

SOCIAL MEDIA AND HUMAN CAPITAL – HOW FACEBOOK CREATES SOCIAL CAPITAL?

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Abstract:

Issues related to social media seem to be particularly important at the time when we observe processes connected with globalization. The text outlines social networking and social capital of people who use Facebook in their everyday life compared with the social capital of Facebook non-users. The contemporary society and especially young people build their social networks through Facebook. While defining what a social network is, the article also presents a picture of social changes in building relations caused by Internet in the 21th century Europe. The presented results are based on a survey conducted in 2015. This survey shows the difference between the social capital of people who use Facebook and the social capital of people who do not use Facebook. In the present study, the social capital of Facebook users is understood as a form of social activity (meetings, conversations), involvement and activities in social organizations (membership, organization, spreading social information).

Keywords: social media, social networking, human capital, social capital, society, Facebook

1. INTRODUCTION

The social capital is a concept between sociology and economics. The best-known theorists of the social capital are James Coleman, Robert Putnam, Pierre Bourdieu and Francis Fukuyama (Sierocińska, 2011, p. 1). Individual authors pointed out various elements which form the whole of what is meant by this term. Robert Putnam defines the social capital as "the features of a social organization such as networks (systems) of individuals or households, as well as associated norms and values which create external effects for the whole community" (Pogonowska, 2004, p.16). R. Putnam considers trust, altruism and any grassroots initiative organized by a given group as particularly important for the social capital. Individuals entering into relationships and organizing their lives collectively form a new quality that benefits the whole community as well as themselves (Sierocińska, 2011, p. 2). J. Coleman draws attention to the uniqueness of the social capital generated in small groups (Sierocińska, 2011, pp. 3-4). A slightly different approach to this issue is proposed by Pierre Bourdieu who focuses on the social capital of the associated individuals. According to Bourdieu, the social capital is all real and potential resources of the individual resulting from owning a network of relations based on acquaintance. In this case special attention is drawn to the number of the individual's acquaintances and what they are (Bourdieu, 1986). The social capital is understood as a resource used to achieve economic and social aims. As the described form of capital is a very important component influencing socio-economic development, it is explored by such institutions as the World Bank which defines it as associations, institutions, values and attitudes guiding interpersonal relations and affecting the socio-economic development (World Bank, 2002, p. 2). The level of the social capital is significant for both social life as well the economy or politics (Fukuyama, 2003, pp. 169-170).

The concept of social capital has gained new connotations with the appearance and popularization of contemporary forms of communication which led to a number of social changes. Media and mass-media in the 20th and 21st century have changed the face of the reality. Researchers note huge changes caused by the influence of these phenomena. New terms describing these transformations were created - J. Baudrillard writes about simulacra (Baudrillard, 2005, pp. 629-638), P. Levy about the second flood (Levy, 2005, pp. 373-390), and finally T. O'Reilly about Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005) - all of the abovementioned terms describe phenomena related to, among others, the proliferation of new media and the effects of their impact on the social reality. Modern media make it possible to establish friendly contacts, make transactions, transfer knowledge and exchange skills in a manner which was until now unknown. Building relationships between heterogeneous groups of people seems to be a phenomenon bearing many new promising opportunities (Levy, 2005, p. 374). Since the emergence of ICT people have been able to lead social life, establish and maintain relationships without leaving home (Kwieciński, Czerwiński, 2010, p. 5).

