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## THE YOUNG GENERATION ON FAMILY AND MARRIAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

**Summary:** The purpose of this article is to find out what young people think about the image of the family and marriage they have encountered in social media. The publication will present the results of research using the diagnostic survey method. The use of this method allowed for the collection of data necessary to solve specific research problems. The research was carried out on 116 secondary school students, including 84 girls and 32 boys. All respondents are residents of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship. The research involved a survey on the respondents' perception of the image of marriage and family that reached them through social networks. In addition, the respondents' views on the possible impact of the discussed image of marriage and family on people who are in adolescence were analysed, as well as a description of photos, graphics and jokes that the respondents remembered. The conclusion presents the results from the conducted research. It presents the postulates concerning both the possibility of using the positive potential of social media and the negative phenomena related to the growing popularity of websites, which very often promote anti-values and undermine the traditional role of marriage and family..

**Keywords:** Internet, youth, family, marriage, social media.

### Introduction

The Internet was invented in the late 1960s as part of research conducted for the military. The early 1990s marked the creation of the first www sites. From that point, the Internet entered a period of rapid growth and became a global network. But at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the model of Internet usage has changed. The people who would regard the Internet as a well of information are now co-creators of its resources, turning from the consumers to the producers of content. (Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, 2011, p. 143) Information technology literature coined a term for that new concept of the Internet – Web 2.0. (DiNucci, 1999, p. 32) Enter social media, designed with the overarching aim of

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enabling dialogue and interaction amongst all the participants. Social media include the typical social networking services but also blogs, message boards, video- and image-sharing platforms, or product/service review websites.

The phenomenon of using social media by young people has been many times subjected to research and scientific reflection. Researchers focused mainly on the impact of social media on the health of their users, (Kawiak-Jawor, Kaczoruk, Kaczor-Szkodny, 2019; Porycka, 2016; Ludwisiak, Polguy, Majos, Drygas, 2016) among others, and on their impact on the beliefs and personal choices that young people make. (Ceglińska, Kopeć-Ziemczyk, 2016; Sigda, 2018) The author of the paper does not know any research that would directly refer to the image of marriage and family in social media in the opinion of young people. The modern youth use traditional media: the press, the radio and television less frequently than their peers from a decade ago. In December 2019, 27.7 million Poles surfed the Web (14 million women and 13.7 million men), with the average user spending nearly 1 hour and 37 minutes online every day. The largest number of users accessed the Internet on a mobile phone, 23.7 million times a month on average. (PBI, 2020)<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, more and more people cease to use the global network as they used to several years ago. The visitors of “traditional” sites are dwindling, whereas the popularity of social media is constantly on the rise. Many young people start their day with a digest of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram notifications rather than longer articles published on web portals. Social media are also increasingly commonly employed in education, as discussed in multiple publications. (Ligeża, Wilk, 2016)

Social media are tools with a huge range of impact, with the power to forge public opinion and beliefs, particularly among the young. It could be said they have revolutionised, to some extent, the world of interpersonal relations, presenting us with the opportunity to communicate anytime, anywhere, as long as we retain an electronic device and an Internet connection. Since the prevalent Polish usage is to employ the terms: “social media”, “social networking services”, “social network”, “social networking sites” interchangeably, let us note that this paper refers to “social media” to denote “information transmission completed through social networking services in the multimedia form of a multi-channel network communication.” (Polańska, 2011, p. 1)

At this point, I believe it is worthwhile to emphasise that the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has brought ground-breaking advancements in the domains of not only technology and the media but also culture. Mariusz Jędrzejko attributes

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<sup>1</sup> August 2019 marked a record number of people (24.3 million) accessing the Internet through their mobile phones. The group who browsed the Web on their desktop computers and notebooks is only slightly smaller, totalling a monthly average of 22.7 million people.

