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SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BREXIT AND THE ASSESSMENT OF INFORMATION ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE POLISH AND BRITISH AUTHORITIES AMONG POLES LIVING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

ŹRÓDŁA WIEDZY O BREXICIE A OCENA DZIAŁAŃ INFORMACYJNYCH WŁADZ POLSKICH I BRYTYJSKICH WŚRÓD POLAKÓW MIESZKAJĄCYCH W ZJEDNOCZONYM KRÓLESTWIE

The background of the problem analysed in the article is Brexit and its mediatization, consisting of an attempt to shape social reality through the media. The UK's decision to leave the EU was an important issue for Polish migrants in the UK. This community is an important research field because it is one of Europe's largest and most active. The reason for undertaking the research was the importance of the impact of information on the decisions of individuals and the diverse policies and information activities of Polish and British authorities. The article aims to determine the sources of knowledge about Brexit and to analyse the assessment of information activities carried out by Polish and British authorities in the opinion of Poles living in the United Kingdom. A quantitative sociological study was conducted in September and October 2019 using a survey questionnaire based on a deliberately selected sample of 620 Poles living in London, Oxford and Swindon. These cities differ in terms of social structure, living conditions and standards, and the nature of the work undertaken by migrants from Poland. The procedure of comparing means (ANOVA) is used in the statistical analysis. It was found that Polish information activities were more often negatively assessed than British ones, and that both media and non-media sources of knowledge influenced this assessment.

Keywords: information activities; sources of knowledge; media and non-media communication; Brexit; migration

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Tłem analizowanego w artykule problemu jest brexit i jego mediatyzacja polegająca na próbie kształtowania rzeczywistości społecznej za pośrednictwem mediów. Decyzja wyjścia Wielkiej Brytanii z EU była ważną kwestią dla mieszkających tam polskich migrantów. Społeczność ta jest ważnym polem badawczym, gdyż między innymi należy do jednej z największych i najbardziej

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aktywnych w Europie. Przesłanką podjęcia badań było znaczenie wpływu informacji na decyzje jednostek oraz zróżnicowane polityki i działania informacyjne polskich i brytyjskich władz. Celem artykułu jest ustalenie źródeł wiedzy o brexicie oraz analiza ocen działań informacyjnych realizowanych przez polskie i brytyjskie władze w opinii Polaków mieszkających w Wielkiej Brytanii. Ilościowe badanie socjologiczne przeprowadzono za pomocą kwestionariusza ankiety we wrześniu i październiku 2019 r. na dobranej celowo próbie 620 Polaków mieszkających w Londynie, Oksfordzie i Swindon. Miasta te różnią się pod względem struktury społecznej, warunków i poziomu życia oraz charakteru pracy podejmowanej przez migrantów z Polski. Przy analizie statystycznej posłużono się między innymi procedurą porównywania średnich (ANOVA). Ustalono, iż polskie działania informacyjne były częściej negatywnie oceniane niż brytyjskie, a wpływ na tę ocenę miały zarówno medialne, jak i pozamedialne źródła wiedzy.

Słowa kluczowe: działania informacyjne; źródła wiedzy; komunikacja medialna i pozamedialna; brexit; migracje

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I. INTRODUCTION

The precedent of Brexit sparked a debate on its various consequences,[1] including information activities and the influence of information sources on the assessment of how the main domestic and foreign events were covered. Shortly after the result of the 2016 referendum on the departure of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union, commenting on the fierce referendum campaign and the coverage of issues such as Brexit-related gains and losses,[2] editor-in-chief of *The Sun* remarked: 'So much for the waning power of the print media'.[3] Made by a journalist of the UK's best-selling newspaper, this comment on the results of the Brexit referendum opened a new space for debate on the public's sources of knowledge about current events, their impact on the direction of the changes taking place, and the assessment of information activities undertaken by the authorities. The phenomenon of Brexit can be viewed much more broadly than merely as a political referendum decision of the British people.[4] A factor that played a key role in the Brexit scenario that is now underway is technological changes associated with social media.[5] It is directly pointed out that the mediatization of Brexit contributed to the shaping and influencing of public opinion.[6] This article contributes to the debate about the role of information sources in the building or development of knowledge about Brexit in the community of Poles living in the United Kingdom, and about the influence of this knowledge on the assessment of information activities undertaken by the British and Po-

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[1] Biernat (2021): 189.
[2] Fel, Wódka, Kozak (2022): 31–35.
[3] Hinde (2017): 80.
[4] Kozak, Fel, Wódka (2021): 5; Moore, Ramsay (2017): 164–168.
[5] Marshall, Drieschova (2018): 89.
[6] Zappettini (2021): 528; Zappettini, Krzyżanowski (2019): 381–383; Jas-Koziarkiewicz (2019): 102; Krzyżanowski (2019): 466.

lish governments. The system of information activities should be understood as an area of public debate between the individual and the authorities, and as an area in which public opinion is formed. In this case, information activities take place at the interpersonal, institutional communication, and mass communication levels.[7] Effectiveness should be understood as the ability to reach different types of target audience in order to establish interaction.[8] One of the ways of measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of information activities is the 'public information model.' The model assumes that the main purpose of information activities is to disseminate information, which should be reliable and true.[9] Therefore, an attempt was made to determine whether and to what extent the assessment of information communication effectiveness differed depending on the sources of knowledge that information came from.

