



The Challenges of Semi-Peripheral Information Society: the Case of Poland

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Abstract

The challenges of developing an information society in semi-peripheral countries are immersed in a struggle between Westernizing processes and local cultural and social specificity. The expansion of the internet and communication technologies in Poland, a “newcomer” to the European Union, provides an instructive example. This article presents the case of the Polish online landscape as a culturally separate but interrelated with Western socio-cultural space. Although there is a dynamic users’ migration towards global communication tools and social networking sites, high involvement in local e-commerce platforms and information portals remains constant. More interestingly, global internet communication tools facilitate local social needs, attitudes, and motives, resulting in enormous number and strength of social protests expressed online. This analysis is based on the review of the current Polish internet audience research, social studies literature as well as case studies. The article describes some of most vivid challenges facing Polish information society and its social, cultural, economic, and technological determinants.

Key words: Poland, online landscape, social media, content websites, Westernization, civic participation

1. INTRODUCTION: WHERE IN THE WORLD IS POLAND? COUNTRY CONTEXT

In this article, we show the Westernized landscape of the Polish internet space. We connect the process of its Westernization with fulfilling the local needs through the use of tools which originated in the West. Before we do that, we describe what is country-specific for Poland and what Westernization means.

Poland, at the midpoint of Europe and certainly placed somewhere between the Asian East and the Euro-American West, is sometimes described in global media studies as a semi-peripheral country (McPhail, 2010). Such a picture is present also in telecommunications studies (Barnett, 1999). Currently, at least since the end of the Cold War and the peaceful transition from communism to democracy, Poland experienced the influence of global processes. The influence is most often referred to using such terms as “Europeanization,” “Americanization,” or, more generally, “Westernization.”

These inexact notions usually refer to the peaceful or disruptive influence of either “Europe” or “North America” or “the West” on countries and societies which have or have not belonged to these entities beforehand, but, while influenced by them, have become or have not become a part of such broader communities. Given this imprecision, it does not surprise that even such notion as the “Europeanization of Europe” has long been in the scholarly usage, referring to the distant factors influencing modern European integration (Toczyski, 2013). The process in question, affecting Polish media and especially the Polish new media landscape, is indeed the mixture of all three: Europeanization, Americanization, and Westernization (Scholte, 2005).

Additionally, since the 2000s, with increasing internet diffusion and the constant growth of online communication following from it, the global processes of change that concern many national and pan-continental media landscapes began to affect Poland. The society, where no tradition of free mass media existed for five decades of the twentieth century, due to communist rule in the People’s Republic of Poland (1945-1989), was exposed to the so-called new media briefly after the 1989 transition (Mocek, 2006).

New media forms came from Western societies as they did globally. Polish scientists were part of the proto-internet community of the 1980s and early 1990s. Since the mid-1990s, horizontal portals had been operating in Poland, launching one after another between 1995 and 2001. In 2013, they are all still active and have significant reach among Polish internet users. Poland’s uniqueness has been recently recognized by online media scholars, such as the author of

Convergence Culture (Jenkins, 2006), who, while interviewing the authors of the local report, noticed Polish specificity and potential for replication of insights from Poland into American online research (Jenkins, 2012a, Jenkins, 2012b).

In a globalized reality, one would expect Poland rather to be Europeanized than Westernized, due to the country's long history of belonging to Europe and the 2004 European Union accession. Indeed, the Europeanization of Polish law and culture, including symbolic culture, has been taking place for centuries. One can speak of Europeanization both as of a long-lasting process, taking place over hundreds of years and in a modern European integration context, e.g., since 1989. However, when approaching the issue of internet in its so-called Web 2.0 era, since ca. 2005 (O'Reilly, 2005), one should speak rather of Americanization than Europeanization, as most mass online tools originated in the United States. Nevertheless, both Americanization and Europeanization can be seen as components of Westernization. Moreover, through referring to the influence of Europe or America it is highlighted that what is "Western" is not a monolith. Using that notion, we accept its whole richness and *acquis* that includes cultural, political, economic and social aspects of both central and peripheral countries from Old Continent, New World and beyond (cf. New Zealand).