Today the Internet is becoming an increasingly important tool enabling access to information and communication as well as the development of social capital which is significant both for the private and professional life. It is considered one of the most essential factors of socio-economic changes. In recent years, social networks, and especially the largest of them – Facebook, have become particularly important. Since the beginning of its existence, Facebook has been constantly expanding the circle of its users and it is the first social network the members of which exceed a billion people. According to the data of March 2015, the number of Facebook accounts amounted to 1 billion 415 million worldwide (Statista, 2015), while it is forecast that the number of people using the Internet in general in 2015 will exceed 3 billion (wirtualnemedi, 2014), which means that half of the people around the world with access to the Internet is registered to Facebook. In Poland, the number of Internet users amounts to approximately 23 million (wirtualnemedi, 2014), Other data indicate that approximately 63% of the population has access to the Internet (Felisiak, 2014), among which there is approximately 95 % of young people aged 18-34, and 80% of people aged 35-44 (Felisiak, 2014). Polish research shows that 92% of 18-24 years old, 78% of 25-34 years old and 56% of 35-44 years old have an account on a social networking site (Felisiak, 2014). In Poland the main purpose of using them is keeping in touch with friends (54%), listening to music, viewing photos, reading texts (38%). About 15% of users use social networks for searching for a job and maintaining business contacts (Felisiak, 2014). The instrumental use of the Internet (ie. business and professional purpose) is most evident among the 24-59 years old (Batorski, 2014, p. 379). As Dominik Batorski writes in Social Diagnosis 2013, "the development of information and communication technologies and the dissemination of their use contribute to the increasing transformation of the entire sphere of life". (Batorski, 2014, p. 357). Modern technologies and methods of their use are a condition to a full

participation in the social life, and they offer the possibility of expanding the social capital, as well as the creation of its new form - social capital mediated by the Internet, and especially instant messaging and social networking sites.

In the present paper, the attention is focused on the individual social capital, which is produced by the Internet, in particular by the social network Facebook.

For the purpose of the present text of the social capital of Facebook users is understood as a form of social activity (meetings, conversations), commitment and activity in community organizations (membership, organization, spreading information about social events).

2. METHODS

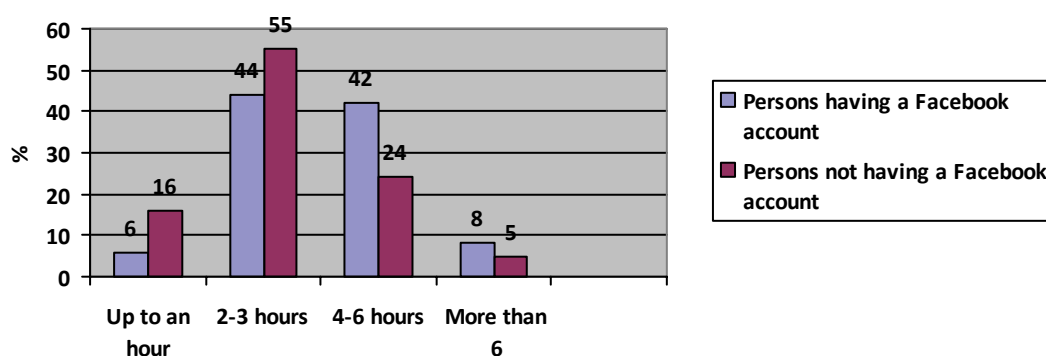
Measuring the social capital is not easy, because it is a complex concept defined in a number of slightly different ways. During the research of the social capital, the researchers' attention is drawn to several key factors, such as membership in voluntary groups, turnout, reading magazines, trust, and altruism. In order to answer the questions: What is the social capital of young people who have an account on Facebook? What are the differences between the social capital of people who have a Facebook account and those do not have it? a study using a quantitative method was carried out. After having reviewed the already conducted research and the available literature, the following hypothesis was put: Having a Facebook account differentiates the level of social capital of young people. Facebook users have a larger stock of social capital than Facebook non-user. In order to verify or falsify the research hypothesis a comparative study was conducted in March 2015. A specifically prepared questionnaire containing 15 main questions and 5 questions on demographics served as the research tool. The used sampling was a snowball sampling consisting in contacting a few persons from the tested population and asking them to contact further respondents. People aged 20-40 were questioned as they were considered the most socially and professionally active social group, intensively building its social capital stock, who in the vast majority use the Internet and Facebook (confirmed by the data presented above). The comparative group (B) was selected in a way to make it possible to compare the two groups. It consists of people with a Facebook account and having socio-demographic characteristics similar to those of the primary group (A), who do not have a Facebook account. A total of 200 people were surveyed, 100 of them not having a Facebook account and 100 of them having it.