The primary setting where the individual experiences various forms of information communication is not the mass media but the family, which is the main vehicle and transmitter of the rules governing the use of language, both verbal and nonverbal.[10] Socialization processes take place not only in primary groups but also in the individual's wider environment.[11] In other words, through communication, both institutional and non-institutional factors can shape the individual's knowledge and opinions. They take the form of direct or indirect influence on what people know and think about the current events taking place in society. Apart from family members, non-media actors of information communication can be friends, the work environment, or even members of the clergy.[12] This results in individual selection of information sources, amounting, to some extent, to the choice of social communication methods. It therefore seems reasonable to inquire into the non-media sources of knowledge about the reality surrounding the individual and into their effect on the individual's assessment of information activities undertaken by various institutions. For this reason, the present empirical study included questions about the non-media sources of knowledge from which respondents derived information concerning Brexit, which was still in progress at that time, and which may have influenced their assessment of the information activities undertaken by the Polish and British authorities.

The article first outlines the characteristics of the information activities of the Polish and British authorities. Subsequently, the purpose and subject of the research are defined, the sample is described, and the method is briefly characterized. Next, the research results are presented, with a focus on those concerning the perceived influence of the media on the formation of knowledge about Brexit. The article ends with a discussion and conclusions.

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[7] Serafin (2013): 137.

[8] Jaska, Werenowska (2017): 65.

[9] Olędzki, Dariusz (2009): 141.

[10] Soliz, Phillips (2018): 7; Nosek (2019): 122; Shehata, Amna (2019): 1058–1059.

[11] Lee, Shah, McLeod (2013): 671–672; Campos, Hargreaves Heap, Leite Lopez de Leon (2016): 972–973; Schaeper (2020): 106; Peciakowski (2020): 6; Żebrok (2021): 78.

[12] Seabra, Abrantes, Lages (2007): 1541–1542; Wodka et al. (2022): 8–10.

The text aims to discuss the sources of knowledge about Brexit among Poles living in the UK and to assess their opinions on the information activities carried out by the Polish and British authorities. The very topic of the UK leaving the EU has become important not only for the British and Polish public but also for experts in the fields of economics, sociology, politics, and law. As Polish migrants are one of the largest national minorities in the UK, their attitude towards Brexit seems to be an important issue. The dynamic growth of economic migration to Britain after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 resulted in the emergence of a relatively large community of Poles built around their socio-cultural system – a community that is of considerable significance for the functioning of British society.[13] Despite concerns about the effects of Brexit, one third of Polish migrants plan to stay in the UK.[14] Until 2015, Polish foreign policy was based on a strategic partnership with Germany and on the recognition of its leading role in Europe. The year 2015 marked a change in that policy, with the United Kingdom becoming a strategic partner. Poland and the UK shared similar views on the functioning of the EU, policy towards the Russian Federation, EU energy policy, and the methods of solving the migration crisis.[15] All these facts support the argument that Polish migrants' assessment of Brexit-related information communication should be regarded as an important issue for research to address.

The information strategies of the British authorities regarding Brexit differed from those implemented by Polish authorities. From the beginning, the British took informational steps to minimize the impact of their 'divorce' from the EU on the functioning of the UK. Information activities in the UK concerned topics such as working out the terms of withdrawal from the EU, setting transition periods between the current deal and the new one, setting general principles for future trade cooperation covering the financial and network sectors, maintaining the Common Travel Area with the Republic of Ireland, and avoiding a 'hard border' in Northern Ireland.[16] One of the most important British information activities (and the most expensive one ever in the UK) was the 'Get Ready for Brexit' campaign, using various types of media (including television, social media, and billboards), which the British government launched in August 2019,[17] a few weeks before the research presented in this article was conducted. The campaign aimed to provide information to British companies, British citizens, and people permanently residing in the UK on how they should prepare for the country's withdrawal from the EU, regardless of the outcome of the negotiations. The 2020 report by the British Parliament emphasized that the campaign had made the public more aware of the practical consequences of the UK's departure from the EU; however, the report did not support the conclusion that after the campaign British society was

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[13] Isański et al. (2023): 3.
[14] Fel, Kozak, Wódka (2022): 20.
[15] Wawrzyk (2017): 120.
[16] de Mars, Murray (2020): 817; Gupta et al. (2023): 4–5.
[17] Bayliss, Fine (2020): 53–72.

