

Amateurs, Symbolic Elites, Celebrities: Broadcasters on Web 2.0

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to answer the question of who creates content that fills Web 2.0 websites. It was believed that the creation of these services, like the Internet itself, would allow “ordinary people” to play the role of a mass broadcaster. It was believed that they would use this option widely, so these websites would be filled with content by non-professionals. Initially, however, it seemed that these expectations would not be met. It was estimated that only 10% of users post their content on the Internet, including 1% regularly and 9% occasionally, while the rest are passive recipients. Web 2.0 websites, on the other hand, were filled with content to a large extent by professional entities that could also express themselves in the mass media. Now, when Web 2.0 websites, especially social media, have more and more users, the issues outlined above require re-examination. **Research methods:** on the basis of the available data and the results of own research conducted with the use of a survey among 500 Internet users, the following **conclusions** were drawn: (1) Web 2.0 content is created mainly by amateurs, and to a lesser extent by professional broadcasters; (2) the majority of users create content on Web 2.0 sites, especially social networking sites; (3) the most labor-intensive and ambitious forms of creative activity are recorded by a small percentage of Internet users. These conclusions are an **original contribution** to the knowledge of content authorship on these hugely popular websites.

KEYWORDS

amateurs, celebrities, symbolic elites, participatory inequality, Web 2.0 services

In traditional media, such as the press, radio or television, there is a rigid distinction between those who can express themselves in them and those who can only be recipients of their messages (Goban-Klas, 2004, pp. 174–180, 207–233). Speaking / broadcasting there is a privilege reserved for those who deal with it in a professional manner (journalists), play important social roles (e.g., politicians, artists), demonstrate competences or achievements (e.g., experts, scientists, athletes). They are all representatives of the elites that Teun van Dijk (1993) called symbolic elites. The transmission of information via the mass media is handled by specialized broadcasting institutions (editorial offices, news agencies). Recipients, on the other hand, have not had the opportunity not only to permanently join the media discourse, but even to quickly formulate a feedback message.

The Internet, especially in its contemporary socialized form, emanating from Web 2.0 sites, offers an opportunity to change this state of affairs. In the initial phase of its dissemination, there were many voices announcing that it would become a media space shaped mainly from the bottom up by ordinary people who, in the mass media model, had to be content with the role of passive recipients. It was also believed that they would willingly and quite commonly use the opportunities offered by the Internet and play the role of broadcasters of publicly available messages. As the Internet developed, these hopes turned out to be deceptive. In this article, I try to answer the question of who currently provides content for Web 2.0 sites. It is undoubtedly done in a bottom-up manner, but the question arises as to whether only a narrow elite is doing it, or has the practice of producing publicly available content become more common?

1. The Emergence of the Internet and the Phenomenon of Participation Inequality

With the popularization of the Internet in the 1990s,¹ there was a chance to overcome the rigid division into a few active broadcasters and a mass of passive recipients. Every Internet user could play (theoretically without intermediaries) the role of a sender, whose message would be available to all other users. The Internet seemed to bear barriers such as the lack of capital and the necessary infrastructure, and the need for formal competences. Therefore, it could constitute a communication space (sometimes called cyberspace), shaped and filled with content by the users themselves.

The Internet also enabled, to an unknown degree, immediate interaction between all participants of the communication process. As a result, entire networks of contacts could be created between users, in which certain content, works, and products were jointly produced. The Internet seemed to have a special power to support not only the creativity of individuals but also of entire communities. For as stated by Howard Rheingold (2002), in the course of communication and cooperation between individuals, mediated by modern technologies, the power of their minds is combined, which leads to the creation of a “smart mob.” A similar approach was presented by Pierre Lévy (2000), who argued that the Internet enables the phenomenon of collective intelligence to emerge as a result of the mobilization and synergistic interaction of the abilities of individuals.

¹ The beginning of the popularization of the Internet is usually assumed in 1995, when it became possible to use it for commercial purposes. Previously, it was used almost exclusively by people associated with academic centers. The existing communication sites (e.g., Usenet) gave users the opportunity to assume the role of broadcasters, but so few people had access to the Internet that it is difficult to talk about the widespread use of this possibility.