the progress to the presence of the following factors: a transformed model of work and shared living of the parents (phenomena such as “family at the crossroads”, cohabitation); economic migration within the country borders and abroad (Euro-orphanhood); family time spent in front of a TV, computer, or tablet screen; the key role of digital media in the formation of opinions and attitudes of the youth, which often leads to a decline of moral norms and the promotion of the “lesser evil philosophy”; the cult of success; continuous reinforcement of the need for consumption; a shift from the concept of “being” to “having;” the growth of an advertising market addressed directly or indirectly at children or adolescents. (Jędrzejko, 2015, pp. 253–256) The transformation concerns primarily the youngest generation which grows up in an environment of the omnipresent media. Hitherto, it was the parents who took responsibility for the upbringing of their offspring and their social, emotional, or physical development. However, with the advancements in new information technologies, parents seem to face an increasingly difficult task. Oftentimes, the adults lack sufficient awareness of who and how brings up their offspring, through social media or otherwise. Considering that most modern adolescents are more proficient users of information technology tools than their parents<sup>2</sup>, we should come to terms with the existence of “new educators” who will exploit social media to affect the views of the young generation on a number of topics, including marriage and family. Consequently, they will be presented in the article the self-reported youth opinions on the image of marriage and family. The older generation are often convinced that the world of social media is, to a large extent, evil. Meanwhile, let us remember that the enormity of information posted on social networking sites prevents any attempts at an investigation (or even a general determination) of its contents. The overall picture of social media will always be in the eye of the beholder, dependent on the individual selection of added friends and followed profiles.

### **Study methodology and result analysis**

Research presented in this paper aims to capture the image of marriage and family that is most commonly formulated in social media. Meanwhile, the topic of research concerns youth opinion on the prevalent image of marriage and family in social media.

The study accepted the following define of the main problem: It is assumed that in the opinions of young people, the negative image of marriage and family,

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<sup>2</sup> Modern parents and educators of the youth also access social media. For this reason, some adolescents use services unknown to the older generations, such as Snapchat or TikTok.

which they perceive in social media, will prevail. The research problem is further concretised with several questions: What is their perception of the image of marriage in social media?

- 1) What is their perception of the image of the family in social media?
- 2) Do they believe that the image of marriage and family created in social media affects their peers?
- 3) Which images (such as drawings, photos, statements) related to the image of marriage and family have stuck in their memory?

The main hypothesis adopted in the study is that the negative image of marriage and family perceived in social media will prevail in the opinions of the youth.

The study also investigates a number of particular hypotheses formulated in line with the research questions above:

- 1) The hypothesis that, in the eyes of the respondents, social media play a significant role in shaping the opinions of their users.
- 2) The hypothesis that the respondents have remembered mainly include derisive images (such as drawings, photos, statements) denigrating marriage and family.

In order to verify the hypotheses and attain the intended research aim, the study employs several variables which may be regarded as an attempt to concretise the research problems and the working hypotheses under analysis. (Łobocki, 1999, p. 126) The list of variables has been included in the study concept, which allowed the author to make optimal decisions regarding both the selected study methods and techniques and the resources. Academic research relies heavily on the division of variables by their causal relationships and dependencies. In that regard, the study employs independent and dependent variables. Dependent variables are observable and random. Independent variables are observable and fixed. The former refers to the explicit behaviour of the object. The latter – to the influences or conditions selected or created by the researcher. (Maszke, 2008, pp. 110–116) The independent variable is:

- marriage and family.

The dependent variables include:

- the role of social media in the formation of youth opinion on marriage and family;
- the importance of opinion exchanges conducted in social media and concerning marriage and family for the attitudes and actual behaviour of the youth in this regard;

- the types of social networking sites, including those selected most frequently by the young generation;
- time constraints regarding communication through social networking sites.

The study was conducted with the use of a diagnostic survey method, employed for the collection of data necessary to solve the research problems defined above. Furthermore, the study adopted the survey technique, useful for the aggregation of the findings in an orderly, comprehensible manner. The research tool was a survey questionnaire devised by the author and comprising three parts: introductory instructions, demographic questions, and the main part including seven questions. The form was sent in early March 2019 through the online Facebook Messenger communicator to three girls and three boys from secondary schools based in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship. The students were asked to fill out the questionnaire and forward it to their peers through social media. In 48 hours, the author received 116 responses.