more prepared for post-Brexit reality.[18] For many years, the British media had been the main opinion-forming source of knowledge about the UK's possible withdrawal from the EU.[19] The so-called Project Fear, which consisted in using the media to arouse resentment against the EU, was actually started much earlier in the 1990s by Boris Johnson, the then-Brussels correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*. His journalistic accounts became a media symbol of Euroscepticism in the UK.[20]

In the case of the Polish authorities, Brexit-related information activities focused on two main areas. The first of these concerned protecting the interests of the Polish state and the interests of Polish citizens living in the UK. The second area was the political aftermath of Brexit, with a focus on how Europe would react to UK decisions. A considerable challenge for Brexit information policy was the main negotiation principle that nothing was agreed upon until everything was agreed upon. In other words, individual negotiation points could not be settled separately. This made the communication of information complicated, as the negotiations were conducted in stages. Nevertheless, the information activities of the Polish authorities were aimed at providing citizens, businesses, stakeholders, and international partners with the clearest possible information on the direct effects of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.[21]

The aim of the empirical social quantitative research presented in this paper was to determine how respondents' assessment of the effectiveness of information activities depended on the different sources of information they used. Information activities become effective when appropriate tools are applied and when the recipients' informational needs have been identified.[22]

The subject matter of the project presented in the article is information about Brexit. Information should focus on facts, but the UK's departure from the EU became a topic full of tension and controversy at the time. This state of affairs became an incentive to publish information in the public space in a way that was guided by and focused on emotions and public moods. Public opinion was often misinformed.[23] Due to the complexity of the negotiation process, access to information on issues such as the future impact of Brexit became limited. Both the Brexit campaign itself and subsequent information activities failed to provide much important information, including the details of the legislative path towards the implementation of the new post-Brexit reality and even the specific date of Brexit, regardless of whether it would be 'hard' or 'soft.' The lack of accurate and reliable information meant that the media speculated rather than reported, and the public seemed to be perpetually concerned about the uncertainty. The research problem addressed in this study is also related to the image of the UK itself at that time. The Brexit campaign focused on building the idea of the British nation as sovereign and

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[18] House of Commons (2020): 12.
[19] Hansson, Page (2023): 361–364.
[20] Kozak, Wódka, Fel (2022): 26.
[21] Wawrzyk (2017): 111.
[22] Risius, Beck (2015): 824–826.
[23] Rone (2023): 71.

independent. It was emphasized that the British did not have to subordinate their decisions to any international obligations and did not need an agreement with the EU. Moreover, the campaign highlighted the identity aspects of sovereignty. Upholding the ideology of independence as such and independence from the EU became one of the most important themes of the Brexit campaign.

Based on the above, the following research questions were formulated:

– What media sources of information do the respondents derive their knowledge about Brexit from and to what extent?

– What other (non-media) sources of information do the respondents derive their knowledge about Brexit from and to what extent?

– What is the respondents' assessment of Polish information activities concerning Brexit?

– What is the respondents' assessment of British information activities concerning Brexit?

– What is the influence of the sources of information about Brexit on the respondents' assessment of the information activities undertaken by the Polish authorities?

– What is the influence of the sources of information about Brexit on the respondents' assessment of the information activities undertaken by the British authorities?

II. METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The analyses discussed below are based on the aggregate results of a questionnaire-based empirical study. The study was conducted in September and October 2019, in three cities: London, Oxford, and Swindon. These three localities differ in terms of urban structure, living conditions, standards of living, and the character of work taken up by migrants from Poland. The method adopted – purposive sampling – seems optimal in the conditions of migration, which make it difficult to reach every respondent on an individual basis.[24] Expert (purposive) samples have been successfully used on numerous occasions in the social sciences, for example in empirical studies aimed at forecasting changes on different planes of social structure. It should be noted that empirical studies on migrants are very often conducted on expert samples. Although the results of such studies must not be generalized, the analysis of the presented aggregate data undoubtedly indicates certain trends in the examined population.[25]

1. Sample

The quantitative cross-sectional study included 620 adults. The largest number of participants (46.5%) were 31 to 40 years old. The majority of the

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[24] Fel, Wódka, Kozak (2022): 31.
[25] Kozak, Fel, Wódka (2021): 19.

sample (62.6%) were women. The vast majority of the respondents (90.6%) were professionally active. Slightly more than half of the participants (56.8%) had graduated from higher education. Most individuals in the sample rated their language skills as high (*very good* – 36.5%; *good* – 34.0%). The greatest proportion of participants (42.9%) reported a good financial status. The largest group (47.1%) were respondents who had lived in the United Kingdom for 10 to 15 years. Detailed characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of the sample

		N	%
Age	≤30	78	12.6
	31–40	288	46.5
	41–50	162	26.1
	>50	61	9.8
	n.d.	31	5.0
Gender	F	218	35.2
	M	388	62.6
	n.d.	14	2.3
Professional activity	yes	562	90.6
	no	42	6.8
	n.d.	16	2.9
Education	primary/secondary	257	41.5
	higher	352	56.8
	n.d.	11	1.8
Command of English	very good	226	36.5
	good	211	34.0
	barely conversational	134	21.6
	poor/none	39	6.3
	n.d.	10	1.6
Financial status	very good	88	14.2
	good	266	42.9
	poor	211	34.0
	n.d.	55	8.9
Length of residence in the UK	<10 years	221	35.6
	10–15 years	292	47.1
	>15 years	85	13.7
	n.d.	22	3.5

Source: author's calculations.

