a-eE

51. Tambor, “Przemiany”, 197.

52. Robert Kostro, Kazimierz Wóycicki, and Michał Wysocki, (eds.), «Historia polski od-nowa. Nowe narracje historii i muzealne reprezentacje przeszłości» (Warsovia: Muzeum Historii Polski, 2014); Dzieje, «Silikonowa głowa Hansa Klossa atrakcją wystawy w Katowicach», (Accessed August 17, 2022), <https://dzieje.pl/content/silikonowa-g%C5%82owa-hansa-klossa-atrakcj%C4%85-wystawy-w-katowicach>; Polskie Radio, «Agent J-23 Hans Kloss - bohater wiecznie żywy» (Accessed October 10, 2020) <https://www.polskieradio.pl/10/5372/Artykul/2599275,Agent-J23-Hans-Kloss-bohater-wiecznie-zywy>.

Suddenly, in 1992, a film by Władysław Pasikowski was released in cinemas: *Psy* [*Dogs*].⁵³ It is considered the most important Polish film work after the fall of the Iron Curtain. *Dogs* are policemen who face the consequences of political changes and find their place in the new reality. The film created a new type of hero that was directly copied from American cinematography. An almost symbolic character was created by Bogusław Linda, a Polish actor who played the role of policeman Franz Maurer, a “tough macho,” fighting almost all over the world. Interestingly, the film divided the society into two groups. The viewers were delighted, but the critics spared no words to

highlight any shortcomings. F. Maurer was almost the embodiment of a new, reborn, independent Poland. It is interesting that the main character of this film is not a transparent character. It has some shortcomings,⁵⁴ just like another main character, straight from *Potop* [*The Deluge*] by Henryk Sienkiewicz, i.e., Andrzej Kmicic (*Potop*, dir. Jerzy Hoffman, 1974; Andrzej Kmicic was played by Daniel Olbrychski).⁵⁵ In both cases, you can see the crisis of values that Poland also experienced, which ends with the change of the hero.

Several decades after the transformation of 1989, not much has changed in cinema and television. The main characters are still men. When a woman is chosen as the main character, she is given almost macho characteristics.⁵⁶

As if in opposition to these processes and the dominance of “macho men” and “macho women,” a generation emerged that does not remember the difficult years of the political transformation of 1989 at all. Young people, born and raised at the turn of the century, have completely different needs and demands towards cinema and television. Education was completely different, and so was the revolution. Technological changes resulted in the fact that the young generation needed a new pattern, and therefore in the literature they are referred to as the “nothing generation.”⁵⁷

The hero is in fact an anti-hero. Once upon a time, he would be a direct enemy of the main character. The young viewers almost began to identify with the antihero, his flaws, and bad attributes. The key moment was the publication in 2002 of Dorota Masłowska’s book entitled: “Wojna polsko-ruska pod

53. *Psy* (1992), (Accessed June 15, 2020), video, 1:44:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjnbDr-N9ZE>

54. Grażyna Stachówna, «Bohaterowie polskiego kina», *Postscriptum Polonistyczne*, vol. 1, no. 5 (2010): 179-194.

55. Filmoteka Narodowa – Instytut Audiowizualny, «Potop Redivivus», reż. J. Hoffman [ZWIASTUN GŁÓWNY] OFFICIAL TRAILER, (Accessed September 12, 2014, video, 2:33, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBfhvt1zrfU>).

56. Łukasz Maciejewski («Kobiety w polskim kinie», 2011) wrote: “There are no parities. There are some glorious exceptions, but still, in the vast majority, Polish films present exclusively the male point of view. They are sexist and often chauvinistic. Women on the screen become an involuntary conglomeration of stereotypes and male fantasies. They function in the cinema most often as mothers, wives, or mistresses, or they appear as a comfortable mattress for a tired warrior”.