For the purpose of this study, a social capital ratio being an index containing data such as: participation in elections, trust in other people, number of friends and acquaintances, membership in voluntary associations (groups), activeness in organizing social events, participation in social and cultural life (concerts, theaters, restaurants, meeting friends) was created (Kwieciński, Czerwiński, 2010, pp. 7-8).

3. RESULTS

The research used a tool consisting of closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. The aim of first question was to determine the number of hours spent per day on using the Internet by persons having an account on Facebook.

Figure 1: How many hours a day do you use the Internet?

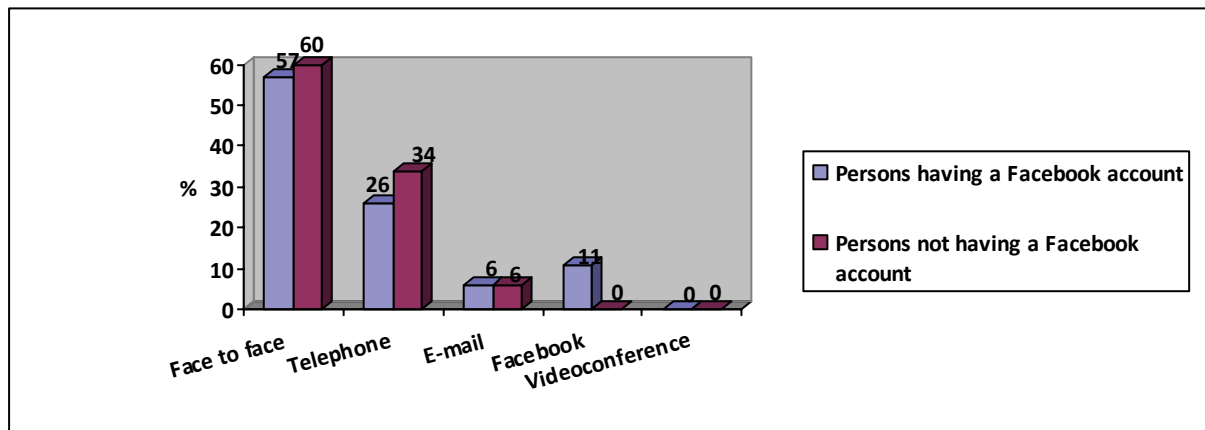


Source: own work

The results show that 44% of Facebook users and 55% of Facebook non-users spend between 2 and 3 hours a day using the Internet. 42% of people using this social network, and 24% of people not using it dedicate 4 to 6 hours. More than 6 hours a day are spent in the net by of 6% of Facebook users, and 5% of those without an account on this portal. 6% of respondents having an account on Facebook and 16% of respondents not having access to this social network uses the Internet less than an hour a day.

The second question aimed to show the preferred type of communication most often used by people using and not using Facebook.

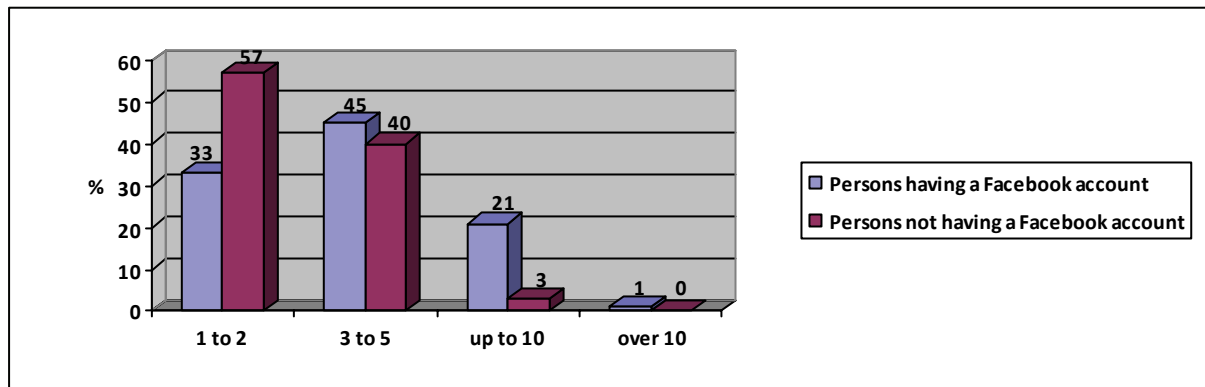
Figure 2: Which type of communication do you use the most often?