The sociological research included Poles living in three English cities, which differed in terms of size and character. In this research project, conducted in October 2019, 620 adults were surveyed – 189 in London, 198 in Oxford, and 233 in Swindon. The sampling process involved the use of a list – a sampling frame of the surveyed population, which was a set of elements of this population mapped on a specific list from which the sample was selected. According to the results of censuses, the number of people born in Poland who lived in England and Wales amounted to 57,754 in 2001, 579,121 in 2011, and 743,085 in 2021.[26] At the time of the study, in 2019, the British Office for National Statistics only had estimates of the dynamically changing number of Polish migrants in the UK, which is why a decision was made to use non--probability sampling. This procedure is based on the subjective choice of the surveyed sample units to obtain the broadest and most complete information. Nevertheless, it was decided that the research sample in the present study should include at least 200 people from each city. This made it possible to select twice the minimum required number of respondents, in accordance with the principle that larger sample sizes reduced sampling error, regardless of the statistics determining sample size.[27]

As mentioned above, the research was carried out in three historically, demographically, and culturally diverse cities in England: Swindon, with a tradition and history of a typically working-class city; Oxford, as an example of a typical university city; and London, as the largest urban agglomeration, distinguished by its size and by the diversity of social, economic, cultural, and even technological and infrastructural phenomena. These three cities are characterized by different urban structures, living conditions, and standards of living; they also differ in the type of professional work undertaken by emigrants from Poland. London, as the capital of the UK, is undoubtedly the most diverse in many respects. It has been home to a cluster of 'old' and 'new' Polish communities, where almost everyone can find a job in their profession. The situation of Poles in Oxford, a small city with only 155,000 inhabitants, is different. Oxford boasts city status because it has its cathedral and university. Here, Poles work not only in services that do not require high-level qualifications, but they also find employment in academic positions and in the administration of two large universities and hospitals. Finally, Swindon is a typical industrial city with a population more than 20% larger than Oxford's, but it has only town status, as there is neither a cathedral nor a university there. One of the major employers at that time was the Honda company – a car manufacturer,[28] which was closed in Swindon for reasons that included the consequences of Brexit.[29]

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[26] Clark (2020).
[27] Taherdoost (2017): 237.
[28] Fel, Kozak, Wódka (2020): 86.
[29] Fel, Wódka, Kozak (2022): 29–40.

Regarding education level, the vast majority of respondents had attended higher education. It should be noted that from 2004 to 2008, the UK experienced a period of intensive development and economic growth with a chronic labour shortage, especially in the health, education, agriculture, hotel, and food sectors. One of the factors attracting Polish migrants at that time was the exceptional economic situation in the UK's secondary labour market.[30] Statistical data shows that, after the first wave of labour migration, more and more people with higher education began to arrive in Britain from Poland.[31] This indicates the mobility of Poland's educated class and specialists in search not only of better earnings but also of broader career opportunities; the latter are of particular importance in professions related to financial markets, of which the City of London remains a global centre.[32]

The largest group of respondents were people aged 31–40. The age profile of the migrants in the sample coincided with the official statistics of Polish migrants in the UK. It turns out that most Polish post-accession migrants left Poland at a young working age. Statistics on Polish migrants in the UK show that individuals aged 20–39 accounted for 80.3% of emigrants in 2006 and for 56.0% in 2012.[33] The results of the 2021 UK Census also clearly indicate the predominance of people of working age. It turns out that every second Pole in the UK in 2021 (51.2%) was between 30 and 44 years old (30–34: 14.1%; 35–39: 20.5%; 40–44: 16.6%).[34]

The sampling was purposive. As mentioned above, expert (purposive) samples have been used before in empirical social research.[35] It is on the basis of this particular type of samples that sociological studies involving return migrants are very often conducted; the analysis of the overall data collected as a result of this kind of quantitative research allows for identifying the trends present in the population.

The survey questionnaire used in the field research in Britain was anonymous and consisted of 35 closed-ended questions focused on the knowledge and opinions of the Poles living there about Brexit. The study was conducted using the auditorium questionnaire technique; the decision not to apply the distributed questionnaire method resulted in a nearly 100% return rate.[36] The research was conducted in locations with the largest Polish communities in the UK, including Polish schools and parishes run by the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales.

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[30] Kisiel, Lizińska, Rosochacka (2019): 131.
[31] Duszczyk, Wiśniewski (2007): 4.
[32] Garapich (2019): 16.
[33] Okólski, Salt (2014): 33.
[34] Office for National Statistics (2023).
[35] Kozak (2015): 106.
[36] Kauf, Tłuczak (2013): 28.