57. «Generation nothing is a generation of twenty-year-olds, barely remembering the ‘difficult times’ before 1989, when Central Europe was overthrowing communism. This generation has great opportunities to compare those times with today, the influx of foreign goods and patterns in the field of popular culture; as well as strong social divisions and corruption in politics, which is obvious at every turn—that is, with all the factors shaping their world at the beginning of the new millennium». Waclaw Osadnik, «Film po adaptacji powieści: narracja Wojny polsko-ruskiej pod flagą biało-czerwoną», *Postscriptum Polonistyczne*, vol. 1, no. 5 (2010): 115-116.

flagą biało-czerwoną” [“The Polish-Ruthenian war under the white and red flag”]. Both in the book and the film adaptation (*Wojna polsko-ruska*,⁵⁸ dir. Xawery Żuławski, 2009), there were two elements that responded to the needs of young people: the language and the character of the main figure, who used a pseudonym *Silny* [*Strong*].⁵⁹ He is full of extremes and vices. As a result, he became the hero of the generation of young Poles in 2009. On the one hand, the young people of that time even mutilated the Polish language and in this youth slang they did not know how to express their own feelings. On the other hand, their identity became so doubtful that they did not know who they were, with whom or with what to identify themselves, what values to celebrate. For them, Polishness was something distant, alien, and Europeaness was simply unattainable, because it did not exist as a one-dimensional way of self-identification.⁶⁰

It might seem that the figure of a modern hero, which *Silny* has become for young Poles, is a momentary delight. However, this duality of nature has turned into cinematography for good. An example is the character Dominik Santorski from the film *Sala samobójców*⁶¹ [*Suicide Room*], directed by Jan Komasa in 2011. Importantly, this film tells a story that takes place in two realities: real and virtual, which was extremely interesting for the young viewer.⁶²

Silny and Dominik are undoubtedly the heroes of the young generation of Poles. The success of *Suicide Room* is the result of the then popularity of the emo subculture. Dominik Santorski and *Silny*, on the other hand, share an internal dissonance and emotional instability regarding the values they profess. The young people were delighted with the characters who are not clear, certain, pure in the ethical sphere. It is a direct message about a serious crisis of values that they are going through.

The film heroes are therefore an emanation of the national character here and now. The recipients of this play therefore could identify with the characters who are most similar to them. Unfortunately, the analysis of Polish cinematography does not fill this matter with optimism. For this reason, young recipients are eager to reach for foreign works, especially American.

58. Visilab, «Klip promocyjny: Wojna Polsko-Ruska» (Accessed January 27, 2009, video, 3:23), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdHH1OtJ0zc>.

59. «‘Strong’ is both strong and weak, articulate and mute, dull and superconscious, sentimental and ironic, loyal and unpredictable. ‘Strong’ is a conformist and a rebel, a persecutor, and a victim. ‘Strong’ has all views and none. He knows what he wants and where he stands, and at the same time he is thrashing around and desperate». Tambor, «Przemiany», 202-203.

60. Agnieszka Wójtowicz, «Podmiot autorski w Wojnie polsko-ruskiej pod flagą biało-czerwoną Doroty Masłowskiej», *Postscriptum Polonistyczne*, vol. 1, no. 13 (2014): 111-134; Paweł Ryś, «Podmiot „rozbity” w polskiej prozie współczesnej. Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną Doroty Masłowskiej i Barbara Radziwiłłówna z Jaworzna-Szczakowej Michała Witkowskiego» (Cracovia, Jagiellonian University, 2013), 211-226; Joanna Orzechowska, «Innowacje w akomodacji syntaktycznej w Wojnie polsko-ruskiej pod flagą biało-czerwoną Doroty Masłowskiej i ich tłumaczenie na język rosyjski», *Prace Językoznawcze*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2017): 107-119.

61. WFDiF – Studio Filmowe Kadr, «Sala samobójców zwiastun» (Accessed December 5, 2016, video, 1:46). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cD7YukDM6Co>.

62. Bożena Kanclerz, «Film *Sala samobójców* jako obraz współczesnej młodzieży uwikłanej w wirtualnej rzeczywistości», *Kultura – Społeczeństwo – Edukacja*, vol. 1, no. 9 (2016): 69-83.