However, both the equality of all Internet broadcasters and the lack of intermediaries turned out to be a sham. At the beginning of the massification of the Internet, communication between Internet users was mediated mainly by portals such as Polish Onet, which looked a bit like interactive newspapers with news or like magazines with entertainment articles. They also gave users the opportunity to express themselves publicly through forums, blogs, comments on articles, but this was only an addition to the content created professionally. Publishing content without their intermediation was too difficult for most Internet users—few of them were able to create a website where they could post their own content. Bottom-up sites, blogs, and forums sprang up, but were not as popular as portals.

This situation began to change at the beginning of the 21st century with the entry of the Internet into the Web 2.0 phase, characterized by a greater participation of users in co-creating websites (cf. O'Reilly, 2007). These include blogging platforms, social networking sites (especially Facebook, established in 2004), and microblogging (Twitter, established in 2006), enabling users to publish photos (Flickr, Instagram) or video materials (YouTube reigns supreme here). Particular among websites created by the users themselves is Wikipedia, established in 2001, which is a “social” compendium of knowledge, and other wikis created in a similar way devoted to various issues (e.g., works of pop culture), because among the most popular websites (co-)created by ordinary people they are the only ones that are not a commercial enterprise. Web 2.0 sites differed from portals in that the content created by Internet users was not an addition to those created professionally, but their essence. One could therefore expect an explosion in the creativity of Internet users.

However, this did not happen. It turned out that only a negligible proportion of users use the new possibilities of the Internet. In 2006, Jakob Nielsen (2006), a computer scientist and web usability specialist, formulated his famous 90-9-1 rule. According to it, 90% of users are passive recipients of content prepared by others (lurkers), 9% are people who occasionally post information on the Internet, for example on forums (intermittent contributors), and 1% are people who regularly produce large amounts of content (heavy contributors). It should be emphasized that it is more about proportion than accurate statistics based on systematic research. Nevertheless, this rule turned out to be very popular both in Internet research and in everyday discourse. However, it is worth paying attention to what data Nielsen referred to when formulating this rule. He took into account the number of blogs set up, user reviews on Amazon and the number of unique Wikipedia users. He also referred to the results of a survey of Usenet newsgroups, which revealed that 25% of all messages were created by 3% of users.

At the time of this analysis, however, there was no Twitter, Flickr or Instagram yet, Facebook² was just taking its first steps, and so was YouTube. Nielsen did not take a look at any of the social networking sites that existed at that time, probably without imagining that in a few years they would gain such crazy popularity. Apart from blogs and Wikipedia, he did not pay attention to any of the Internet communication methods, which Paul Levinson (2009) called “new new media” and which are distinguished by the activity of users and their willingness to cooperate in filling websites with content. Nielsen referred to the statistics from 1998—practically non-existent today—Usenet. It did not take into account any of the websites (except Wikipedia) that currently dominate the Internet (cf. Alexa, 2020, “The Top 500 Sites on the Web”).³ Therefore,

² In 2009, Nielsen published an update on the same page that includes Facebook activity. However, he took into account not the creative activity as such, but the tendency to support / donate to charities online.

³ Currently, the most popular websites are Google and YouTube, followed by the Chinese websites Tmail, Baidu and Qq, followed by Facebook in sixth position (the huge popularity of Chinese websites is due to the

it is hard to resist the impression that the rule presented by Nielsen described the phase of the Internet earlier than Web 2.0 and that in the present conditions it may no longer be relevant.

2. Web 2.0 and New Perspectives of Creating Content Available over the Internet

At the dawn of the Web 2.0 era, more and more researchers and journalists expressed the conviction that Internet users would increasingly create information resources that would fill cyberspace. Some people paid attention to individual actions in this regard. Manuel Castells (2009) called communication via the Internet mass self-communication, because users create their own mass communication systems (i.e., involving many people) using such tools as blogs, podcasts or video broadcasts. Citizen journalism, i.e., creating quasi-professional messages by amateurs (cf. e.g., Gillmor, 2004), as well as fan work, i.e., amateur stories, films, graphics or compendiums of knowledge inspired by pop culture and published on the Internet (cf. Jenkins, 2006), aroused great interest at that time.

Other Internet researchers have paid particular attention to creativity in a collective manner in networks of Internet-mediated collaboration (e.g., Shirky, 2010). Such networks did not have to mean creating something in interaction with other people, more often it was about adding individual particles to a common work by different users. This is how wikis were created and are being created, with Wikipedia at the forefront. Yochai Benkler (2008) argued that users create these types of works as amateurs, operating outside the market, during their free time, as part of active entertainment. All forms of activity of Internet users were to be a manifestation of participation, i.e., the use of media that engages and activates their users.