2. Method

In this empirical study, groups were compared by means of the Kruskal–Wallis ANOVA rank test. The Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance by ranks is an extension of the Mann-Whitney *U* test and serves the purpose of verifying the null hypothesis about the non-significance of differences between the median values of the investigated variable across several populations (the distributions of the variable are assumed to be similar). I used IBM SPSS Statistics v. 28.

III. THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

A review of the research on the sources of knowledge about the current social events reveals that the main non-media source of knowledge in Polish society is the family.[37] In the case of mass media as sources of knowledge, television programmes are dominant among older recipients in both Polish[38] and British societies.[39] The Internet is the medium that dominates among the younger members of society, both British[40] and Polish.[41]

A somewhat different issue in social research is recipients' evaluation of media credibility. Respondents usually evaluate their critical, responsible, and selective mass media use skills as high;[42] the same goes for their ability to evaluate media message quality – in terms of sender and source credibility,[43] bias, and the rules of creating media news.[44]

An issue much less often raised in the literature is the assessment of information activities undertaken by the authorities.[45] I therefore concluded that it was important to engage in scientific reflection on the information strategies implemented by the Polish and British authorities concerning Brexit, which was then underway. Brexit not only concerned British people's decision regarding the United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union; it also concerned other important issues, such as the conditions of further residence for migrants already living in the UK at the time. Based on the presented results of social research, an attempt was made to show the differences in the assessment of the information activities undertaken by the Polish and British authorities from the perspective of different sources of knowledge from which Polish respondents in the United Kingdom drew their knowledge about Brexit.

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[37] Jakubowski (2021): 13–19; Cybulska (2017): 7–8.

[38] Omyła-Rudzka, Feliksiak (2019): 1–2; Kinal (2022): 139.

[39] Reuters Institute (2021); Silver (2019).

[40] Newman et al. (2020): 10.

[41] Uzarski, Witt, Wincławska (2019): 128–129.

[42] Duda (2020): 771.

[43] Dallmann (2023): 7.

[44] Kristanova (2021): 466.

[45] Niklewicz (2013): 8; Pattyn, Gouglas, De Leeuwe (2021): 825–826.

IV. RESULTS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

1. The media as the main source of knowledge about Brexit among Polish immigrants

The first stage of the analysis assessed the influence of the media on the formation of knowledge about Brexit. The study examined the influence of the media, politicians, and other community factors: family, friends, and members of the clergy. Using a scale from 1 to 6, participants rated the influence of selected sources of information on their knowledge about the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. Mean scores were analysed. It turned out that the media, not divided into Polish and British, had the greatest influence ($M = 3.07$). The next source of information were people from the respondents' closest environment ($M = 2.91$). The least influential source was politicians ($M = 2.82$). Detailed results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Perceived influence of selected sources of information on knowledge about Brexit

		1	2	3	4	5	6	Descriptive statistic		Overall influence
Sources of knowledge about Brexit		%	%	%	%	%	%	M	SD	(M +/- SD)
Polish media	Polish television	29.7	13.7	22.4	7.8	19.1	7.3	3.0	1.7	M = 3.07, SD = 1.68
	Polish radio	43.7	11.7	17.5	10.6	12.3	4.2	2.5	1.6	
	Polish social media	24.4	15.0	23.2	5.2	24.6	7.7	3.1	1.7	
	Polish press	39.4	14.8	18.2	11.2	11.4	5.1	2.6	1.6	
British media	British television	18.8	11.0	21.0	6.5	31.8	10.8	3.5	1.7	
	British radio	25.3	13.2	20.0	5.8	26.0	9.7	3.2	1.8	
	British social media	22.2	14.2	22.2	5.9	26.5	9.0	3.3	1.7	
	British press	25.0	12.5	19.8	7.3	25.7	9.6	3.3	1.7	
Politicians	Polish politicians	40.6	17.3	21.0	9.1	9.4	2.7	2.4	1.5	M = 2.82, SD = 1.58
	British politicians	23.0	14.0	21.2	7.1	26.2	8.5	3.3	1.7	
Other sources	Family	23.6	12.6	27.8	6.4	22.2	7.4	3.1	1.6	M = 2.91, SD = 1.55
	Friends	18.9	14.1	29.4	4.3	27.6	5.9	3.3	1.6	
	Clerics	41.6	15.7	21.4	10.4	8.2	2.7	2.4	1.4	
1 = no influence of the media; 6 = very high influence of the media										

Source: author's calculations.

2. Perceived influence of the media on the formation of knowledge about Brexit as related to the assessment of the information activities undertaken by the Polish and British authorities

In the current study, I analysed the relationship between the sources shaping the respondents' knowledge about Brexit and the assessment of the information activities undertaken by Polish and British authorities.