IV. Research exploration of the problem

After explaining the basic concepts and indicating only a few examples of heroes from the Polish perspective, starting from historical figures, through film heroes who have influenced generations, it should be noted that the concepts discussed in the first part of the text begin to be less and less clear (they blur). There are many synonyms in Polish that correspond to the same term. The same is also true in this case. Therefore, the authors decided to conduct a short survey (pilot study), which was aimed at indicating whether young people (aged 18-24) distinguish between the terms and the indicated concepts: demigod, hero, influencer, celebrity, “talking head” and idol. The research group consisted mainly of students of the University of Social and Media Culture in Toruń.

The method chosen by the authors was a survey, and the research tool was a specially prepared online questionnaire. The subjective scope of the research covered a group of 30 students at the University of Social and Media Culture in Toruń. The selection of this sample was purposeful. We are aware that the ideal situation, from the perspective of the conducted research, would be the possibility of random selection. The probabilistic sample allows for a broad statistical inference and a broader perspective of examining and generalizing the results of the conducted research.⁶³ However, in this case, the research was to be of an exploratory nature only. The exploratory research carried out in the field of the discussed problem also indicated areas that should be considered when conducting analyzes on a larger scale.

The online survey questionnaire prepared for the study consisted of 7 parts and included a total of 20 questions. In the first part, the participants were asked to provide information about themselves. This part was intended not only to verify whether the participant belongs to the target group of the study, but also considered several additional factors such as: professional and family situation, way of spending free time and regionalization (place and region of origin). Due to the issue raised in the second and third part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked questions about their activity in the virtual world, wherein, as indicated in the previous considerations, influencers and celebrities are also popular. The research scope in this part covered the activity of the participants of the study on the Internet and in social media. The next part of the questionnaire constitutes a fundamental study to the problem discussed in the text by the authors. In the fourth part of the survey, the respondents' task was to indicate the specific characteristics of a demigod, hero, influencer, celebrity, “talking head” and idol. In the next two parts of the survey, the respondents had to assess (according to the Likert's scale) to what extent they agree or disagree with the statements about the central figure/ hero and the influencer proposed by the authors of the study. The study was crowned with a request

63. Sylwia Bedyńska, Aneta Brzezicka and Marzena Cypriańska, «Od teorii do analizy statystycznej. Jak badać zjawiska psychologiczne?» in *Statystyczny drogowskaz. Praktyczne wprowadzenie do wnioskowania statystycznego*, ed. by S. Bedyńska and M. Cypriańska (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo akademickie SEDNO 2013), 40.

to classify several characters (real or fictional) selected by the us into the appropriate group, by indicating whether this character can be described as a demigod, influencer, hero, celebrity, “talking head” or idol. Participants in the study could also answer that the proposed character was unfamiliar to them or indicate other characters that the creators of the study did not include in the proposed list.

V. Characteristics of the respondents

The survey involved 19 women and 11 men (63% and 37% of respondents, respectively). Each of the surveyed persons was in the age range of 18-24, which was the basic condition for being classified for further research (belonging to the target group). 23 people also declared that they study only, and 7 people combine studies with professional work. This is important in the context of questions about free time and activity during this time. In response to the question “How much free time do you have on average on a weekday and on a day off?”, four respondents indicated that on a weekday they have no free time/time for themselves at all; 17 people said that up to 2 hours; and 12 people answered that 3 to 5 hours. The situation is different in the case of a day off. Here, as many as 17 people indicated that it was between 3 and 5 hours; 11 respondents specified that it was more than 5 hours, and only 5 people answered that up to 2 hours. From our point of view, and since many influencers or celebrities build their popularity in the media (including social media), it matters how much free time the respondents have and what activities they invest in. This can also translate into online activity, where they observe the activities of such famous people. In this context, it is necessary to look at the form of spending free time in an active and passive way (Table 1 and Table 2). Respondents were asked to assess how often they spend their free time in the form proposed, where 1 meant very rarely, and 5 very often. Then the results were presented as follows: 1-2 on the scale was classified as a low range, 3-5 as a high time range.

