

The flow of information about the law in the modern society

*Professor of the University of Gdańsk, Grzegorz Wierczyński Ph.D.
Faculty of Law and Administration, University of Gdańsk*

Introduction

This contribution aims at presenting an overall view on the flow of information about the law in the modern society, with a particular focus on electronic databases. The major part of the contribution will present the results of the research carried out in Poland. In other countries, the proportions between the use of individual sources of information about the law may differ, but the general models of information flow will probably remain similar.

1. Theoretical models of the flow of information about the law

As a starting point, it should be mentioned that theoretical models of the flow of information have been developed within the framework of studies on social communication.

We may start with the so-called Harold Lasswell's persuasion model. In an article published in 1948, he stated that the specific communication process may be reproduced by answering 5 questions: "who? says what? in which channel? to whom? with what effect?".¹ What is important for further considerations is the fact that in the Lasswell's model attention is paid to the effect of the process, while recognising its instrumental character. In rational legal systems, law is a tool to achieve the defined social objectives, and the effective flow of information is one of conditions for achieving these objectives.

The second model, which shows some important elements of the process of the flow of information about the law, have been created by Kurt Lewin. He noted that an important role in the information processes is played by locations connecting individual information channels, because persons or institutions, which select information and decide about its

¹ H. Lasswell, *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society* (in:) *The Communication of Ideas*, ed. by L. Bryson, Institute for Religious and Social Studies, New York, 1948, p. 216.

further sharing in this locations act as information gatekeepers.² Therefore, in examining the effectiveness of information transmission processes, special attention should be paid to the functioning of such persons or institutions.³

Another communication model, which to some extent corresponds to the presented considerations, is the so-called two-step model of the information flow. Its authors are Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld.⁴ They noted that information reaches individual members of a society in different ways and an important role in this process is played by interpersonal contacts. The information directly reaches the so-called opinion leaders, and from them – other members of the society.

Relatively the most versatile social communication model is the model proposed in 1956 by George Gerbner⁵, sometimes included among the so-called convergence models of communication. He stresses that communication is dynamic and non-linear. Information does not flow in a linear manner, but circulates within a given society, and reaches a given recipient in ever changing ways, extending his/her knowledge more and more as the time goes by. An important role in this process is played by perception abilities of participants and the context in which the message is communicated.

For a long time, the problem in the work of the theorists of law was to reconcile the universal obligation to observe the law with the actual impossibility to get to know the entire applicable law.

Originally, it was believed that an adequate level of legal awareness is guaranteed only by the knowledge of the entire law in force in a given country. In ancient Rome, knowledge of the law was considered a virtue of a Roman citizen⁶ and Cicero pointed out that in his childhood he learnt the applicable legislation by heart.⁷ It was possible, if we take into

² This observation was formulated for the first time by K. Lewin in: *Forces behind food habits and methods of change*, "Bulletin of the National Research Council", 1943, No 108, p. 35.

³ An example of this type of studies in the field of law is the study in which the authors tracked the importance of the discussed "information gatekeepers" in relation to the selected draft acts in the U.S. Congress — cf: P. Shoemaker, M. Eichholz, E. Kim, B. Wrigley, *Individual and routine forces in gatekeeping*, "Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly" 2001, No 78, p. 233.

⁴ E. Katz, P.F. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: the Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*, Free Press, New York 1955.

⁵ G. Gerbner, *Toward a General Model of Communication*, „Audio-Visual Communication Review" 1956, No 4, p. 171.

⁶ Thus for example: H. Kupiszewski, *Ignorantia iuris nocet*, "Prawo kanoniczne" 1982, No 1/2, p. 302 and literature cited therein.

⁷ Cicero, *O państwie, O prawach [On the Commonwealth and On the Laws]*, Kęty 1997, p. 147.

account the fact that this legislation was not extensive⁸, and when talking about citizens, Cicero was referring only to the representatives of a narrow, best educated social group.

Today, in the developed countries the number of the applicable legal regulations exceeds the human perception abilities. However, as Franciszek Studnicki demonstrated, the knowledge of all applicable regulations is not necessary for effective functioning of the legal system. F. Studnicki agreed that effective functioning of the legal system depends on “appropriate saturation of the human community with information about the law”⁹, but he stipulated that “such saturation does not consist in (...) providing all the members of this community with all information about the law”¹⁰. Therefore, he concluded that “the optimal state of saturation of a specific human community with such information would be the state in which each of its members is to some extent informed and has a certain resource of such information, receiving and remembering of which is necessary due to the requirements of the social roles played by this citizen, while other legal information shall be easy to obtain”¹¹. These right observations led F. Studnicki to divide the information about legal standards into three classes (categories): basic information, role-related information and *ad hoc* information.