At a time when Web 2.0 was beginning to arouse more and more interest, there was an almost universal agreement among Internet researchers that Internet users would almost massively use the opportunity to play the roles of Internet broadcasters, as well as engage in grass-roots cooperation networks, share their knowledge and, together with others, create new works that will then fill the information space in the Internet. Some (e.g., Jenkins, 2006) even thought that such products would be able to successfully compete with those produced by specialized institutions and distributed by the mass media. Castells (2009) heralded in 2009 an unprecedented pluralization of discourses available to humans, assuming that the Internet has the potential to allow the unlimited variety and independent production of most of the communication flows that create meanings in people's minds (p. 81). In the works of that time, it was somewhat tacitly assumed that if Internet users could become content creators thanks to this tool, it would be so.

However, it soon turned out that users, as Mirosław Filiciak (2013) put it, "usually do not grow up to the goals set for them by cultural researchers, of course, set for them with the noblest intentions, which should not obscure the fact that it does not fit [translation]" (pp. 241–242). It has turned out that those who use the Internet in an active and creative way constitute only a small percentage of all Internet users. The statistics quoted by Nielsen were a kind of sobering up, although it could be accused of not taking into account all the new possibilities offered by

number of people using the Chinese language, but they are not popular outside the Asian cultural circle). The top 50 of the most popular websites in the world contain a lot of content mostly filled by users—apart from YouTube and Facebook, there are also for example, Wikipedia, Reddit, Instagram, Blogspot, and Yahoo! (10th place) and Amazon (12th place), which also use their users' activity. It should be remembered that there are some turbulences in this ranking, which are, as it can be assumed, the effect of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic that has been present since the end of 2019. Hence the popularity of such websites as, for example, zoom.us.

Web 2.0. However, the 1-9-90 rule was also confirmed by other network observers on the basis of ever newer data (cf. e.g., Arthur, 2006; Musser & O'Reilly, 2007; Wu, 2010; van Mierlo, 2014; Hubert, 2015). Moreover, analyses of some new media, such as YouTube (Tancer, 2007; Bughin, 2010) and Twitter (Heil & Piskorski, 2009; Antelmi, Malandrino, & Scarano, 2019), also indicated that active users are a minority there. It has also been shown that a minority of users create a disproportionate amount of content (e.g., Bracciale, Martella, & Visentin, 2018). According to U.S. research from 2007, active creators accounted for only 13% of all website participants, which were supposed to be filled with user-generated content; 33% are passive spectators whose "active" role was limited to, for example, having an account on a social network or retransmitting material created by others; 52% were (inactive) people who were completely excluded from activity (van Dijck, 2009, p. 44). Therefore, the question asked by José van Dijck seemed justified as to whether, in a situation where over 80% of users are passive recipients, one can speak of participation.

3. The Current Scale of User-Generated Content Available on Web 2.0 Sites

The changes which the Internet underwent in the following years and which shaped its present form, however, make us wonder whether the rule of participation inequality described by Nielsen and confirmed by other researchers is still valid. Are the overwhelming majority of Internet users still reluctant to publish their content on the Internet? Looking at various contemporary trends, one can come to conflicting conclusions.