For the story of the Polish internet presented in the article, using the framework of Westernization seems to be sufficient. Thus, we consider Polish online space as Westernized: filled with tools and content production and distribution patterns of Western origin. There obviously are some local specificities within the social science of the global internet, such as South Korean online citizen journalism or Estonian e-governmental information society. Poland, however, seems to be apart from South Korean or Estonian influence, whereas one can easily describe Polish internet as quasi-American or quasi-British, namely Westernized.

2. WESTERNIZATION OF POLISH ONLINE SPACE AND ITS LIMITS

Both online tools and partially online content in Poland can be considered as Westernized. What we hereby call Westernization refers mostly to the American influence on Polish internet properties. This is the United States where many online tools have their origin and from where they diffuse to semi-peripheral emerging information societies. Given that some, once innovative online tools, e.g. Skype, are co-produced between East and West, the "West to East" diffusion process is regarded by us as Westernization only in the generalized meaning. "Being Westernized" can have many shades.

2.1 Variants of and limits to the Westernization of Polish online space

Insight into the usage patterns of internet websites and services confirm different Polish trajectories of Westernization. Generally, based on the evidence from the only Polish standard of audience research, we can distinguish three variants of Westernization. We refer, in the first place, only to well-known global brands and, secondly, to such websites which entered the list of top twenty Polish online properties.

The first variant is when locally popular Polish websites are moved aside by Western websites. This is illustratively exemplified by social networking website NK.pl, first being accepted by the majority of both young and old Polish online users but then displaced by Facebook.com. We will describe this case in detail.

The second variant of Westernization takes place with locally developed online functionalities being overtaken by their Western counterparts along the latter's global trajectories. This phenomenon is exemplified by Polish youth social networking website Grono.net being finally closed after the worldwide growth of Facebook.com. The same happened to search engine Netsprint.pl being replaced in the early 2000s by Google.com that probably provided better search quality and gathered huge numbers of users.

The third Westernization variant is the entry of a Western online property into Poland where no local equivalent met the needs of users. This is the case of Wikipedia.org or YouTube.com. Both of them were early adopted by Polish internet users and had no significant Polish counterpart.

Thus, Westernization in some of its variants concerns online video content (YouTube), social networking (illustrative NK.pl and Facebook.com cases to be described in detail), education (with the high position of Wikipedia as global and simultaneously local medium of education). But sometimes there can be a mixture of the third and second Westernization variants. Instant messaging tools, such as Skype, which has been based on voice transmission, grow and through their growth diminish the power of local instant messenger GG. However, having GG, Polish internet users seem to be somewhat reluctant to use MSN instant messenger. Not all tools of Western origin achieve equal popularity.

Table 1. Users of instant messengers Skype, GG, and MSN in Poland, yearly interval January 2007-January 2015

Month and year	Monthly reach of Skype among these Polish internet users who went online at least once a month	Monthly reach of MSN among these Polish internet users who went online at least once a month	Monthly reach of GG (Gadu-Gadu) among these Polish internet users who went online at least once a month

January 2007	23.00%	0.77%	41.55%
January 2008	28.33%	0.81%	40.87%
January 2009	25.87%	1.97%	37.26%
January 2010	26.92%	n/a	39.71%
January 2011	24.15%	n/a	38.03%
January 2012	23.02%	n/a	30.83%
January 2013	44.52%	n/a	44.56%
January 2014	47,60%	n/a	28,68%
January 2015	43,66%	n/a	19,03%

Source: Megapanel PBI/Gemius. Substantial growth between 2012 and 2013 is partially due to the change in methodology measuring the number of users for an application.

Westernization does not have to mean Anglicization as it once did historically: content is available in local languages and not in English, tools management systems are even automatically translated into local languages. The above mentioned parts of media visited by the Polish audience are filled with professional, semi-professional, or user-generated content that is Polish-language. Each global tool, or global medium, is thus locally relevant, even if some of the English-language content happens to be poorly and unprofessionally translated into Polish, which can often be the case of amateur-like, user-generated Wikipedia.

None of these variants of Westernization is closed and given forever. They all can be just stages in more complicated process of unequal circulation or econo-cultural exchange between the so-called East and the so-called West and can follow one another as stages in the major process.

The conceptual framework of Westernization is certainly not ideal in describing all areas of social, cultural, and geopolitical reality. It is, however, good enough to meaningfully view internet-related diffusion processes in semi-peripheral country such as Poland. We consider examples of Westernization in all three variants.