2.1. Assessment of Polish information activities

The study revealed that every second respondent evaluated Polish Brexit--related information activities as poor (49.0%), while one in three evaluated them positively (29.4%). Every fifth respondent (21.6%) was unable to give a clear evaluation on this issue.

Table 3 below juxtaposes the effects of specific types of media on the assessment of Brexit-related information activities carried out by the Polish authorities. It seems a little surprising that it was British rather than Polish sources of knowledge – more precisely, British television – that had the strongest influence. The next most influential factors were deriving knowledge from Polish social media and Polish television, whereas treating Polish radio stations and Polish press as sources of information had a considerably weaker effect.

Table 3

Influence of sources of information on respondents' assessment of Brexit-related information activities undertaken by the Polish authorities

		1		2		3		4		5		Overall		Statistic	
Sources of knowledge about Brexit		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	H	p
Polish media	Polish television	2.29	1.57	3.02	1.51	2.38	1.46	3.74	1.54	4.71	1.76	3.02	1.64	**88.929**	**0.00**
	Polish radio	2.26	1.59	2.65	1.57	2.33	1.44	2.92	1.55	4.10	1.81	2.65	1.59	**30.402**	**0.00**
	Polish social media	2.87	1.73	3.20	1.53	2.81	1.62	3.67	1.54	3.90	1.73	3.22	1.62	**28.391**	**0.00**
	Polish press	2.34	1.48	2.73	1.54	2.33	1.42	3.00	1.57	4.19	2.02	2.71	1.57	**30.396**	**0.00**
British media	British television	3.28	1.77	3.41	1.64	3.55	1.60	3.87	1.59	4.33	1.62	3.57	1.65	**15.009**	**0.01**
	British radio	3.31	1.82	3.19	1.67	3.44	1.64	3.29	1.63	4.00	1.55	3.31	1.67	5.443	0.25
	British social media	3.33	1.65	3.25	1.64	3.37	1.60	3.47	1.54	3.71	1.79	3.36	1.61	2.804	0.59
	British press	3.23	1.66	3.24	1.69	3.45	1.73	3.31	1.58	3.90	1.76	3.32	1.67	3.944	0.41

Politicians	Polish politicians	3.02	1.74	3.27	1.51	3.07	1.57	**3.37**	1.57	3.00	1.67	3.21	1.58	**28.314**	**0.00**
	British politicians	3.01	1.54	3.42	1.49	3.28	1.53	3.39	1.54	3.43	1.57	3.32	1.52	8.273	0.08
Other sources	Family	2.05	1.41	2.57	1.44	2.31	1.32	2.83	1.51	2.86	1.65	2.52	1.46	4.549	0.34
	Friends	1.98	1.31	2.60	1.40	2.26	1.36	2.88	1.53	3.05	1.91	2.53	1.46	4.738	0.32
	Clerics	3.08	1.74	3.18	1.59	3.53	1.57	3.37	1.67	**3.86**	1.59	3.32	1.64	**20.536**	**0.00**
1 = negative assessment of information activities; 5 = positive assessment of information activities															

Source: author's calculations.

2.2. Assessment of British information activities

Likewise, in the present study Polish migrants were asked to assess the information activities undertaken by the British authorities. It turned out that 48.5% of the respondents evaluated these activities positively, while 42.4% evaluated them negatively. Only one in eleven respondents (9.0%) had no clear opinion on the matter.

In the case of the assessment of information activities undertaken by the Polish authorities, the most influential factor proved to be Polish social media, followed by Polish 'traditional' media, whereas the assessment of British information activities was most strongly influenced by British television, with the effect of British social media ranking second. As in the case of information communicated by the Polish authorities, the weakest effect on the assessment of the information activities undertaken by the British authorities was found for British radio and press. The study revealed no influence of the Polish mass media on the assessment of Brexit-related information activities undertaken by the British authorities.

The assessment of the information activities carried out by the British authorities was also influenced to a statistically significant degree by knowledge about Brexit drawn from British politicians. The study revealed no influence of other sources of knowledge (family, friends, clerics) on opinions about British information activities. Detailed results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Influence of sources of information on respondents' assessment of Brexit-related information activities undertaken by the British authorities

		1		2		3		4		5		Overall		Statistic	
Sources of knowledge about Brexit		*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*H*	*p*
Polish media	Polish television	2.90	1.60	3.09	1.75	3.03	1.62	3.03	1.72	1.70	0.21	3.00	1.64	0.546	0.97

Table 4 (*continued*)