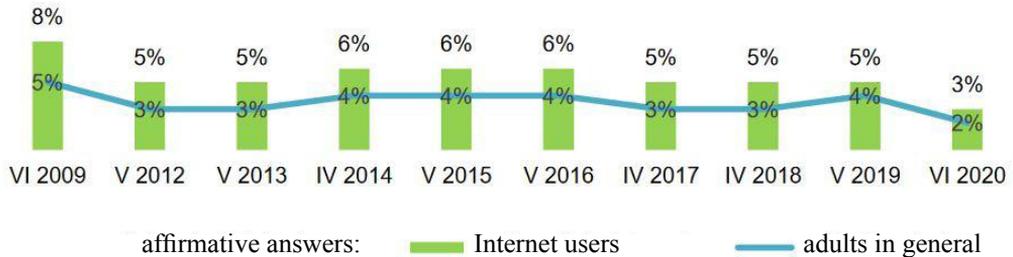
Some data seem to indicate that not only are there few active creators, but their percentage is actually decreasing. This applies, for example, to the blogging activity of Internet users. Blogs, as I have already mentioned, aroused great interest among Internet researchers at the dawn of the Web 2.0 era. They gave users the best chance of playing the role of a (potentially) mass broadcaster. Most often they were personal blogs resembling publicly available diaries, but apart from describing their private life, their authors also dealt with the issues of public life, culture, politics, new technologies, etc. (Więckiewicz, 2012, pp. 126–166). Blogs could also revolutionize the media sphere, giving ordinary people the opportunity to conduct quasi-journalistic activities and speak out in public matters, and were also an excellent marketing tool (cf. Rettberg, 2013). However, it is difficult to say whether blogs were once popular among Internet users as a form of their communicative activity. It is enough to recall that Nielsen himself, when formulating his rule, took into account, *inter alia*, the number of blogs created. Jodi Dean (2010), on the other hand, estimated the percentage of bloggers at over a dozen percent in the Western culture, noting at the same time that blogs are much more popular in Asia. In her opinion, rumors about the death of blogging are definitely exaggerated, and social networking sites, such as Facebook, accused of contributing to it, are a complementary, not an alternative form of Internet users' activity to blogging. However, there is not much data on bloggers' participation among Internet users. One gets the impression that researchers were more interested in what blogs can be than what they really are.

The moment when blogging enthusiasts such as Dean or Jill Walker Rettberg (2013) wrote their books, i.e., the turn of the first two decades of the 21st century, in retrospect seems to be the golden age of blogging. Their popularity was indicated by the data from the then very popular Technorati website, which was a blog search engine. At that time, there were 28 million blogs annually (48 million in 2009) (Maciąg, 2013, p. 140). Soon, however, the number of people interested in either running or reading blogs began to decline. This is evidenced by the slow decline of the Technorati website and its closure in 2020. This is also confirmed by the fate of the popular blogging platform Tumblr, largely devoted to fan creativity, where user activity (measured by the number of entries published in one day) was the highest in 2014 (over 100 million), and then began to decline (to 21 million in

2019) (Wikipedia, 2020, “Tumblr Usage,” acc. 2). The most popular blogging platform in the world today, Blogspot, ranks 33 in the Alexa Rank. It is worth recalling that in 2015, the most blogs of popular Polish portals: Interia, Onet, and Wirtualna Polska, and soon Gazeta.pl, were closed due to the decreasing number of users and views.

The trend of blogs becoming less and less popular is also recorded by Polish Public Opinion Research Center’s (CBOS) report (2020). According to it, in 2009, 8% of Internet users in Poland ran their own blog or website, in the following years this percentage began to decline, from 2012 it remained at a constant level of 5-6%, but in 2020 it fell to only 3% (cf. Figure 1). On the other hand, blogs were read by 39% of users in 2010, after which this percentage dropped in the following years by approx. 8-10% and in the last survey it amounted to 33%.

Figure 1. Percentage of Responses to the Question “Do You Run a Blog or Your Own Website?”



Source: CBOS, 2020, p. 13.

The still small share of the majority of Internet users in creating content on Web 2.0 sites may also be indicated by their slight tendency to edit Wikipedia (and other wikis). Wikipedia, like blogs, was a flagship example of Web 2.0 capabilities. However, being able to be active is not the same as being actually active. The phenomenon of the negligible participation of Internet users in the creation of Wikipedia has already been taken into account by Nielsen and there is no indication that it will change in the following years. The Nielsen’s rule of participation inequality has been affirmed for both Wikipedia (e.g., Ortega, Gonzalez-Barahona, & Robles, 2008) and other wikis (e.g., Shaw & Hill, 2014; Serrano, Arroyo, & Hassan, 2018). People who edit entries on these websites have always constituted a small percentage of all Internet users. At the end of 2018, there were just over 2.6 million people editing Wikipedia in all language versions, of which less than 40,000 was in Poland (Statystyki Wikipedii, 2019, “Współpracownicy”). Taking into account that according to the Digital 2020 report, the number of Internet users in the world exceeds 4.54 billion, and in Poland 30 million (Mobirank, 2020, “Raport digital i mobile na świecie w 2020 roku,” acc. 2, 9), Wikipedia editors constitute a negligible percentage of them. Moreover, Polish Wikipedians alone estimate the size of their community at 500 people, because only that many are actively involved in its life (Wikipedia, 2020, “Wikipedia: Społeczność wikipedystów Liczebność,” acc. 5). Assuming a similar proportion for world data, all Wikipedia editors would amount to only about 33,000 (although these are only speculations).