Source: own work

It is found that both Facebook users (57%) and Facebook non-users (60%) mostly prefer the face to face contact. Another commonly used type of communication is the phone, which is used in everyday life by 26% of surveyed people with Facebook account and 34% without it. 11% of the respondents communicate through Facebook. 6% of respondents using and not using Facebook use the e-mail. Nobody in the surveyed groups prefers videoconferences as the main means of communication. The third question was to determine the number of people who Facebook users and non-users considered as friends.

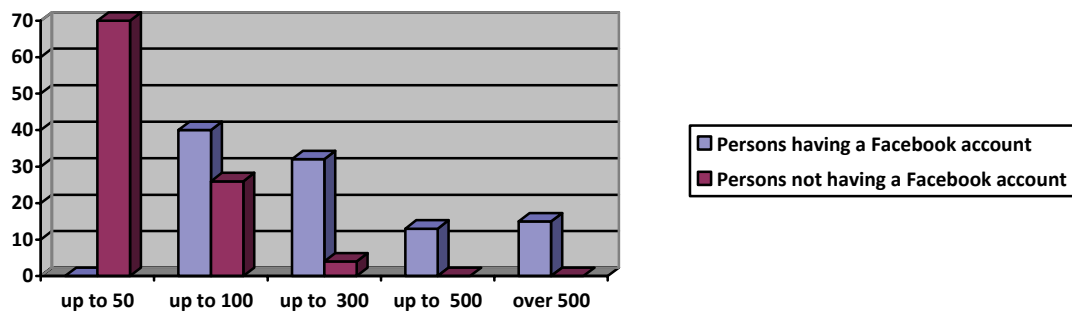
Figure 3: How many persons do you consider as your friends?



Source: own work

Most respondents who have an account on Facebook, (45%) have 3 to 5 friends, then 33% declare having 1 to 2 friends, 21% admit to have up to 10 friends, and only 1% of them claim to have more than 10 friends. Most people who do not have a Facebook account (57%) have between 1 and 2 friends, followed by 40% of the respondents who have 3 to 5 and only 3% of them who have up to 10 friends. Data presented in figure 3 shows the difference in the number of friends of those with and without a Facebook account. Facebook users have a lot more friends than its non-users. The next question to the respondents draws attention to the number of acquaintances held by the surveyed person.

Figure 4: How many persons do you consider as your acquaintance?