Polish media	Polish radio	2.50	1.48	2.63	1.54	2.61	1.60	2.91	1.68	1.70	0.21	2.60	1.59	1.998	0.74
	Polish social media	3.10	1.68	2.91	1.56	3.30	1.67	3.23	1.63	1.60	0.20	3.20	1.62	3.012	0.56
	Polish press	2.80	1.72	2.93	1.67	2.63	1.53	2.92	1.78	1.80	0.22	2.70	1.57	2.755	0.60
British media	British television	3.20	1.47	2.93	1.51	4.01	1.50	4.39	1.69	1.70	0.21	3.60	1.65	66.604	<.001
	British radio	3.00	1.50	2.71	1.66	3.53	1.62	4.32	1.66	1.70	0.20	3.30	1.67	45.455	<.001
	British social media	3.20	1.56	2.98	1.58	3.57	1.59	3.79	1.64	1.60	0.20	3.40	1.61	16.366	0.00
	British press	3.00	1.68	2.84	1.54	3.59	1.63	4.03	1.71	1.70	0.21	3.30	1.67	32.176	<.001
Politi-cians	Polish politicians	2.50	1.50	2.59	1.58	2.45	1.44	2.62	1.54	1.50	0.19	2.50	1.46	1.639	0.80
	British politicians	2.90	1.58	2.55	1.53	3.57	1.61	3.94	1.64	1.60	0.20	3.30	1.64	34.614	<.001
Other sources	Family	3.10	1.59	3.20	1.58	3.26	1.55	3.15	1.83	1.80	0.23	3.20	1.58	0.881	0.93
	Friends	3.00	1.57	3.29	1.50	3.40	1.51	3.23	1.63	1.60	0.20	3.30	1.52	3.899	0.42
	Clerics	2.30	1.52	2.52	1.36	2.54	1.47	2.55	1.49	1.50	0.18	2.50	1.46	2.474	0.65

1 = negative assessment of information activities; 5 = positive assessment of information activities

Source: author's calculations.

V. DISCUSSION

To answer the question concerning the formation of knowledge about Brexit, it should be concluded that the media were the most frequent source of information, with non-media communication ranking lower as a source of knowledge about events. Regarding media sources of information, respondents derived their knowledge from British television, Polish social media, and Polish television. As mentioned above, the study did not show a statistically significant influence of family and friends (non-media sources of knowledge) on opinions about information activities. This influence was found, however, in the case of the clergy, who had an impact on the respondents' assessment of the information activities undertaken the Polish authorities. The study also revealed an effect of British politicians on the evaluation of information activities carried out by the British authorities.

These results demonstrate that the media are an important tool for disseminating information, but not the only one. Non-media communication, resulting in the influence of clerics or politicians, ranks lower among the factors shaping knowledge about Brexit and takes the form of direct interactions aimed at individual recipients. By talking to members of the clergy or by contacting politicians directly, people can explore more complex issues and revise their opinions outside the media communication channels.

The presented research results reveal an observable difference in the assessment of information activities between Polish and British authorities. Namely, Polish information activities were evaluated negatively more often than those implemented in the UK. In other words, respondents rated Polish information activities about the ongoing Brexit process more critically than British ones. This may have been due to the fact that the Polish authorities limited themselves to general press releases, which were perceived as vague and insufficient. It was difficult for Polish migrants in the UK, who spoke their mother tongue rather than English, to obtain clear and complete knowledge about the changes in the socio-political and economic space that were taking place in the UK at that time. What also significantly impacted the negative assessment of Polish information activities was the fact that the British authorities actively communicated with British citizens on Brexit matters more often than did the Polish authorities, which is not surprising because, in the long-term perspective, Brexit-related information was not top news in the Polish media.[46]

Moreover, the British authorities were better prepared for communication activities thanks to the long Brexit referendum campaign, while the Polish authorities often reacted to events in the British Parliament with delay. The protracted negotiations and changes regarding the Brexit date additionally contributed to confusion and chaos in information communication. The overlap between the ongoing Brexit and the 2019 UK parliamentary election campaign also turned out to be important. While the Polish media tended to emphasize the negative aspects of Brexit at that time,[47] British media coverage more often promoted the idea that the British decision to leave the EU was right.[48] During the election campaign, the Conservatives increased their use of social media. Facebook became the most important platform for reaching potential conservative voters, who were informed about Brexit negotiations with the EU on an ongoing basis and in a manner that emphasized the rightness of the choice made by the British in 2016.[49]

The communication factor that had the strongest influence on the information activities undertaken by the Polish authorities was British television, followed by clerics, social media, Polish politicians, Polish television, Polish press, and Polish radio stations. Regarding respondents' assessment of information activities implemented by the British authorities, the most influential factor was British television, followed by other sources of knowledge about Brexit: British social media, radio, and press and British politicians. It should be noted that the assessment of information activities may have been affected by a number of other factors, such as command of English in the case of British information activities. In information communication, the content provided must be clear and objective, which means it must be independent of political

[46] Kałowski (2017): 67.
[47] Jas-Koziarkiewicz (2019): 80–81.
[48] Simpson, Startin (2023): 303–304.
[49] Gaber, Fisher (2022): 469.

or personal factors. In the case of the Polish press, the relationship between the assessment of Brexit and the political tone of the medium was confirmed. This relationship was found in the case of information about Brexit, which was generally positive in the headlines of Polish right-wing newspapers and magazines, and negative in those supporting the centre-left of the Polish political scene.[50] This non-uniformity of the media coverage of Brexit may have contributed to the more critical assessment of the information activities undertaken by the Polish authorities.