Despite such a Westernized landscape, there are also limits to Westernization as indicated by Polish horizontal portals (Onet, WP, Gazeta, Interia, O2). It is not common in the world to have five big horizontal portals dominating the online news market, even if they do not produce their own content, distributing content bought from press agencies and user-generated content. Poland is such a case.

The limits of Westernization can also be noticed in the popularity of online shopping websites. The huge auction website (Allegro), being the gold standard in Poland, is a local but not a global Western actor. Global eBay's attempt to enter the Polish market can be seen as a limited

success if not unsuccessful. Polish users did not transfer their viewing and shopping activity from Allegro.pl to eBay.com. The latter has ten times the users as the local website.

Global shopping websites, such as Amazon.com, still have no official local Polish presence at the time of this article going to print, with the German, UK, or American branches serving those Polish customers who decided to shop at Amazon.com. Some analysts believe the firm is delaying entering Poland due to the weak delivery infrastructure of local post offices. Would it be the case, the limits of online Westernization would thus seem to be set by offline, bricks and mortar, local infrastructure.

Another such exception that exemplifies limits of Westernization is the local Polish maps website Zumi.pl which preceded Google Maps and kept the position after Google Maps was launched.

In such a defined Westernized landscape of the Polish internet there are global internet services and content websites which originated in the West, namely, the search engine Google.com and its ecosystem, several social media tools such as YouTube.com, Facebook.com, and Wikipedia.org that reflect the broader process of Polish online media Westernization. Locally decreasing “social medium,” such as NK.pl, is the flip side of the same phenomenon.

2.2 The case of local Polish resources suppressed by global, Western social networking tools

The generalized statement that in Poland’s online landscape a global-Western toolbox is suppressing local-Polish one can be further complicated by more detailed study of the case of NK.pl. NK.pl originated in 2006 as Polish website similar to the American website Classmates.com founded in 1995. This would suggest a situation similar to the Westernization’s third variant, where there is no local online property of a given kind. However, creating a Polish website similar to the American approaches both the second and the third variant of Westernization. To complicate this picture one has to bear in mind that Classmates.com may have inspired Odnoklassniki.ru in the Russian market first and then Polish creators of NK.pl (at that time named “Nasza Klasa” which means “Our Class”). How the American Classmates.com could be an inspiration in 2006 for both the Russian and Polish teams remains beyond the scope of this article’s interest. Its trajectory certainly originated in the West, even if the Polish website was founded in reaction to Russian. The whole situation shows Poland’s location and constant dilemma of simultaneously belonging to the East and West, resulting in tension between Eastern and Western components of identity. The Eastern component results from historical “melting pot” reflecting common history of Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Lithuanian and Russian close

geopolitical neighbourhood. Historically, it was attempted to be enforced into Poles' identity through almost fifty years of the Polish People's Republic (in general: between 1945-1989), but also through earlier Russian imperialism (since 18th century, and through 19th century attempts of "Russification").

The NK.pl pattern of Westernization from today's perspective would be, however, the pattern of website first accepted by the majority of Polish online users but then displaced by Facebook.com.

In 2015 less than 15 per cent of Polish internet users visits NK.pl at least once a month. Its former name was "Nasza-Klasa.pl." The name had strong local context: in 1983 Jacek Kaczmarski, a Polish bard, published the text of the sentimental ballad "Our Class" in *Zeszyty Literackie* literary journal. The song became so famous that after the Polish transition from communism to democracy in 1989, the bard wrote also one more song entitled "Our Class '92." Those who were born in 1980s listened to the songs in their early youth. It can be assumed that chief founder of Nasza-Klasa.pl, Maciej Popowicz born in 1984, was inspired to brand his website with this local name.

The founders bought the Nasza-Klasa.pl domain on 2 July 2006, and they launched the website on 11 November 2006. The atmosphere in Poland at that time was focused on searching former classmates and colleagues with new Web 2.0 tools facilitating it. On 18 December 2006 a big Polish nation-wide print newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" launched the social campaign "Odnajdźmy się" (Polish for "Let's Reunite"), supported by radio, internet, and outdoor advertising. Posters suggesting reuniting with former acquaintances were imprinted in common consciousness. The need for reunion after decades was named and widely articulated. The same need in December 2006 led 0.61 per cent of Polish internet users to visit Nasza-Klasa.pl, in February 2007 more than 1 per cent, and in September 2007 more than 7 per cent. Dynamic growth took place in January 2008, when the number of visitors in Nasza-Klasa.pl exceeded 50 per cent of Polish online users. At that time, the per cent of internet users in Poland approached 50 per cent: it means that every fourth Pole entered the website, and there were also proxy users such as children or grandchildren consuming online content at their offline parents' requests.