The basic information about the applicable legal standards is, according to F. Studnicki, “essential information about the standards, determining the political system of the state, the most general awareness of the rules of major branches of law, basic information about certain procedures, etc.” and “general knowledge of the methods of finding the sources of more specific information”¹². In order to effectively influence a given community through legal standards, information belonging to the first category must be effectively communicated to the members of this community. Both from the point of view of an entire community, and its individual members, communication of this information should take place before a given individual will have the full legal capacity and active civil rights. From this point of view, communication of this information should take place as part of universal education.

The minimum role-related information is, according to F. Studnicki, “information, receiving and remembering of which is necessary for appropriate performance of the social roles played by an individual” understood as “all that is expected from individuals, due to the

⁸ Thanks to Gaius, cited in the second title of the first book of the Digest, we know that a collection of the applicable legal regulations has been written on twelve tables.

⁹ F. Studnicki, *Przepływ wiadomości o normach prawa [The flow of information about the legal norms]*, Kraków 1965, p. 69.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 60 – 70.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 70.

role they play in society”.¹³ Possession of up-to-date knowledge about legal standards governing the performance of a specific role and the practical ability to apply this knowledge are prerequisites for appropriate performance of a specific social function. In cases where a given function involves executive powers and also in cases where performing a specific function is associated with safety, health or rights of other persons, the state should introduce a requirement to demonstrate the knowledge of the specific legislation and the ability to apply them in practice. The lack of knowledge about the relevant legal standards should result in the prohibition to perform certain public functions. Detailed solutions in this regard may be found in the regulations applicable in the individual countries to specific professions or positions.

The last category of information about the applicable legal standards, called by F. Studnicki *ad hoc* information, includes the information used by a given individual “if necessary”.¹⁴ This class is the most extensive and this is the one to which the previous comments on the impossibility to learn and remember the entire legislation applicable in a given country refer to the fullest extent. In this case, the best solution is not to communicate the information (as it assumes that the information has not only been communicated but also received), but to share this information in such a way so that the persons concerned could easily find it.¹⁵ Here, we are approaching the issues considered in this contribution.

2. The flow of information about the law in the light of the results of empirical research

2.1. Introduction

Below, I will present the results of empirical research on the sources of legal information, used by the Poles, when looking for information about applicable legal standards, and on the assessment of these sources in terms of their accessibility, usefulness and reliability. The main objective of my research was to reproduce the models functioning in the society as regards seeking and verifying the information about the applicable legal standards. The first, quantitative part of the research was carried out in July 2013, using computer-assisted personal interviewing¹⁶ on a nationwide sample of 1,000 persons above 15 years of age,

¹³ F. Studnicki, *Przepływ...*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁶ Computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) is a method to carry out quantitative research, consisting in conducting interviews with respondents using portable computers. Thanks to this, answers obtained from the respondents are entered directly into a database, which shortens the duration of the study and allows to eliminate errors arising at the stage of copying the survey results into the database.

selected to ensure the representativeness of the entire Polish population.¹⁷ After the completion of the quantitative part of the research, additional qualitative research was carried out in order to extend the scope of the results obtained. This part of the research was conducted by means of focused group interviews¹⁸ with four groups of respondents – two from Gdańsk and two from Warsaw.

2.1. Sources of information about the law

2.2.1. Official journals

In discussed research the respondents were asked about using “official journals”, for example *Dziennik Ustaw*. To the question formulated in this way 10% of respondents answered that they had used this source of information “within the past 3 years”, while 7% chose the answer “I used it sometimes, but it was more than 3 years ago.” Those who used it not more than 3 years ago were mainly persons with higher education (68%), active Internet users (73% of persons using this source of information were those using the Internet everyday or almost everyday).¹⁹ In relation to the general surveyed population, overrepresented were the persons working at management positions, living in large cities, aged 30-39. The persons corresponding to this profile assessed the accessibility, usefulness and reliability of that source of information much higher. While in the general population official journals were assessed as less accessible, less useful, and even less reliable than other sources of information (8th, 7th and 6th place, respectively, among all sources of information in the rankings prepared according to the mentioned criteria), the majority of persons with higher education stated that official journals were the most useful and reliable source of information. In terms of accessibility, official journals were ranked 4th in the analysed group.