The sample group included 84 girls and 32 boys. The number of respondents and the gender distribution are shown in Chart 1.

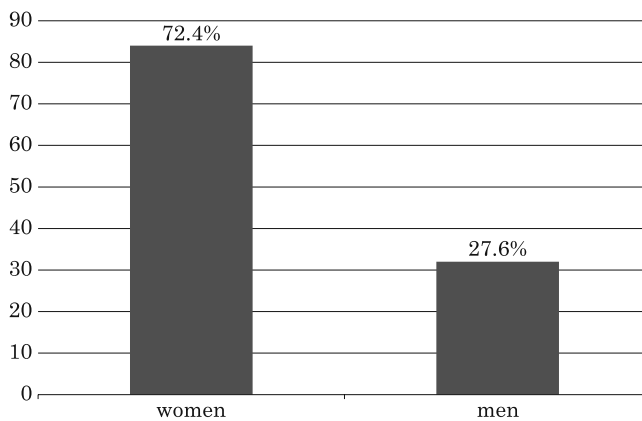


Chart 1. Number of respondents split by gender

Source: own research.

The majority of respondents were female (more than 2/3 of the sample group). The completed forms suggest that girls are more willing to share their observations on marriage and family than boys, which accounts for their dominance in the group of voluntary respondents. Conversely, the supposition that boys are less ardent users of social media appears ill-founded, as confirmed by the answer to the first question referring to the frequency of social media use.

The second demographic question (included to confirm the respondent's enrolment in a secondary school) required the respondents to mark the type of school they attended. Types of schools attended by the respondents are shown in Chart 2.

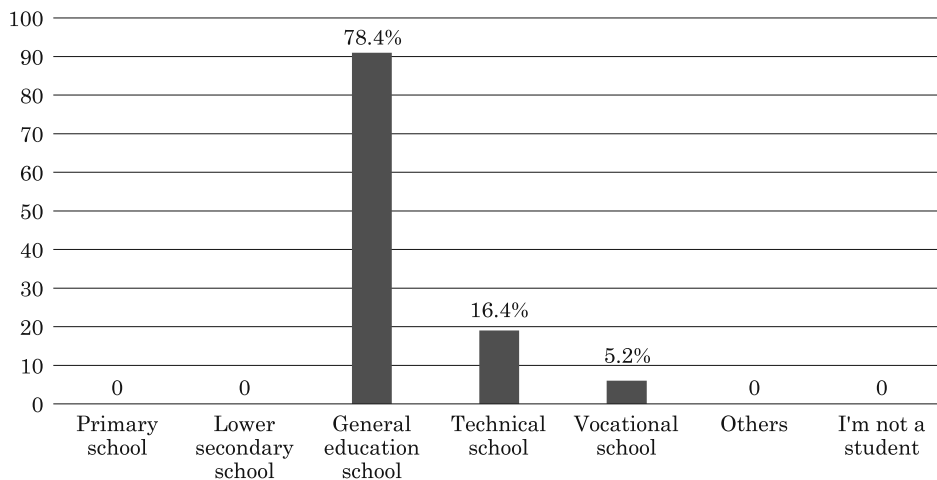


Chart 2. Types of schools attended by the respondents

Source: own research.

The majority of the respondents attended general education schools (78.4%),<sup>3</sup> and fewer than 1/5 (16.4%) – technical schools. The smallest group was comprised of vocational school students (5.2%). Since all the respondents confirmed their enrolment in a secondary school, none of the completed questionnaires was excluded from the analysis.

The main part opened with a question regarding the amount of time dedicated to social media use every day. The responses provided by the respondents are shown in Chart 3.

The answers reveal that the sample group included no people who refrained from using social media every day. The vast majority (73.3%) were users spending online approximately 2 hours per day. Nearly 1/4 of the respondents (24.1%) accessed social media for approximately 1 hour. The percentage of people using social media for 3 hours seems minor in proportion to the whole group.