On New Year's Eve in 2008, a famous Polish journalist and writer Edwin Bendyk wrote that "a radical change happened—the internet became a common medium in Poland" (Bendyk, 2008). An illustration of this statement was Google Zeitgeist ranking published in December 2008 (Google Zeigeist, 2008) which contained phrase "nasza klasa" in global (not just local Polish-language) part on the seventh position, directly behind U.S. presidential candidate "Obama." This local growth noticeable globally was regarded as an "astonishing result, when

taking into account that the Polish internet due to demography is just small part of a global network. But there was a reason for which Poles in large number sat behind the monitors. It is the most popular social networking website Nasza-klasa.pl. For popularizing the internet in Poland, it did more than official programs of informatization” (Bendyk, 2008). Nine months later Nasza-Klasa.pl reached almost 70 per cent of Polish online users a month. But this percentage will never be higher than in September 2009. Its fall began when the number of Polish internet users started increasing.

Searching for new auto-definition in 2010 “Nasza-Klasa.pl” changed into “NK.pl” and stopped naming itself a “portal for classy people” trying to transform into a “place of meetings,” unsuccessfully trying to avoid in advance Facebook’s coming supremacy. Soon, for some reason Poles decided to join Facebook and contribute their attention to this website instead of NK.pl.

In January 2013, Facebook was ranked the second among Polish internet websites, just after Google (87.1 per cent reach), with 71.04 per cent Polish internet users at least once a month visiting Facebook (not necessarily as active users as not all of them have Facebook account). 70.26 per cent visit YouTube and more than half visit Wikipedia (51.73 per cent). Thus among top ten websites four are global brands and global tools and the decrease of NK.pl confirms the global-local tension.

Table 2. Users of social networking websites NK and Facebook in Poland, yearly interval January 2007 - January 2015

Month and year	Monthly reach of Facebook.com among these Polish internet users who went online at least once a month	Monthly reach of Nasza-Klasa.pl / NK.pl among these Polish internet users who went online at least once a month
January 2007	n/a	0.74%
January 2008	1.34%	50.16%
January 2009	4.61%	58.47%
January 2010	23.81%	66.17%
January 2011	54.27%	67.62%
January 2012	66.09%	58.73%
January 2013	71.04%	41.79%
January 2014	76,39%	33,89%
January 2015	80,67%	14,85%

Source: Megapanel PBI/Gemius. Substantial growth between 2009 and 2010 is partially due to the change in methodology of websites’ number of users measurement.

2.3. Ad-supported content within five local horizontal portals

The ad-supported model of Polish internet is also significant for most Polish content served within horizontal portals. Their acting model is providing unpaid ad-supported content of relatively low-quality, usually not conforming to what might be considered journalistic standards. Such content circulation is named by some commentators “portalozza” which bears association with kind of illness (“-ozza” in Polish is often used as a suffix for diseases). The phenomenon refers to over-supply of free quasi-journalistic content within five horizontal portals. This phenomenon seems to be unique for Poland. All five portals are constantly among top ten online properties almost since the beginning of the Polish internet, even as their reach diminishes. These portals’ content has not been unique as for many years each of them buys major news, i.a., from the Polish Press Agency. However, at different stages of their growth and for current strategic reasons, these portals also tend to produce some own content, beyond just distributing press agencies’ content or “copy-pasting” free content such as content originated at user-generated blogs. *Gazeta.pl* is often thought to be an online version of the biggest Polish quality daily newspaper – which is in fact paid content website *Wyborcza.pl* of the same owner – but this confusion is sometimes fruitful for the company in terms of advertising business and thus intentionally not cleared.

The global crisis in the media market raises social awareness of the media, which are usually invisible, hidden behind the content. Also the image of the internet and online ecosystem in the writing of Polish journalists is changing. Even those Polish journalists who were not autothematic now become aware of media change. Traditionally, journalists were gatekeepers in the information flow, but now their role differs and they express their opinion in a manner similar to this one: “What caused the financial crisis of journalism? We know: we got the internet, in which ‘everything’ is free. And in which the portal ... founded for three hundred dollars can achieve a click-through rate higher than most common weeklies. Less revenue, in addition worse money drives off better money, like in Copernicus’ [writings]. You need to make paid content and return to monetary paradise” (Staszewski, 2013).