Table 1. Ways of spending free time passively by respondents (n=30)

| Free time of respondents – PASSIVE | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| ACTIVITIES | 1-2 | [%] | 3-5 | [%] |
| reading books, newspapers, magazines | 16 | 53 | 14 | 47 |
| listening to the radio, music | 9 | 30 | 21 | 70 |
| watching TV | 29 | 97 | 1 | 3 |
| internet surfing | 4 | 13 | 26 | 87 |
| use of the theatre, musical and cultural institutions, cinema | 23 | 76 | 7 | 24 |
| self-learning and studying | 4 | 13 | 26 | 87 |
| snooze | 18 | 60 | 12 | 40 |

Source: Own study based on conducted research

In the case of passive spending of free time, the high scores for surfing the Internet are noteworthy, while the score for watching TV is very low. This is because nowadays more people get content from the web, where, through media convergence, they have wider access to all platforms that offer materials that have been available on television, radio, and magazines so far. This media hybrid means that traditional media are increasingly being replaced by modern media (including social media). Currently, this is where content created by celebrities, influencers, or simply opinion leaders are very often sought.

Table 2. Ways of spending free time actively by respondents (n=30)

| Free time of respondents – ACTIVE | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| ACTIVITIES | 1-2 | [%] | 3-5 | [%] |
| regular walking | 13 | 43 | 17 | 57 |
| swimming | 29 | 97 | 1 | 3 |
| running | 27 | 90 | 3 | 10 |
| cycling, rollerblading, skateboarding | 16 | 53 | 14 | 47 |
| breathing exercises | 25 | 83 | 5 | 7 |
| gym exercises | 19 | 63 | 11 | 37 |
| traveling, sightseeing | 17 | 56 | 13 | 44 |
| shopping | 23 | 76 | 7 | 24 |

Source: Own study based on conducted research

Contrary to the passive ways of spending free time, we decided to combine active forms. It should be emphasized here that young people are much more likely to spend their free time passively than actively. It should also be noted that only 17 (56%) of the respondents said that they are satisfied with the way they spend their free time - only 10% (3) *definitely yes*, and 46% (14) - *rather yes (probably yes)*⁶⁴. The respondents also indicated with whom they most like to spend their free time - 30% spend it alone, 23% with a partner, 26% with friends and acquaintances, 16% with family, and only 1 respondent indicated that he likes spending time with his favorite movie characters, series, as well as with people he met virtually.

VI. Online and Social Media activity

The high scores obtained regarding spending free time on passive browsing the Internet indicate that this area should be addressed in more detail, and not only because people spend a lot of their time online. According to research conducted by NorthVPN, Poles spend an average of 23 years, 5 months

64. At this point, it should be emphasized that in this type of research, the subjective feelings of the respondent are considered. Therefore, using the Likert scale, the following terms were proposed: *definitely yes*, *rather yes (probably yes)*, *hard to say*, *rather no (probably no)*, *definitely no*.

and 16 days of their lives on the Internet;⁶⁵ Poles average 6 hours and 39 minutes a day (the world average is 6 hours 58 minutes).⁶⁶ This creates great opportunities to look for authorities (whether or not we define them as hero, influencer or celebrity) in the network. In view of the observations made, we decided to include in the designed questionnaire a part devoted to the respondents' activity on the web and in social media. Respondents who participated in the pilot study indicated that they spend on average 2 to 3 hours online (44%), 30 minutes to 1 hour (22%), and 4-5 hours and more (34%). Such a long time of using the Internet is determined by the fact that the respondents mainly access it on smartphones or mobile phones with Internet access (78%), as well as on a personal computer or PC (22%).

The Digital 2022 report shows that at the beginning of 2022 there were over 27 million social media users in Poland, which is as much as 72% of the population of the entire Polish society.⁶⁷ Research conducted by the authors on a small pilot sample (30 people) shows that only one person does not have an account on at least one social network, and as many as 90% of respondents (27 people) actively use their accounts (*i.e.* at least twice a week). Respondents were asked to mention all social media in which they have accounts and which they actively use. In the case of answers to these two questions (about having an account on a given website and actively using it), users could give more than one answer. According to the conducted analyses, the largest number of users have accounts on the following websites: Facebook (29; 97%), Instagram (26; 87%) and YouTube (26; 87%); least on LinkedIn (1; 3%). The number of users of a given website is correlated with the activity on this website. In this case, again, we can talk about three websites that are used by the respondents on a regular basis (*i.e.* at least twice a week). These websites are Facebook (24; 80%), Instagram (20; 66%) and YouTube (19; 63%). The full list is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Social media - having an account and active use (for n=30)

| Social network- ing site | HAS AN ACCOUNT | | AC- TIVE- LY USES |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-----|----------------------------|
| | HAVE | [%] | [%] |
| Facebook | 29 | 97% | 80% |
| Instagram | 26 | 87% | 66% |
| TikTok | 11 | 37% | 26% |
| Twitter | 11 | 37% | 13% |