<sup>3</sup> Translator's note: Secondary schools in Poland include general education schools, technical schools and vocational schools.

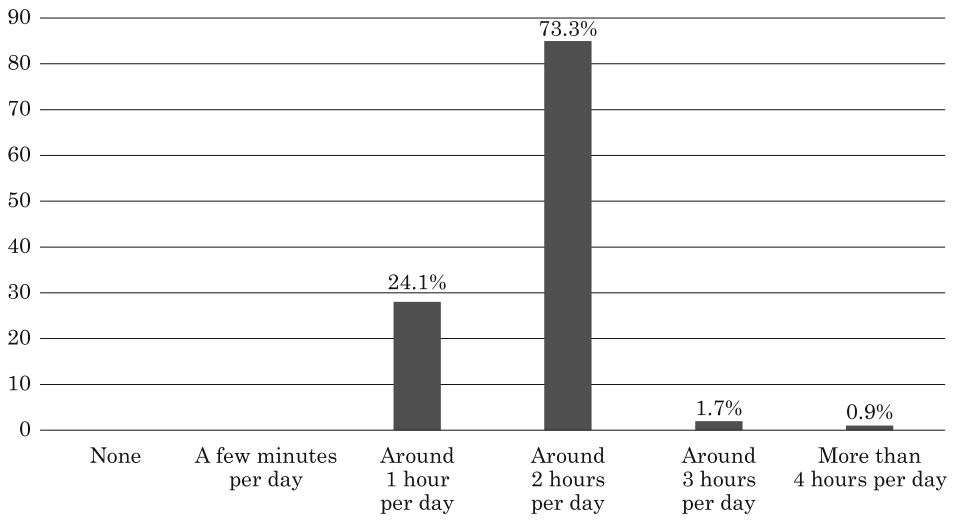


Chart 3. Average amount of time dedicated to social media use every day

Source: own research.

The second question referred to the names of social media used by the sample group. All respondents provided answers, which are shown in Chart 4.

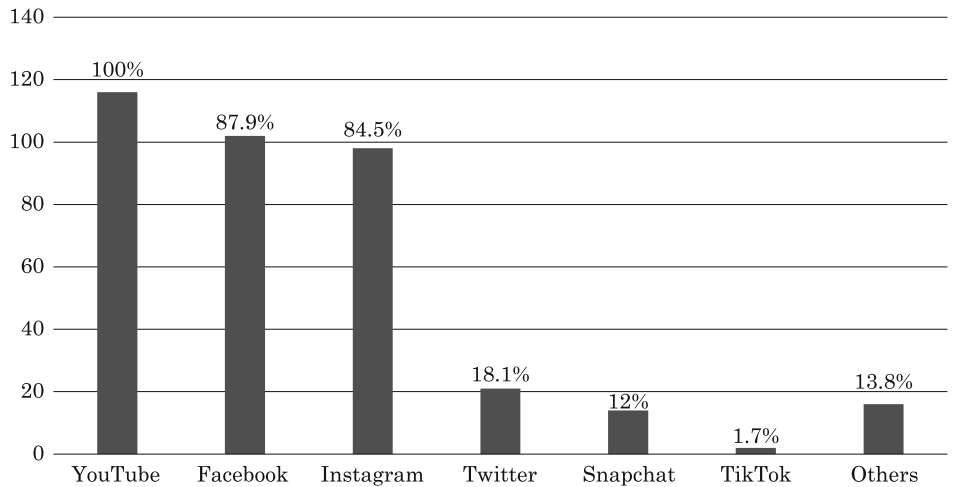


Chart 4. The names of social media used by the respondents

Source: own research.