Despite local high-quality content websites’ declared inability to generate revenue which would enable production of high-quality journalistic content, it is thus quite clear that some online properties generate revenue. Within the ad-supported online environment there is one economic consequence of Westernization worth noticing. Taxing e-services operating abroad also keeps profits outside of Poland, not only with Google paying somewhere else in the world at least part of the tax for ad revenue from ads served in Poland. Such unclear economic, legal, and social environment is probably characteristic of semi-peripheral emerging information society.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT: “ANTI-” MOTIVES AND SOCIAL PROTEST

The history of Poland (see Introduction) facilitated strong social needs and attitudes praising a concept of freedom. That concept is specifically understood in terms of personal freedom in opposition to rules, obstacles, and control. That specificity can be considered as a substantial public opposition to the various forms of organizational and governmental control. Discussing this issue one should bear in mind the strong lack of social trust in relations in every level of Polish society (Czapiński & Panek 2011). Taking both factors into consideration, praise of freedom (no rules) and lack of trust (especially toward governmental and commercial organizations, institutions and companies), one may expect reluctance to any threat to freedom (rational or imaginary) as well as ease of spontaneously emerging movements against some practices of organizations and companies.

Current information and communication technologies (ICT) following the Web 2.0 idea, e.g. social networking sites, facilitate the emergence of protests and any other forms of social resistance, which was easily observed in Poland in the recent years. We should consider also that political issues are continuously present in the discussion in the Polish online social media. As an example we may cite the results of the “Pew Global Attitudes Project” showing that 40 per cent of Polish social networking sites users declare they discuss online social community issues. It positions Poland close to the median and other European countries (Kohut, Wike, Horowitz, Simmons, Poushter & Barker, 2012). What is even more interesting in the Polish social media landscape is that we observe enormous number of groups which are gathered around complaints and issues both concerning governmental institutions and commercial companies. But the most spectacular were social protests against Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) signed by the Polish government at the beginning of 2012.

All around the world we observe facilitating effect of social media on rise and escalation of social protests and movements, especially in the context of political issues. As an example we may mention the influence of social media on political activity in China (Guobin, 2009), political change in Malaysia (Smeltzer & Keddy, 2010), political engagement in Japan (Ikeda & Richey, 2005), and political changes in the Middle East countries in 2012. Also in 2012 “Occupy...” movements and protests spread around Western countries. As part of them we observed protests against the ACTA agreement. However, nowhere in Europe did these protests take a scale and efficiency like in Poland. These protests were the only ones after 1989 which forced the government to change its position.

Nearly 24 per cent of the Polish internet users declared active participation in the anti-ACTA protests (Krejtz, Ciemniowski & Baran 2012) in any form (i.e. street demonstrations, joining social networking group against ACTA, redistributing jokes about ACTA, or blocking official governmental web sites). Nearly 40 per cent of protesters were triggered for the action by comments from other internet users. Furthermore, the results of the social study conducted just after the anti-ACTA protests by Krejtz et al (2012) showed that protest participants declared that the main reason was the threat to internet freedom of speech and privacy as well as attempt of government and business corporations on free exchange of information and electronic goods and culture.

The scale of cyberprotests and their impact is spreading. After the anti-ACTA protests, the authorities on almost all levels of government started to “listen to the voice of citizens” expressed online. What is more important, the matter of issues raised by protesters often has nothing to do with cyberspace or new media. The internet and new media in this manner serve only as tools for gathering people with the same opinion to express it aloud. Such a case was observed in the beginning of 2013, when the Polish Ministry of Administration and Digitalization presented a proposal of the new regulation concerning organization of local and school libraries. This proposition disappointed librarians and the parents of school children. Almost immediately a Facebook group “Stop liquidation of school libraries” was started. The group was supported by other actions conducted in new and traditional media (Pezda, 2013). The Facebook group gathered about 20,000 “likes,” which can be perceived not as a huge number, however, the Ministry started negotiations and consultations with protesters. This effected in the withdrawal of previous regulation proposition and started the process of new regulation preparation. According to the Ministry officials, they see a chance in such emerging, bottom-up social actions in the process of public consultation of any new regulation propositions. That, in fact, may change the rules of governance to be more consistent with the idea of *Open Governments* (Lathrop & Ruma, 2010), especially in the manner of civic participation.