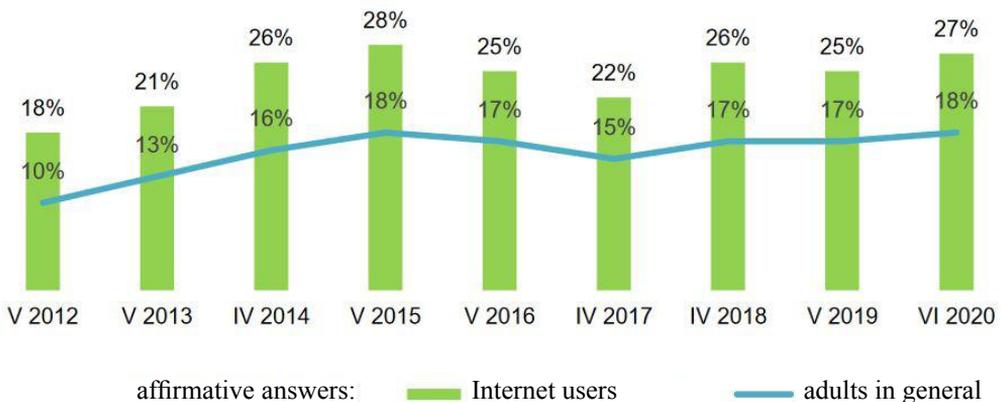
All of this could indicate that Web 2.0 sites are in fact filled with content only by a small group of creatively committed people. However, other data on user activity on Web 2.0 sites indicate that the rule of participation inequality described by Nielsen is no longer relevant. This is primarily about the popularity of social networking sites, especially Facebook and Instagram

(belonging to the same owner). According to the Digital 2020 report, 3.8 billion people in the world actively use social media, i.e., most Internet users, including Facebook itself 2.44 billion, and Instagram 800 million. In Poland, Facebook is used by 16 million people, and Instagram is used by 7.3 million (Socialpress, 2020, “Social media w Polsce i na świecie – najnowsze dane,” acc. 3, 4, 6, 9, 15, 18).

There are many indications that these are often active users who create their own content (e.g., update their profile, post their comments, photos and videos) or, more often, share, rate (“like”) or (less often) comment on content created by someone else (Turri, Smith, & Kemp, 2013; Batorski, 2015). Danish research on Facebook users shows that the percentage of users who publish at least one post a month is increasing there (Bechmann, 2019). In turn, according to the Digital 2020 report in Poland, the average Facebook user likes 11 posts and leaves 3 comments within a month. Such averaging, however, can mask the participation inequality in which only a small fraction of users create content and the remainder share it further and occasionally comment on it. However, there are reasons to believe that this is not the case.

Firstly, the number of users of social networking sites began to increase rapidly in the second decade of the 21st century, when smartphones became popular, making it possible to quickly take photos and videos and immediately post them on social networking sites for friends to see. For many people, such Internet activity was very attractive because it allowed to document and report on their everyday life, which is important in the contemporary culture of individualism (Jacyno, 2007), and to maintain contacts with people. It does not have to be done often, it does not have to be a large amount of content, but a significant proportion of users do it regularly. Such instant and effortless reports from one’s own life began to replace the blogs reporting everyday life (Więckiewicz-Archacka, 2019, p. 65). Polish CBOS research (2020) shows that publishing photos and videos taken by them on the Internet at first became more and more popular among users, and then this popularity stabilized at the level of approx. 25% (see Figure 2). This result is clearly correlated with the popularity of social networking sites, which increased first—from 47% in 2008 to 66% in 2015 and 69% in 2020.

Figure 2. Percentage of Answers to the Question: “In the Last Month, Have You Posted Photos or Videos You Took on the Internet?”



Source: CBOS, 2020, p. 12.