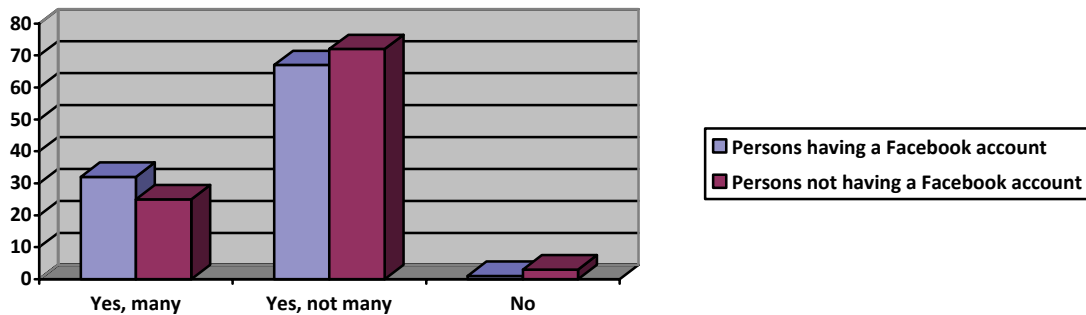


Source: own work

Most respondents who have an account on Facebook, (40%) have up to 100 acquaintances, then 32% say that they have up to 300 acquaintances and as much as 15% of respondents admit that this number is bigger than 500, followed by 13% of them claiming to have up to 500 acquaintances. Most people who do not have an account on this social networking (70%) have 50 acquaintances, then 26% of respondents have 100 of them and only 4% of respondents admit to have 300 acquaintances. These results indicate that Facebook users claim that they have a lot more acquaintances than those who do not have an account on this social network. This may be due to the fact that while using Facebook, its users know the specific number of acquaintances which they have on their list (these are often people with whom there maintain no regular or even occasional contact). It is much more difficult for people who do not have a Facebook account to determine the exact number of acquaintances (they do not have a numerical list). They can think about people with whom they maintain a rather regular contact, and not those with whom they have no contact at all. Moreover, counting all their acquaintances (even the farthest ones) during a short survey seems to be at least difficult, so the unequivocal assumption that the number of acquaintances of Facebook users and non-users is different to such an extent may be not entirely justified.

The research also raises the question of acquaintances who live abroad and the regularity of keeping in touch with them.

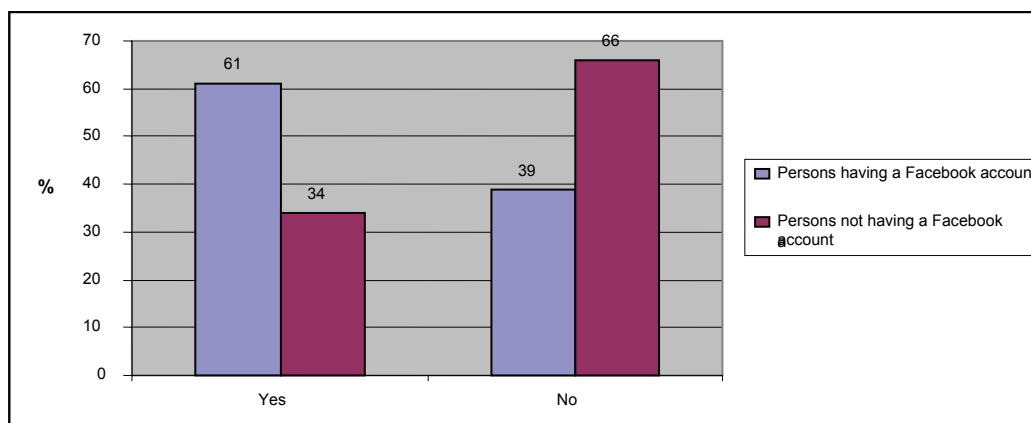
Figure 5: Do you have acquaintances who live abroad?



Source: own work

It is concluded that both Facebook users (67%) and non-users (72%) do not have many acquaintances living abroad. 32% of respondents with Facebook account and 25% without it admit having many acquaintances outside their country. Only 1% of respondents who use and 3% of respondents who do not use Facebook declare that they do not have acquaintances living abroad.

Figure 6: Do you maintain regular contact (at least once a few months) with acquaintances living abroad?



Source: own work

Maintaining regular contact with acquaintances from abroad is declared by 61% of respondents who have an account on Facebook and 34% of those who do not have an account on this website. 39% of Facebook users and 66% of its non-users do not keep regular contact with acquaintances from outside the country. This data indicates that Facebook facilitates contact with acquaintances living abroad. It can be a tool for an easy, quick and cheap means of international communication.

Comparing the social capital of people who have an account on Facebook and those that do not have it is the subject of the analysis below. The human capital was compared in the domain of: participation in elections, trust in other people, number of friends and acquaintances, membership in voluntary associations (groups), activeness in organizing social events, participation in social and cultural life (concerts, theater, restaurants, meeting acquaintances).