Cyberprotests also appear often in the relations between Polish consumers and commercial companies. We should mention at least one such an example. In 2012, 8222 dissatisfied customers of one of the Polish internet banks formed several influential groups using websites and social networking services willing to change the bank practices, which, in their opinion, were unfair. Their actions, postulates, and effects of action were widely discussed in both internet and ATL media. After successful assertion of their consumer rights, they formed online community of “winners” to encourage others to fight with unfair companies. This grassroots campaign found many followers among consumers pursuing for their rights. The same

happened with the new digital TV platform brand “NC+” in 2013. After fusion of two digital television platforms in March 2013 and change of the terms and conditions, many clients felt cheated. In a few days Anty NC+ Facebook fan page emerged and then grew to more than 90,000 participants in a few weeks. This grassroots action engaged fans in interaction much more effectively than many professionally managed Facebook fan pages. Such consumer resistance action has been recognized and taken seriously by NC+, leading to changes in contracts and an official apology. Very often these internet groups are becoming loud in other traditional media and in most cases their goals are achieved.

The last, a bit anecdotal, “anti-system” use of social media is the free mobile application “Yanosik” (the name comes from the Polish equivalent of Robin Hood, noble robber favouring the poor). The application gives drivers an opportunity to avoid being fined for road offenses. Connected to the internet and GPS, this application enables the interchange of information between drivers on the location of police controls and speed cameras. It is used on daily basis by around 20-30,000 drivers in Poland. The service is based on a social networking site, which gathers drivers using this solution (application from Google Play has been downloaded more than 100,000 times). In practice, the Yanosik app is a tool for “tricking the system” serving as an example of using the internet in order to take advantage on the infrastructural gap and cope with “limitations of freedom.”

To sum up, what is characteristic – but not unique – for Polish internet users, or more specifically social sites users, is the ability to raise social actions facilitated mainly by ICT communication and impacting strongly on off-line reality. Although these actions are currently mainly driven by the “anti-system” and are resistant to organized control motives, they form a unique potential for the future in terms of civic activity and social engagement crucial for modern democratic societies. This hope is fuelled by social research results on the Polish sample of social networking sites users that the more active they are online, the more socially active they are in real life, engaging in NGOs, political parties or special groups of interest (Krejtz, 2012). The biggest challenge, however, for social leaders is how to spread and promote the main motivation from “anti-” into “pro-,” but this issue relates more to social change theory than development of information and communication technologies.

4. CONCLUSION: THE CHALLENGES FOR THE SEMI-PERIPHERY

A semi-peripheral country, like Poland, is less developed as an information society. There are still plans of “digitization,” “internetization,” or “informatization” awaiting the country, where

internet penetration does not grow fast after reaching, according to different research institutes, and methodologies applied, 50-65 per cent of adult population. Even a semi-peripheral emerging information society is capable of building its own tools, even if they are diminished by global processes such as Westernization. Thus Poland faces the challenge of self-development as an information society through the mass usage of selected global tools, in constant transfer of content between such tools. Some content remains within the Polish-based content websites, which one could view as similar to what is available within the global trend of disputable quasi-journalistic or non-journalistic quality. What one would call Westernized “social media” is usable and used by Poles in order to fulfil their local, country-specific and sometimes not easily understandable needs. Such is the story based on selected evidence from the Polish standard audience research, supported by descriptive analysis and computer-assisted web interviews among Poles. For presenting the case of Polish online landscape as a culturally separate but interrelated with Western socio-cultural space, such approach is sufficient. This picture can be made more detailed and even may be attempted to be comparable—certainly at least re-painted along other storyline—based on other data, such as European Social Survey or World Internet Poland, available for Poland since 2010.

Both Westernization of tools and anti-system usage patterns raise challenges for Polish emerging mass information society. Polish users transfer their activity from local tools to global Web 2.0 tools, while keeping involvement in local brands. Even Western-originating tools enable Polish internet users to fulfil their locally driven needs, such as the ever-lasting need for anti-system engagement.

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