65. Marian Szutiak, «Polacy spędzają w sieci ponad 23 lata swojego życia» (Accessed October 26, 2021). <https://www.telepolis.pl/wiadomosci/prawo-finanse-statystyki/polacy-spedzaja-w-sieci-ponad-23-lata-swojego-zycia>

66. Data Reportal, «Raport Digital 2022» (Accessed August 23, 2022). <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report>

67. *Ibid.*

| | | | |
|-----------|----|-----|-----|
| Snapchat | 9 | 30% | 23% |
| LinkedIn | 1 | 3% | 0% |
| Pinterest | 16 | 53% | 13% |
| YouTube | 26 | 87% | 63% |

Source: Own study based on conducted research

Participants of the survey spend the most time on social media on three activities: watching videos, movies, and TV shows (18; 60%), searching for general information (15; 50%) and listening to music (14; 46%). Only 4 people (13%) of the respondents indicated that they follow the activities of well-known figures, and 6 respondents (20%) are looking for new ideas and inspiration.

In the context of online activity, the use of social media and determining who we can call a hero, influencer, celebrity or idol, attention should be paid to what type of social media accounts their users follow. The respondents were offered several categories for assessment. They determined the frequency with ratings from 1 to 5, where 1 means that the respondent very rarely observes the content published by a particular group, and 5 means that it is very often observed. The answers were then grouped into two ranges from 1 to 2 (rated as rarely) and from 3-5 (rated as often). A full summary of the results is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of observing accounts of each group (n=30)

| Social Media Use | 1-2 | [%] | 3-4 | [%] |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| family, friends and others you know | 10 | 33 | 20 | 67 |
| actors, comedians | 23 | 76 | 7 | 24 |
| entertainment, memes and parodies | 16 | 53 | 14 | 47 |
| music bands, singers, singers and other music artists | 15 | 50 | 15 | 50 |
| accounts of popular/favorite TV shows | 23 | 76 | 7 | 24 |
| food, restaurants, healthy eating, etc. | 21 | 70 | 9 | 30 |
| known influencers and other experts | 24 | 80 | 6 | 20 |
| athletes, sports teams, sports organizations | 19 | 63 | 11 | 37 |
| people related to your studies or professional work | 16 | 53 | 14 | 47 |
| fitness and lifestyle | 21 | 70 | 9 | 30 |
| journalists and media people | 23 | 76 | 7 | 24 |

Source: Own study based on conducted research

As the results of the conducted research show, most often the respondents follow the publications of family and friends in social media; they rarely follow known influencers, actors and comedians, channels of their favorite TV shows and journalists. The results of research conducted by the research agency IQS stand in contrast to the research carried out by us. According to a report from 2021, as many as 21 million Poles follow the profile or channel of at least one influencer, and the influencers

themselves have recently enjoyed an increase in trust.⁶⁸ Such results may have been influenced by the authors' specific research environment or confusion between the term influencer and other terms discussed in the text. Therefore, the research should be repeated on a larger group of respondents.