The percentages do not add up to a hundred because every respondent could mark any number of answers. All of the respondents confirmed their use of YouTube, a video streaming service. Even though YouTube was not originally an social media channel, it was included in this category upon the addition of video ranking features, the comments section and subscriber groups. Facebook is used by a majority of the respondents (87.9%.) Notably, the group includes all girls and only 18 boys (56.2%.) Instagram enjoys a comparable popularity to Facebook (84.5%.) but with no statistically significant disparity in the gender distribution. Twitter is used by fewer than 1/5 of the respondents (18.1%) and Snapchat has only 14 users (12%). In both cases, the boys constitute a slight majority. The TikTok app was marked by 2 boys (1.7%) only. It should be noted that out of 16 people claiming the use of other social media, nobody provided a name.

The third question was: In your opinion, what is the image of marriage created by social media users? The answers are shown in Chart 5.

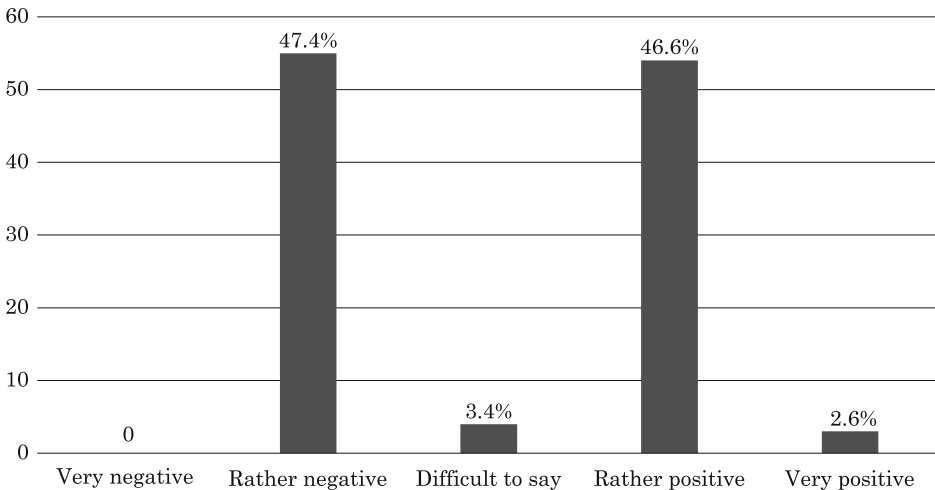


Chart 5. The image of marriage created by social media users in the opinion of the respondents  
Source: own research.

All the respondents answered the question. Only four people (3.4%) found it “difficult to say” whether the image of marriage was negative or positive. Nearly half of the respondents (47.4%) assessed the image of marriage in social media as “rather negative”, whereas the “rather positive” answer was marked by only one person less (46.6%.) Even though the “very positive” option was chosen by only three respondents, it should be noted that positive opinions on the image of marriage in social media prevailed by a minimum margin (49.2%.) The results reveal statistically significant gender differences in answering the



question. All the “very positive” answers were provided by girls, whereas the “rather positive” option was chosen by only three boys. The gender distribution for the “difficult to say” answers was equal.

The fourth question required the respondents to assess the image of the family. The answers are shown in Chart 6.