In the qualitative research, many respondents pointed out that the content of official journals was difficult to understand and therefore they sought information written in a simpler manner. They treat the text of legal regulations as a theory, abstraction, which requires comments and interpretation. Some respondents pointed out that it was necessary to refer to official journals to verify the information found in other sources, which confirmed the high opinion about the reliability of that source among the members of the analysed social groups.

¹⁷ On commission of the author of this contribution, the research was carried out by GfK Polonia.

¹⁸ Focused group interviews (FGI), sometimes called focus groups, are interviews carried out by a moderator with a group of 6-8 persons. The advantage of this method are interactions between participants in the research, which allow to discover their knowledge or emotions difficult to detect during classic in-depth interviews.

¹⁹ Since 1 January 2012, all Polish official journals have been made available online only.

2.2.2. Legal information systems and legal databases

In Poland, comprehensive legal information systems are issued only by commercial publishers.²⁰ The content and functionality of the only publicly accessible legal information system (Online Legal Acts System created and shared by the Sejm) are very limited. This has a substantial impact on who and how uses legal information systems in Poland. In the last 3 years before the research, legal information systems were used only by 6% of respondents. The profile of persons who declared using that source of information corresponds to that of persons using official journals – most often they are persons with higher education (75% of respondents who pointed to that source had higher education or were students of higher schools), frequently using the Internet. These persons use legal information systems almost exclusively at work, since only there they have paid access to commercial legal information systems.

The results obtained, in particular the comparison of the number of respondents who declared using legal information systems with the number of respondents who declared using official journals, may be surprising. In France, the comprehensive, commonly accessible website *Légifrance* records much more visits than the official site of the most important French official journal - *Journal officiel*. The reports on the functioning of the *Légifrance* website show that the number of visits to this site is regularly growing, and the number of the page views over the last several years exceeds half a billion (see: data presented below in Charts 1 and 2).

²⁰ The Legal Information System LEX issued by the Wolters Kluwer group and Legal Information System Legalis issued by C.H. Beck.