VII. Hero and Influencer – Understanding of concepts among respondents

The main purpose of the research was to identify the basic differences in definitions and to show what features and who is a role model for young Poles, with whom they identify, who can be called a hero, and who can be called an influencer or celebrity. In the survey, the respondents were presented with a set of features that were indicated in detail at the stage of characterizing the conceptual grid. Each of the respondents had to determine whether a given feature fits the following terms: demigod, hero, influencer, celebrity, “talking head,” or idol. A complete list of the characteristics and indications of the respondents is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Assignment of features to the appropriate conceptual categories (number of responses for n=30)

| Character trait | Hero | Influencer | Demigod | Celebrity | Talking head | Idol |
|------------------------------|------|------------|---------|-----------|--------------|------|
| strength | 23 | 1 | 27 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| expressive character | 15 | 13 | 8 | 12 | 9 | 10 |
| talents | 17 | 7 | 10 | 5 | 4 | 16 |
| imitation by the crowds | 10 | 26 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 13 |
| supernatural abilities | 18 | 1 | 21 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| belief in own superiority | 1 | 17 | 8 | 16 | 15 | 4 |
| adhering to moral values | 26 | 2 | 13 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| heroism | 23 | 0 | 24 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| haughtiness/arrogance | 4 | 17 | 2 | 17 | 13 | 3 |
| empathy | 26 | 2 | 10 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| bravery | 27 | 0 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| striving for media attention | 1 | 28 | 1 | 23 | 14 | 6 |
| authority | 27 | 3 | 14 | 5 | 4 | 15 |
| widely known | 8 | 23 | 7 | 20 | 6 | 5 |
| capacity for sacrifice | 26 | 0 | 20 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| egoism | 1 | 19 | 1 | 17 | 11 | 2 |

Source: Own study based on conducted research.

68. «96 procent Polaków śledzi w social mediach przynajmniej jednego influencera», (Accessed August 7, 2022), <https://marketingprzykawie.pl/espresso/96-proc-polakow-sledzi-w-social-media-przynajmniej-jednego-influencera-badanie-iqs/?fbclid=IwAR24lFD4QOjkmPl6DwnCtiGOuC-zy7qUqBjzt4AKjeONBG5vBIkyL-khoS8>

Comparing the indications of specific features made by the respondents, the traits that can be attributed to the hero are not at the same time attributed to the influencer. Moreover, the image of the influencer is completely opposite in key features to the image of the hero. Features such as: strength, being guided by moral values, heroism, empathy, bravery, authority, and the ability to self-sacrifice indicated by the respondents most often in the case of characterizing the hero, are contrasted with features such as: imitation by crowds, seeking media attention, common knowledge, egoism, arrogance, conviction of one's own superiority—most often indicated in the characteristics of the influencer. Therefore, from the analysis conducted, it should be concluded that these are two concepts placed by the respondents on opposite poles. The very similar features that were indicated with the concept of demigod, were also indicated to a large extent for the concept of hero. Based on the analysis of the results of the conducted study, it can be concluded that in terms of features, these are concepts that can be treated as identical (demigod and hero). Like concept of influencer, the respondents indicated a like set of features for celebrities and the so-called “talking heads.” In the case of the last two terms (talking heads and idols), features opposite to those used to characterize a hero or a hero were also significantly dominant.

Most of the respondents had problems with the concept of “idol”. Comparing the individual characteristics assigned to various concepts by the respondents, it can be concluded that this concept is not separate from the one such as hero and demigod. We have unique respondents; many features are common to these concepts.

In view of the analyzes carried out, two conceptual groups can be created: hero (demigod), influencer (here will also include celebrities and “talking heads”). Thanks to such conceptual groups, the respondents in the questionnaire were offered an in-depth assessment for two of them: the hero and the influencer. The subjects were to assess to what extent (on a scale from 1 to 5) they agree with the proposed statements. The average results obtained for both concepts are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Hero (demigod) and influencer characteristics (n=30)

| Term | Mean |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| HERO (DEMIGOD) | |
| He enjoys social recognition | 3,66 |
| He is a role model | 4,26 |
| He is a social authority | 4,03 |
| He is heroic and brave | 4,33 |
| He is an idol in the eyes of others | 3,30 |
| He is a mythical figure | 1,80 |

| | |
|--|------|
| This concept is currently unpopular | 3,03 |
| He is mostly associated with the movie character | 4,00 |
| He is created by the media | 3,23 |
| It is a celebrity | 1,13 |
| Once a hero, today an influencer | 1,73 |
| INFLUENCER | |
| He enjoys social recognition | 3,16 |
| He is a role model | 1,76 |
| He is a social authority | 2,53 |
| He is an example of heroism | 1,40 |
| He is an idol in the eyes of others | 3,86 |
| Influencers are currently extremely popular | 4,70 |
| Influencers are created by the media | 4,53 |
| It is a different celebrity | 3,63 |
| Influencers are today's central figures (heroes) | 1,66 |

Source: Own study based on conducted research.