Secondly, the websites themselves, or rather their commercial owners, encourage their users to be active. Reporting of one's life and thoughts by an Internet user means large amounts of data about him / her, which can be profitably sold to advertisers, who in turn will direct personalized advertisements to the user. For this reason, users are encouraged to create as much information as possible on social networking sites, especially about themselves, so that, as they are suggested, they stay in touch with their friends. However, it can be called—as Mateusz Halawa (2013) argued—disciplining users to comply with the appropriate Web 2.0 standards of participation and sharing under the sanction of disappearance (p. 126). This is an effective sanction because the fear of loneliness is common in contemporary society, and in the conditions of a deficit of social bonds, people do not want to lose their last trace—visibility (Bauman & Lyon, 2013).

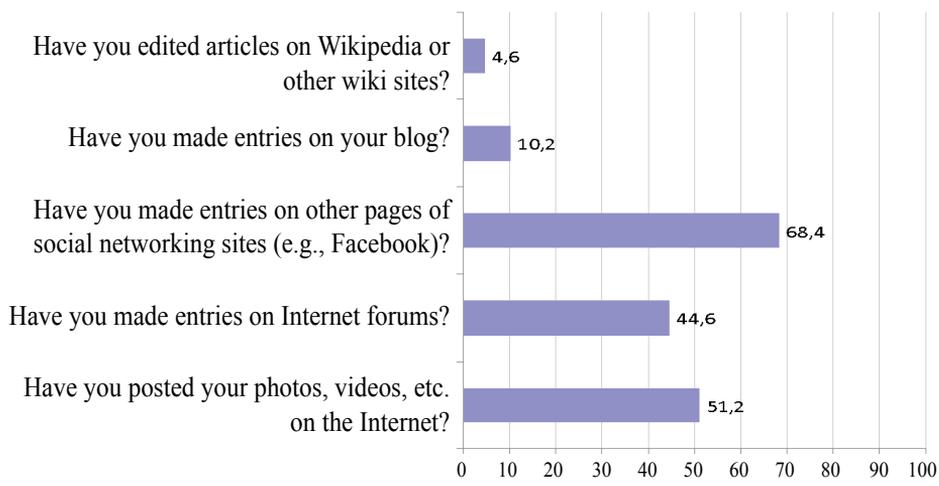
However, all this also shows that the Internet “creativity” does not necessarily have to be a significant act of creation testifying to the public involvement of the Internet user and his / her social participation, as was imagined at the threshold of Web 2.0. The research cited earlier, confirming the rule of participation inequality, proved that Internet users were not very active precisely because they took into account mainly such forms that require a lot of time, effort, and attention (editing a blog, editing wikis or participating in discussions on Twitter). Meanwhile, a creative activity can also be the publication of photos of one's cat and holiday videos. This type of content is published mainly on Facebook, which is the most popular of all social networking sites. It is more focused on publishing information from everyday life, in contrast to, for example, Twitter used mainly for debates on public issues and probably for this reason attracting much less users than Facebook.

CBOS research also shows that a fairly popular form of activity of Polish users is publishing posts on Internet forums and on social networks. Since 2013, their percentage has not dropped below 30%. This does not have to mean participation in serious public debates (although it may), but it is a manifestation of filling websites with content by the users themselves, regardless of the substantive value, quality, and importance of this content. However, if such types of creative activity are also taken into account, the active users will be significantly more than 1% or even 10%.

This is also shown by the results of the 2017 own research.⁴ There, I asked respondents whether they posted various types of content on the Internet in the last month. The received responses indicated quite high creative activity of users (see Figure 4). The following proportion was also visible—a definite minority of the respondents showed the most demanding creative activity (wikis, blogs), while many more respondents performed less demanding creative acts (photos, comments). Interestingly, although rather unsurprisingly, activity on social networking sites was more frequent than on Internet forums. Of course, the situation may have changed since this survey was carried out, but a similar proportion can be seen in the CBOS research—the fewest users perform the most labor-intensive activities, a few more publish audiovisual materials, and even more post comments on forums or on social media. Obviously, the results of the above-mentioned studies from 2017 cannot be generalized, due to the time that has elapsed since their conduct, and also—as in the case of CBOS research—their local nature (although Poland does not seem to differ from the rest of the world). However, they can be a premise for formulating and verifying in further research the thesis about the existence of this type of proportion.