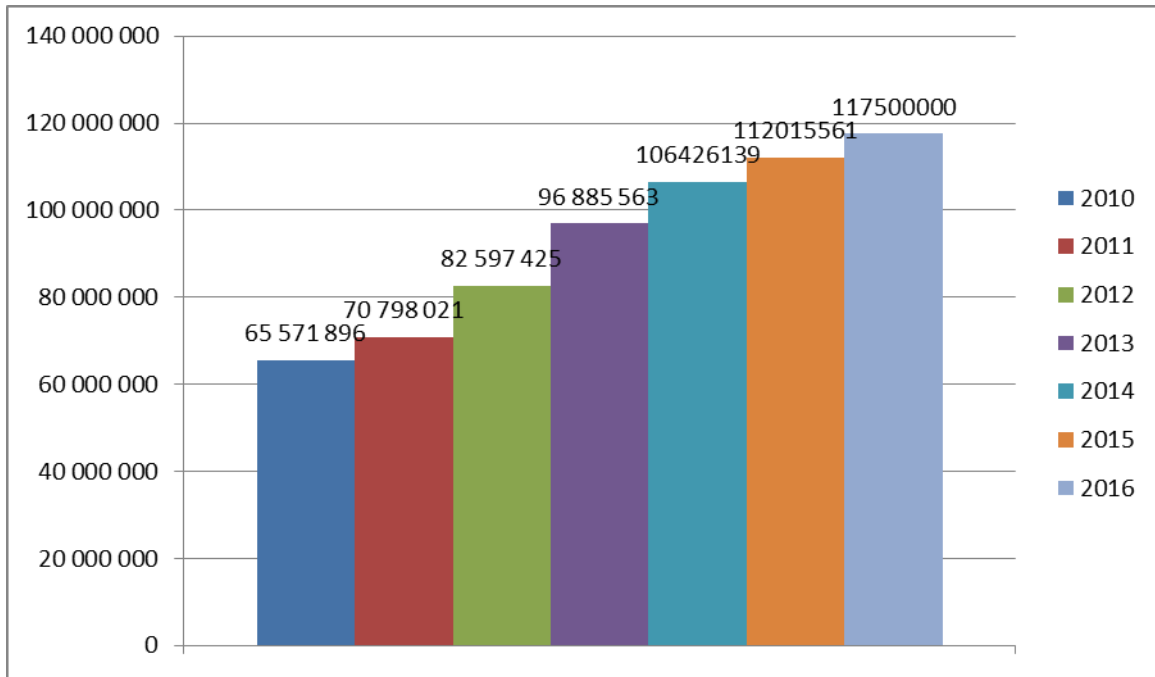


Chart 1. Visits to the *Légifrance* website in the years 2010-2016²¹

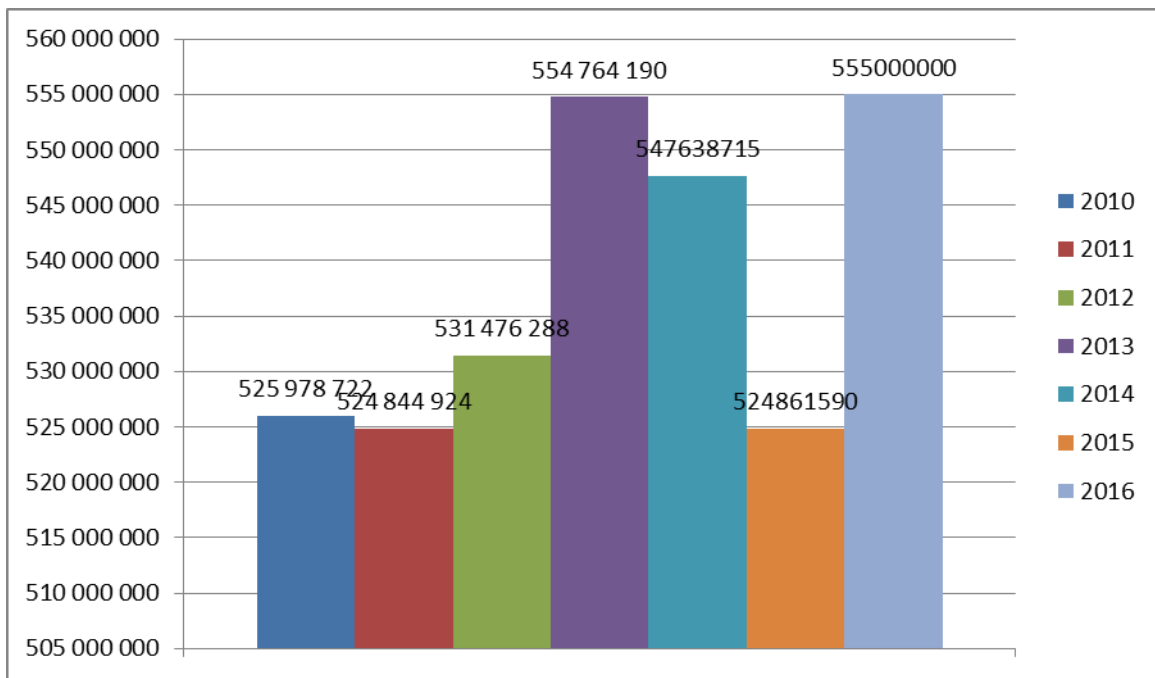


Chart 2. Page views on the *Légifrance* website in the years 2010–2016

The number of visits to the website with the electronic version of *Journal officiel* was also growing (in the years 2012-2015 from a little more than 5 million per year to over 12

²¹ Based on the reports published on the website, <http://www.dila.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/qui-sommes-nous/textes-documents.html> [access: 16.04.2014, 18.06.2014, 14.02.2017 and 13.07.2017].

million per year)²², but these figures are incomparably smaller than the number of visits to the *Légifrance* website. These data confirm that the legal information system meets the much wider needs of persons looking for information about the law than the (even digitised) official journal.

The structure of the legal information system users is different as well. In Poland, these systems are used mainly by professionals, while the research carried out by the editors of the *Légifrance* website in 2012 show that users of this website are mainly individuals, employees of companies and associations and administration personnel, while representatives of the legal professions and researchers account for only 1% of users of the website.²³

All these observations lead to a conclusion that sharing the information through the publicly accessible legal information systems has a very large potential, and may be an important element of the system of the public sources of information about the law.