Table 1: Basic statistics based on the results of the social capital of Facebook users and non-users.

Human capital	Group A N=100	Group B N=100	χ^2	p
Participation in elections	36,00	22,66	11,79	p < 0,02
Trust in other people	11,07	13,04	3,36	p < 0,50
Number of friends and acquaintances	5,90	5,60	1,65	p < 0,80
Membership in voluntary associations	26,00	23,90	9,48	p < 0,05
Participation in social and cultural life	21,03	34,80	11,68	p < 0,02
Total	100	100	4,88	p < 0,30

Source: own work

Statistical analyzes reveal statistically significant differences between Facebook users and non-users in various dimensions of the social capital in the following areas: participation in elections, participation in social and cultural life, membership in voluntary associations. Respondents having a Facebook account are more likely to participate in elections than those who do not have such an account. They are also more likely to belong to any organization, association, party, committee, council, religious group, union or circle and to serve any function within them. People who have an account on Facebook actively engage in the organization of social or charity actions, and inform their acquaintances about them. On the other hand, they participate in social and cultural life less frequently than those who do not have a Facebook account (they rarely go to the cinema, theater, concert, restaurant, cafe, pub or social meetings). Although statistically significant differences exist in the above-mentioned dimensions of the social capital, the analysis shows that the overall rate is not

differentiating. The overall index balances ($\chi^2 = 4.88$), despite the differences in various dimensions. So, if there are no statistically significant differences in the overall comparison between the two groups, they exist between the various dimensions of the social capital.

4. DISCUSSION

The research of Maciej Kwieciński and Michał Czerwiński indicates that the daily use of the Internet has an impact on the social capital, even if it is marginal. It also shows the influence of various forms of online activities on the social capital (Kwieciński, Czerwiński, 2010, p. 25).

Other researchers emphasize the significance of the net in building relationships and communicating (Pieczka, 2011, p.110). The Internet has a positive impact on the local social and civic activity. People who use the Internet talk and meet their acquaintances more frequently. They strengthen social bonds using new forms of communication and more frequently contact the acquaintances who are not their neighbours. They know the members of the local community; new forms of communication such as Facebook help them to increase the number of social and local events, and social activity associated with overcoming local problems (Hampton, Wellman, 2000, p. 80). New media are of great importance in the development of communication (Broom, Casey, Ritchey, 1997, p. 85-87). The Internet has an impact on the formation of social bonds (Touraine, 2005, p. 389).

Research carried out in the present paper partially confirms the aforementioned study. It indicates that Facebook users have more friends and acquaintances, and they contact acquaintances who live abroad more often. Although they use social network, their contact with friends and family takes place mainly in the real world (face-to-face). Research of the general comparison of the human capital between the two groups indicates that there are no statistically significant differences and that they exist between its dimensions: participation in elections, social and cultural life, membership of voluntary associations.

5. CONCLUSION

Contemporary media undoubtedly cause great changes in the society. The introduction of the general use of the computer, then the Internet, and now Facebook influences a person's life in many dimensions. Conducting research on the phenomenon of what undoubtedly Facebook is seems to be the key to understand the current social reality and changes caused by this specific medium. Social networking sites can in fact increase social activity and expand contacts between people. The Internet facilitates the exchange of ideas, helps to make friends, especially if the acquaintances are staying abroad. Facebook simplifies organizing charity and social events. The study presented in this article shows that Facebook users have more friends and acquaintances, and they contact their acquaintances more frequently, even if they live abroad. The most often, the contact with acquaintances and family takes place in the real world (face to face).

The study also indicates that even if there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms a general comparison of the social capital, they nevertheless exist between its dimensions: participation in elections, social and cultural life, membership in voluntary associations. It should be noted that the study was a pilot. A non-random selection of the sample does not allow to transfer the results to the whole population. A further research based on a random sample is recommended. Analyzes taking into account the socio-demographic variables such as gender, place of residence or education may also be valuable.

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