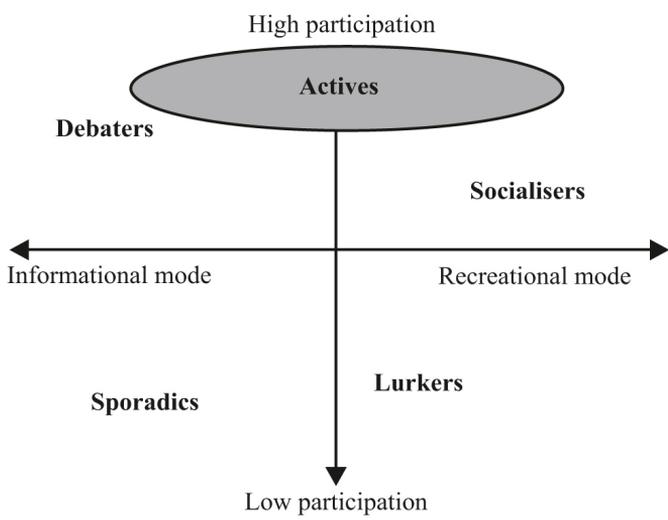
⁴ The survey was conducted in July 2017 using the CAWI technique on a representative sample of 500 Polish Internet users. For the adopted confidence level of $p = 0.05$, the maximum sample error was approx. +/- 4%.

Figure 3. Percentage of Affirmative Answers to the Question Whether the Respondent Performed a Given Activity in the Last Month.



Source: Own research / study.

Figure 4. Types of Users Depending on the Form of Participation.



Source: Brandtzaeg & Heim, 2011, p. 39.

Therefore, I believe that further research on the activity of Internet users must take into account its diversity, and cannot focus solely on the most ambitious types of it. It is worth following a similar path as Petter Bae Brandtzaeg and Jan Heim (2011), who, when researching several small Norwegian social networking sites in 2011, noticed that participation in social networking

sites may not only be large or small, but may also take a form more focused on information or entertainment. Consequently, they distinguished five types of users: actives, debaters, sporadics, socializers, and lurkers (see Figure 4). Not surprisingly, in the light of their research, the majority of users were lurkers (27%) and socializers (25%), and the least were debaters (11%). Thus, recreational goals were more important for the respondents than information goals. Certainly, these data cannot be generalized, but I find the direction of thinking adopted by the researchers inspiring.

4. Who Fills Web 2.0 Websites with Content?

Therefore, the thesis about the low inclination of most Internet users to post their own creations on the Internet no longer seems legitimate. There are more and more active users. Only some of them—certainly not all—are representatives of the symbolic elite, who can also publish their content in the mass media and treat the Internet as an additional communication channel. Does this mean that Web 2.0 sites, including blogs and social networking sites, are filled with content primarily by ordinary people or by professional broadcasters?

As already mentioned, blogs are not very popular anymore. Nevertheless, they still exist and are a form of expression for a fixed (albeit small) percentage of users. It can be noted that more and more bloggers are companies, people known on a smaller or larger scale, specialists in some field, professionals, but also enthusiasts and hobbyists. Blogs also usually have specific topics, such as travel, health, and culture. Today, however, other forms of expression are incomparably more popular.

Currently, the most popular websites in the world (especially in the western cultural circle) and in Poland filled with content by users are YouTube and Facebook, followed by Instagram. It is therefore worth taking a look at who their most popular users are.

The world's most popular Facebook pages are run by Cristiano Ronaldo, Real Madrid, Chinese TV CGTN, FC Barcelona, Shakira, Vin Diesel, Leo Messi, Eminem, among the most popular there is also Tasty (Socialbakers, 2020, "Facebook Pages Stats"). As one can see, these websites are not run by amateurs, but by institutions, companies, and public figures who can even be classified as a symbolic elite, as they have the opportunity to express themselves also in the mass media. The situation is similar in Poland, where the owners of the most popular websites are Robert Lewandowski, Kuba Błaszczykowski, the Play mobile network, Ewa Chodakowska, Allegro website, Radio ESKA, and Demotywatory website (Sotrender, 2020, "Facebook Trends Polska"). Only the latter is non-commercial and presents content created by amateurs. The next places in both rankings are also occupied by institutions and public figures.