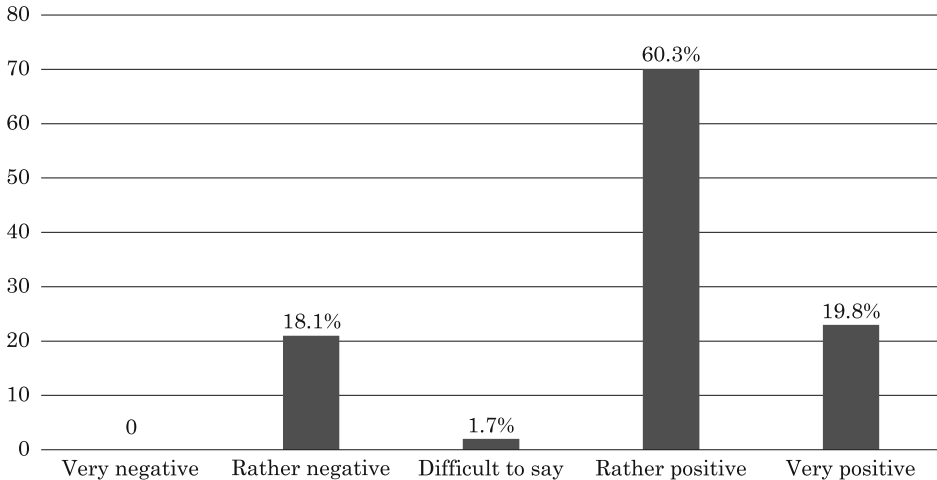


Chart 6. The image of the family created by social media users in the opinion of the respondents  
Source: own research.

All the respondents answered the question. Only 2 (1.7%) found it “difficult to say” whether the image of marriage was negative or positive. Most respondents (60.3%) assessed the image of the family in social media as “rather positive,” whereas nearly 1/5 (19.8%) – as “very positive.” Nobody marked the “very negative” option, and the “rather negative” option was chosen by fewer than 1/5 of the group (18.1%). Notably, the results revealed no statistically significant gender differences in answering the question.

The fifth question inquired the adolescents about their opinions regarding the influence of the social media on shaping user opinions. In its intentionally general wording, the question referred to the broadly understood images of reality created by social media. Consequently, it also concerned the image of marriage and family. The answers are shown in Chart 7.

All the respondents answered the question. Nobody chose the option “no influence.” Only six people (5.2%) found the matter difficult to judge. The people convinced that social media exerts a minor influence on user beliefs represent 1/10 of the sample group (10.3%). Meanwhile, a preponderance of the respondents (84.5%) believe that social media has a profound influence on their users.

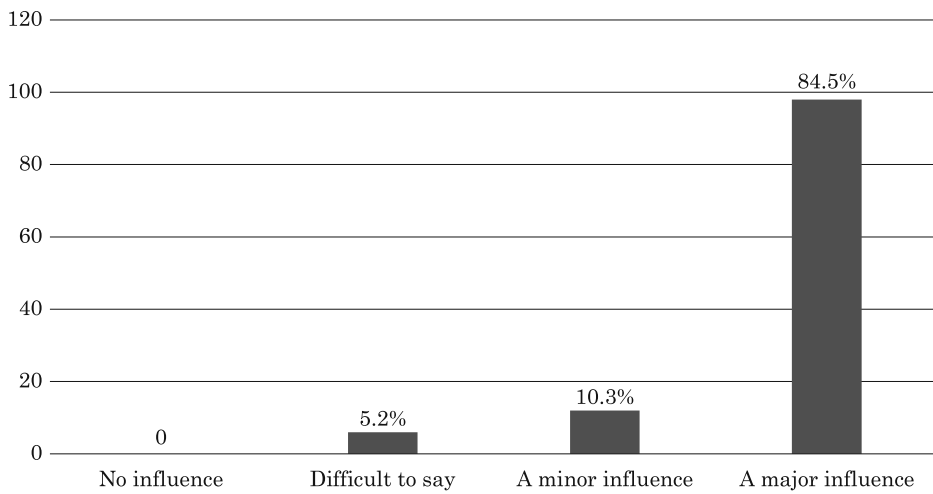


Chart 7. Answers to the question: "What is the influence of social media on the beliefs of their users?"

Source: own research.

Points six and seven were open-ended questions. The former asked the respondents for a brief description of images relating to marriage (photos, graphics, jokes, memories and so on) which particularly stuck in their memory. The question garnered seven answers (6%) presented below:

- "some stereotypes such as: women are from Venus, men are from Mars. As if women were some isolated beings operating by incomprehensible, different rules"

- "photos of famous people with their spouses"

- "all the images that normalise the idleness of the husbands and the never-ending housekeeping of the women"

- "[...] somebody published a story about his wife's fight against cancer. Despite the illness, the woman was still joyful and full of life, so the husband could not stand the thought of losing his beloved. Eventually, the woman overcame cancer and the post ended with their photo together. That story has really stuck in my memory"

- "a photo of a couple kissing on the seaside at sunset :)"

- "usually, the images showing how awful it is to be married, such as a husband getting home late at night, drunk, and the wife waiting for him with a rolling pin (to scare him / hit him)"

- "quotes such as: if you don't love me at my worst then you don't deserve me at my best."