The conducted in-depth research on the meaning of the notion of hero and influencer clearly confirms the contrasting features emphasized by the respondents for both concepts. The hero is a role model (4.26) and is characterized by heroism and bravery (4.33). It cannot be compared to a celebrity, and it is not synonymous with the term influencer. It is also worth noting that the respondents do not identify the notion of a hero with a mythical figure (1.80). The concept of influencer is characterized in a completely different way. He is not a role model (1.75) or an example of heroism (1.40). It is also confirmed in this case that influencers are not modern heroes (1.66). Respondents emphasize that influencers are extremely popular (4.70) and created by the media, which certainly also ensure this popularity (4.53).

The analyzes and characteristics carried out in this way ultimately lead to the assignment of characters (historical, film, influencers, journalists, etc.) selected by the authors of the study. The choice of characters was intentional, that is, it was meant to include both those that were known by previous generations of Poles, as well as those that are recognized today. If the respondent believed that more than one concept should be indicated for a given character, he could do so. A complete list of the assignment of characters to the appropriate conceptual categories is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Assignment of figure to appropriate conceptual categories

| Figure | Characteristic | Demigod Heros | Influencer Celebrity Talking head | Idol | None of the concepts | I do not know |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---|------|----------------------|---------------|
| Hans Kloss | movie character | 13 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 11 |
| Friz | influencer | 0 | 38 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Dominik Santorowski | movie character | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 29 |
| Michael Jackson | musician | 2 | 15 | 21 | 0 | 0 |
| Zenon Martyniuk | musician | 2 | 25 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| Kuba Wojewódzki | journalist | 0 | 40 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Wersow | influencer | 0 | 34 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Józef Piłsudski | historical figure | 31 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Napoleon Bonaparte | historical figure | 28 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| John Paul II | historical figure | 30 | 1 | 10 | 4 | 0 |
| Maksymilian Kolbe | historical figure | 28 | 1 | 9 | 4 | 1 |
| James Bond | movie character | 17 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 0 |
| Tadeusz Kościuszko | historical figure | 32 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 0 |
| Anna Lewandowska | Celebrity / Influencer | 3 | 33 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Maciek Chełmicki | movie character | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 25 |
| Monika Olejnik | journalist | 0 | 16 | 4 | 0 | 14 |
| Janek Bytnar | historical figure | 14 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 15 |
| Franz Mauer | movie character | 4 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 23 |
| Tomasz Lis | journalist | 0 | 27 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Andrzej Kmicic | movie character | 18 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 9 |
| Batman | movie character | 26 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 1 |
| Julia Kostera | influencer | 0 | 27 | 2 | 2 | 8 |
| Julia Wieniawa | actor/influencer | 0 | 36 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Martyna Wojciechowska | journalist / influencer | 4 | 25 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Lech Kaczyński | historical figure | 15 | 4 | 4 | 12 | 0 |

Source: own compilation based on surveys conducted.

The conducted analyzes indicate that the term heros is most often used in the context of a historical figure (7 times) or a film character (4 times). To the group of influencers, celebrities or the “talking

heads,” the respondents most often included musicians, people known for publishing online, actors, or journalists (10 times). The research has also revealed that the contemporary generation of young Poles is not very familiar with film characters who were referred to as heroes for earlier generations, characters like Hans Kloss, Maciek Chełmicki, Franz Mauer. The concept of an idol was clearly indicated only in the case of one character – Michael Jackson (musician). This may be since he was referred to in this way by the media.