On the other hand, the world's most popular channels on YouTube are run by the Indian music label T-Series, Cocomelon children's music label, Sony Entertainment India, WWE media and entertainment company, Indian Zee TV, Ryan's World, including the Turkish music channel Netd Müzik (Sociabakers, 2020, "YouTube Channels Stats"). In this comparison, only the idea for the Ryan's World channel, showing funny scenes from the life of a boy and his family, is amateur, although it was also taken over by a private company two years after its launch. The remaining part of the most popular channels belong to typical media institutions. Web 2.0 is thus becoming another way of reaching the recipients of institutional broadcasters, next to the mass media. It would be easy therefore to come to the conclusion that YouTube, which was to be aimed at publishing amateur video materials, has transformed into a place for presenting professionally prepared materials (cf. Kim, 2012). However, this is contradicted by the ranking of the most popular channels on YouTube in Poland, in which the first places are taken by Blowek, Stuu, ReZigiusz, Bazylland, Wardęga, Abstrachuje, Step Records hip-hop label, Friz, Naruciak, and

Disco Marek (Apy News, 2020, “Ranking youtuberów”). All these youtubers, with the exception of studios, are amateurs. Amateurs also dominate the top hundred of the ranking.

The comparison of the above data with the ranking of the most popular pages on Instagram looks interesting. It is a website focused on the presentation of audiovisual materials, so presence is more important than anywhere else. The world’s most popular accounts are run by Cristiano Ronaldo, Ariana Grande, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, Kylie Jenner, Selena Gomez, Kim Kardashian, Beyoncé, and Justin Bieber (Brandwatch, 2020, “The Top 20 Most Followed Instagram Accounts”). In the entire top twenty, there are mainly public figures whose work is related to appearance. At the same time, athletes and artists are joined by celebrities known only for being known who, apart from showing themselves and reporting on their lives on the Internet and other media, do not have to stand out or play any significant social role (the Kardashians). Although the phenomenon of celebrities was born in the mass media (Godzic, 2007), Web 2.0 sites greatly influenced its popularization. This is confirmed to some extent by the data from Instagram in Poland, where the leaders are Robert Lewandowski, Weronika Bielik, Anna Lewandowska, Wojciech Szczęsny, Karol Wiśniewski (frizoluszek), Stuart Kluz-Burton (stuuburton / Stuu), Weronika Sowa (wersow), Ewa Chodakowska, Mateusz Trąbka (trombabomba), and Jaś Dąbrowski (jdabrowsky) (DDOB, 2020, “Ranking Instagram”). Here, next to models and athletes, there are people who have gained their popularity only thanks to their activity on the Internet and who, such as Stuu, promote themselves through various Web 2.0 websites: YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and blogs. In this way, they create their own brand, which they can also use for commercial purposes (see Hou, 2019). They are often people who started their online careers on YouTube or Instagram. Some of them are also able to influence the beliefs or behaviors of their recipients, so they are called influencers for a reason. New new media can therefore be persuasive, just like mass media.

As can be seen from the above data, Web 2.0 websites are filled with content by both amateurs and professionals. However, it is not possible to infer the entire website on the basis of several of the most popular accounts. Apart from them, there are millions of others, some of them can count on a huge audience, others arouse the interest mainly of the author’s friends. Referring to the terminology proposed by Chris Anderson (2006), it can be said that they constitute a “long tail” that balances the “head” of the most popular profiles. It can be assumed that celebrities, institutions, representatives of symbolic elites feed rather the “head” and amateurs rather the “tail.” An important phenomenon, however, also seems to be the fact that some amateurs, especially youtubers who also promote themselves on other websites, manage to become part of the “head.”

5. Final Conclusions

Therefore, to the question posed at the beginning of the article, I would say that Web 2.0 sites are filled with content primarily by amateurs. Although they are to a lesser extent representatives of symbolic elites and celebrities, i.e., those who can also speak in the mass media, they are the focus of the greatest attention of the audience on the Internet and other media. It can be carefully concluded that some content (comments or audiovisual materials) is posted on social networking sites by the majority of their users, who in turn constitute the majority of Internet users. On the other hand, there are far fewer users who undertake the most time-consuming and ambitious forms of content production, for example, blogging, wiki entries, and YouTube videos. Based on the available data, I estimate that they account for around 5% in total, although this issue should be examined more carefully to be able to state it unequivocally. However, it cannot be concluded that the activity of Internet users is at all low only on the basis of this percentage. The rules governing online participation must be reformulated.

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