In the seventh question, respondents were asked to provide a brief description of images about the family which they have in their memory (photos, graphics,

jokes, memories, etc.). This question was answered by 6 people. The answers are listed below:

- “it stuck in my memory that 5 out of 10 older (>40) Facebook users post the photos of their children/grandchildren on their public pages, free to view for any user of the platform”
- “rather funny stories from married life”
- “a normal family is a he and a she”<sup>4</sup>
- “father hugging a new-born”
- “photos of happy families”
- “a photo of an Instagram user showing her with her husband and children (aged 3 and 4) cooking dinner together. The girls, all covered in flour, were cutting the dough for pierogies with plastic knives. You could see they were all happy to cook and saw the activity as good fun rather than an ordinary house chore. The user also added photos of them all cleaning after cooking and eating together.”

### Conclusions and postulates

The young frequently say: “if you’re not on Facebook, you don’t exist”. With the advancement of digital technologies, and mobile devices in particular, modern societies have gained almost unlimited access to social media wherever they are. The answers of the young reveal the image of marriage and family they perceive during the daily use of their social media.

In reference to the particular hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the study, one should note the confirmation of Hypothesis 1, as the vast majority of respondents (73.3%) use social media for approximately two hours every day. At this point, let us note that the youth access social media with similar frequency as most social media users in 2019 according to the “Digital 2019”<sup>5</sup>.

Hypothesis 2 was only partially confirmed. Whereas the preponderance of the respondents are indeed Facebook users (93.9%), however, all the respondents confirmed their use of YouTube, which makes it the most popular service for the sample group. Notably, the respondents use mainly the most popular social media in the world and thus do not differ significantly from other users of these services (Kuchta-Nykiel, 2018).

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<sup>4</sup> Translator’s note in Polish: *chłopak dziewczyna normalna rodzina*. A popular anti-LGBT slogan.

<sup>5</sup> According to the „Digital 2019” report, every person accessing social media used them for an average of 2 hours, 16 minutes. Notably, that time gets longer with each year. *Ilu użytkowników korzysta z sieci i social media w 2019 roku?* (2019, Feb. 18), in: *RunPrimeMedia* [online], access: <<http://www.runprime.pl/27/ilu>>, 3.01.2020.

Hypothesis 3 that “in the eyes of the respondents, social media plays a significant role in shaping the opinions of their users” was well-founded. Let us note that no respondent backed the supposition that MS exerted no influence on the views of their users. Only six people (5.2%) refrained from taking a stance on the matter. Meanwhile, an overwhelming majority (as many as 98 people – 84.5%) regard social media as a major factor in the opinion formation process.

The fourth and the final particular hypothesis: “the respondents have remembered mainly mean, derisive images (such as drawings, photos, statements) denigrating marriage and family” was not corroborated. It should be noted that the respondents who provided answers represented a tiny fraction of the sample group. That outcome was probably due to the open-ended character of the questions, as most adolescents had no willingness to describe the images they remembered. Even though the answers relevant to the hypothesis were an extremely small minority, they formed a positive image of marriage and family communicated in social media.

The main hypothesis that “the negative image of marriage and family perceived in social media will prevail in the opinions of the youth” draws on the stereotypical perception of social media as deleterious and menacing to traditional values. The analysis of the answers refutes this hypothesis since the majority of the sample group do not perceive the image of marriage and family in social media as exclusively negative. Nevertheless, let us note the rather significant differences in the perception of marriage and family. When discussing marriage, nearly half of the respondents (47.4%) judged its image in social media as “rather negative,” while a similar percentage (46.5%) selected the option “rather positive.” Even though only three respondents pointed to the answer “very positive,” we should declare that the favourable assessments of the image of marriage on social media prevailed by a minimum margin (49%.) At this point, it is worth noting that a strong majority of girls have a positive or very positive perception of the image of marriage, whereas the majority of unfavourable verdicts were given by boys. Notably, as many as 30 (93.7%) of the boys chose the option “rather negative.” Such radical gender differences in beliefs are a point to ponder. Its exploration appears to be an interesting research idea that could provide a better understanding of the processes unfolding in the lives of modern youth.