Respondents in the study also had the opportunity to indicate characters that were not included in the list. Among the characters mentioned by the respondents were: Matt Heafy (American musician of Japanese origin) – with the respondent’s note: hero; Alexandra Horowitz (canine cognitive researcher) – with the note: idol; Zamerdani.pl (with the note: influencer; [lifestyle dog’s blog]); Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, Roman Dmowski, Ghandi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta (with the note: heroes); Robert Lewandowski (Polish footballer), Mateusz Morawiecki (politician, Prime Minister of Poland), Roman Dmowski (politician, former foreign minister, lived in the years 1864-1939), Mariusz Pudzianowski (strong man) — all with the note: idol. One person also indicated that Jesus Christ is their hero (idol).

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations for further research

According to the adopted methodology, we managed to fully confirm the research hypotheses that were put forward at the beginning of this article. On the one hand, we confirmed the thesis about the linguistic vagueness of the concepts defined within the framework of the conceptual grid created for the text. Young Poles, to a large extent, do not even think about the meaning of the words themselves, even though they have the ability to cognitively use the terms “hero” and “influencer,” locating them at two opposite poles. The other terms, on the other hand, are to a greater or lesser extent identified with the two main ones that have been mentioned. Of the terms proposed by the authors, “idol” causes a bit more problems. It turns out that this is a concept that can be used to characterize both a central figure, a hero, a celebrity, an influencer, or a “talking head.” This is part of the distinction between the concepts of identity and image. Identity is about how we want to be perceived, and image is about how we are perceived in society. Therefore, you can become an idol for someone through your actions, attitude, words, etc.

On the other hand, it has been clearly demonstrated in this work that the generational gap is widening. The classic demigods and heroes of the generation of parents and grandparents are almost unknown to their children and grandchildren. In terms of interests and points of reference, these two groups of Poles, for whom the only difference is the moment of birth, practically do not touch each other. Characteristic features, quotations, language phrases, etc., can therefore be an important starting

point for further analysis of two colloquial languages, where in each of them the same words can have completely different meanings.

However, we must not forget about the specificity of the present times. Generational differences in Poland are not only the effect of the digital revolution, as many are trying to explain today, or the over two-year-old *Sars-CoV19* pandemic, symbolized by the “lockdown.” It is also a matter of difficult Polish history.

Currently—2022—representatives of different environments and times live in Poland. On the one hand, the generation of our grandparents, born in the years 1946-1964, which remembers the hardships of rebuilding the country after the hecatomb of World War II and the imposition of a model of the communist system by the USSR. On the other hand, the generation of parents who were born and grew up during the economic crisis, the political and economic collapse of the centrally planned economy model and the hardships and poverty resulting from the difficult period of political transformation after 1989.

The youngest generation of Poles, and especially the research group included in the survey analyzed here, who are currently 18-24 years old, are citizens who do not remember the political transformation and the hardships and poverty of the 1990s, at a time when Poland was already a member of the European Union (since 2004), the standards of a democratic state and personal freedom were placed on the pedestal of values as the highest goods, and crossing borders could take place without major problems.

These differences have a significant impact on how these groups are perceived today. Young Poles emphasize that older citizens—their parents and grandparents—do not understand the current world at all and for this reason they should make more space for growing youth. Older Poles, on the other hand, often mock the consumerism of the young and the increasingly frequent lack of respect for the elderly.

The pandemic only intensified this division. Young people, thanks to technological innovations, coped better with the period of lockdown at home. On the other hand, the generation of parents and grandparents, for whom such forms of spending free time as cinemas and theaters were banned, endured this time much worse and focused their free time on listening to the radio and watching television.

The research done for the purpose of this article is just a substitute for pioneering future analyses. The study of Polish society in the perspective of changes in consciousness resulting from digital revolutions and generational gaps has not found a proper place in Polish scientific literature so far.

For us, this article is just the beginning of a much broader study that is planned for 2023. Noteworthy are the survey studies that have shown not only interesting correlations, but also the need to focus on further determinants.

The survey conducted among students at the University of Social and Media Culture in Toruń showed not only the essence of the problem, but also drew attention to other factors worthy of attention, such as place of residence, environment and origin, upbringing, or type of peer group.

Future research should not only focus on an in-depth analysis of the entire Polish society, but should also be confronted with the results obtained in the future, both from European Union countries and with indications from other countries.

Therefore, it should be clearly stated that this article is only a substitute for future scientific activities of a global nature, planned by the authors of this work.

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