For both analysed groups of information activities, the study confirmed the decreasing influence of print media (the press) accompanied by an increase in the significance of electronic communication channels (the Internet). The analysed results of the present study show that social media are increasingly becoming a source of knowledge on the surrounding reality and at the same time an opinion-forming source. They are partly supplanting the previously dominant television communication. Social media are specific communication channels that have in fact become communication networks rather than media in the traditional sense of the term.[51] It must be admitted that in the United Kingdom social media have a considerable opinion-forming impact on recipients,[52] which the results of the present study also confirm.

A factor that may have had an effect on the assessment of the information activities undertaken by the Polish and British authorities among frequent social media users – or, more broadly, Internet media users – is the issue of personal selection and choice of media content skills.[53] The Internet offers much wider opportunities for acquiring knowledge about the surrounding reality, provided that the recipient is aware of the possibility that the message reaching them may have been manipulated.[54] This is why some authors deny that interactivity is more effective in the virtual world, referring to the contemporary digital forms of communication as 'electronic colonialism'[55] or 'media imperialism'.[56] In the virtual space, tools of selection become tools of control, including the control of information activities. An individual believing in the illusion of free choice of information is actually legitimizing this very 'on-line hegemony',[57] for reasons that include the use of information selection algorithms by digital systems.[58] It is difficult to comment unambiguously on this issue based on the presented research results. Nevertheless, this may be a point of departure for further social analyses of how conscious individuals are of the possibility of manipulation being involved in the selection of the information that reaches them.

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[50] Jas-Koziarkiewicz (2019): 82–83.
[51] Newman et al. (2020): 9.
[52] Reuters Institute (2021).
[53] Cho et al. (2022): 4–5.
[54] Brändle, Galpin, Trenz (2022): 238.
[55] Eijaz, Ahmad (2011): 136.
[56] Boyd-Barrett, Mirrlees (2019).
[57] Szpunar (2017): 9–11.
[58] Salaverría, León (2022): 109.

Another issue that deserves a brief comment is the phenomenon of digital exclusion affecting a certain part of society, which may also have an effect on the assessment of the information activities undertaken by both Polish and British authorities. Older adults do not use the Internet as often as young people do. Conscious and effective new media use is undoubtedly a characteristic of the younger generation.[59]

Previous empirical research results clearly indicated that the family was the environment in which current social and political issues were most often discussed.[60] When looking at the presented research results, one can indeed conclude that the family is an element of both knowledge transmission and opinion formation, but not as strong as the mass media. Moreover, as noted above, respondents' assessment of the information activities implemented by both Polish and British authorities was also influenced by the individual's social environment – for example, by members of the clergy.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The technological changes resulting in the widespread use of information from various sources, combined with the increase in people's distrust of the traditional political and media elites and expert knowledge,[61] have created favourable conditions for exploring the subject of the sources of knowledge about the surrounding reality in the time of Brexit and the ways in which they can influence the assessment of information activities. It seems that the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of these activities had a significant impact on public opinion regarding this important socio-political issue,[62] not only for British people[63] but also for migrants living in the United Kingdom.

Today, information activities, considered in terms of effectiveness in reaching the target audience, necessitate choosing multidirectional information channels that will allow for more direct interaction with that audience. This is clearly exemplified by the information activities undertaken by the British authorities. They were assessed more positively than the communication strategies implemented by the Polish authorities. British communication made much more efficient use of technological developments in the field of news transmission, thanks to the latest information activity channels (social media).

One of the reasons why British communication in this area is more effective is the huge popularity of social media in the UK. They offer, to some extent, direct interaction not only with leading politicians but also allow for communication within the environments to which the individual belongs. Another fac-

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[59] Adamczyk, Betlej (2021): 125.
[60] Cybulska (2017): 1.
[61] Culloty, Suiter (2021): 10.
[62] Kozak, Wódka, Fel (2022): 30–34.
[63] Marshall, Drieschova (2018): 98.

tor that may contribute to a better assessment of the effectiveness of British communication regarding Brexit is the speed of information transfer. Tracking the latest events in real-time allows the recipient to react immediately and discuss hot topics related to Brexit. Finally, British communication on Brexit took advantage of technological developments in messaging with the latest channels of news activity due to their global reach. This is significant because the British Brexit news message was able to reach a large number of audiences not only in the UK but around the world, which was important in the context of the global nature of the Brexit precedent.

Given the good and bad sides of communication progress, it would be a mistake to underestimate new social communication solutions, especially as, if left uncultivated, they may go out of social control and deviate from proper usage. This opens further areas for in-depth research exploration of other important topics, such as the issues of media communication considered from an axiological perspective, the value of the word and image, and the ethical competencies of people responsible for information activities.

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