With regard to the image of marriage in social media, the hypothesis was categorically refuted, since as many as 93 people (80.2%,) which is a substantial majority, perceive the image of family as positive.

At the point of formulating the postulates arising from the research, one should definitely emphasise the enormous popularity of social media, which makes them a major factor in the opinion formation process, particularly among

youth. Their potential should be unlocked, also in the scope of the dissemination and perpetuation of the favourable images of marriage and family. This postulate is addressed to all the social media users concerned with the future of the young generation. It is a worthwhile goal to use social media to disseminate (post, like, and so on) content that portrays marriage and family as a foundation of society, imbued with some immutable characteristics arising from the psychological and biological properties of males and females.

The considerations above concern the promotion of a positive image of marriage and family in social media. However, one should also address the negative phenomena observed in social media such as the supplantation of traditional family values, the relaxation of moral and customary norms and the promotion of non-marital and homosexual relationships and a lifestyle dedicated to the satisfaction of hedonistic whims, free from responsibility for another person. Therefore, at this point, one should appeal to all users of social media to refrain from the dissemination of such content, especially if it takes the form of a joke about marriage or the family. Moreover, the author propounds that the social media owners and moderators block the accounts of people that insult or denigrate marital and family values, just like they negate the content that constitutes an infringement upon the law (as it involves violence, pornography, etc.).

As the new behavioural patterns related to marital and family life gain ground through social media, they reach the young and shape their opinions. The content published also in social media will affect the level of acceptance, dissemination, and thus the realisation, of the forms of marital and family life by modern youth. Therefore, the growing popularity and development of social media create a need for research contributing to the description of the social processes transpiring in their environment. Such research should not only provide a better insight into the current phenomena but also translate to tangible actions sufficient to preserve traditional values, undeniably exemplified by marriage and family.

When summarising the findings of the research presented above, we should note several questions that remain and shall be asked. What will the discussed image look like in several years? Will the negative processes detrimental to marriage and family continue? Will the number of new marriages keep falling while divorce statistics continue to grow? Will the social media users promote a positive image of marriage and family? For one thing is beyond doubt – that social media will continue affecting the beliefs of the youth and their decisions.

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## **Młode pokolenie o rodzinie i małżeństwie w mediach społecznościowych**

**Streszczenie:** Celem autora było poznanie opinii młodych ludzi na temat wizerunku rodziny i małżeństwa, z którym spotkali się w mediach społecznościowych. W publikacji zostały zaprezentowane wyniki badań własnych, w których wykorzystano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego. Zastosowanie tej metody umożliwiło zgromadzenie danych, niezbędnych do rozwiązania sprecyzowanych szczegółowo problemów badawczych. Badania przeprowadzono w grupie 116 uczniów szkół ponadpodstawowych (84 dziewczęta i 32 chłopcy). Wszyscy ankietowani są mieszkańcami województwa warmińsko-mazurskiego. Przeanalizowano także poglądy ankietowanych na temat ewentualnego wpływu omawianego wizerunku małżeństwa i rodziny na osoby, które są w wieku dojrzewania. W zakończeniu przedstawiono wnioski z przeprowadzonych badań i zaprezentowano postulaty dotyczące zarówno możliwości wykorzystania pozytywnego potencjału mediów społecznościowych, jak i negatywnych zjawisk, związanych ze wzrostem popularności serwisów internetowych, które często służą do promowania antywartości i podważania tradycyjnej roli małżeństwa oraz rodziny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Internet, młodzież, rodzina, małżeństwo, media społecznościowe.