3.2.3. Press, radio and television

It is difficult to estimate the importance of the processes where information about the applicable law is obtained through radio and television. In 2011, the research was carried out, on commission of the Polish Ministry of Justice, on the image of judiciary in Poland.²⁴ In reply to the question about the sources of knowledge about the functioning of the judiciary, most respondents (67%) mentioned television.²⁵

As regards the press, in my research carried out in 2013, a quarter of respondents stated that in the last 3 years they had used daily newspapers as a source of information about the law. The figures were similar for women and men.²⁶ This source of information was most often used by persons with higher education and working in management positions. In both of these groups, half of respondents pointed to that source of information. The largest percentage of persons using this source of information was recorded among persons aged 30-39 (39%)

²² Data based on the reports referred to in the previous footnote.

²³ Direction de l'information légale et administrative, *Rapport d'Activité DILA 2012*, Paris 2013, http://www.dila.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/media/feuilletable_rapport_2012/index.html [access: 16.04.2014], p. 16 and DILA reports of 2014 and 2015 [access: 14.02.2017]

²⁴ The study was carried out by TNS OBOP in May 2011, using the above-described CAPI method on a nationwide, representative group of 1,500 Polish residents aged 15 years or more. The final report of the study (TNS OBOP, *Final report on the public opinion poll. The image of judiciary, assessment of the judiciary reform, current state of public awareness with regard to alternative methods of dispute resolution and the rights of victims of crime*, Warsaw 2011) http://ms.gov.pl/Data/Files/_public/foto/ministerstwo_sprawiedliwosci_raport-koncowy.pdf [access: 23.04.2014].

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁶ Women were overrepresented among respondents who chose the answer "I used it in the last 12 months" and "I used it in the last 2-3 years", while men were overrepresented among respondents who chose the answer "I used it in the last few months", but in both cases, the differences were small.

and using Internet everyday or almost everyday. The similar structure of respondents, although with lower general rates, occurs in the communication processes, in which the sources of information include “weekly opinion magazines” (14% of respondents stated they had used this source of information within the last 3 years) and the “economic/legal press” (8% of respondents declared that they had used this source of information within the last 3 years). Assessments of the usefulness, accessibility, and reliability of the analysed press categories as sources of information about the applicable law were strongly correlated with the sources of knowledge of the respondents. Respondents considered “daily newspapers” (30%) to be most accessible, and “magazines/periodicals/ women’s press” (14%), “weekly opinion magazines” (10%) and “economic/legal press” (6%) to be less accessible. As the most useful, respondents considered the sources which they used most often and recognised as accessible (26% in relation to “daily newspapers”, 9% in relation to “magazines/periodicals/women’s press”, 7% in relation to “weekly opinion magazines”, and 5% in relation to “economic/legal press”). The indicated order has only changed in the case of the results regarding the reliability of individual types of the press – the highest ranking was granted to daily newspapers (23%), while “weekly opinion magazines” were assessed as slightly more reliable (8%) than “magazines/ periodicals/women’s press” (7%).

3.2.4. Websites and online forums

From the research carried out in 2013, it follows that the processes of acquiring information on the law through the websites are significantly similar to the processes of acquiring this information through daily newspapers: almost 25% of the respondents declared that in the last 3 years they had used the Internet, looking for information on the law. Most of the respondents indicating the use of this source of information were among the persons with higher education (51%). A strong correlation occurred also between the use of this source of information about the law and the professional status of respondents; in the last 3 years this source had been used by 48% of “senior white-collar workers” and 45% of respondents from two other groups – persons acting as “directors, managers and business owners” and “other white-collar workers”. The highest percentage was recorded among the persons aged 30-39 (43%). A significant difference was recorded only among the youngest category of respondents (15-29 years) – while only 20% of them declared using daily newspapers as a source of information about the law, 34% stated that they had used websites for this purpose. Here, the respondents who use the Internet everyday or almost everyday were an overrepresented category (43%).

Websites were very highly assessed in terms of their accessibility (2nd place, 33% of the answers), while clearly worse in the following categories: usefulness (4th place, 26%) and reliability (5th place, 20%). The last assessment was further confirmed by the results of qualitative part of the research – in the interviews, many respondents stressed that websites were not a reliable source of legal information for them.

In discussed research 20% of respondents declared that they had used popular online forums as a source of information about the applicable law within the last 3 years. The highest number of respondents declaring their use was recorded among the persons with higher education (43%). As in the case of websites, a strong correlation with the professional status was observed here – the use in the past 3 years was declared by 40% of senior white-collar workers, 39% of other white-collar workers and 37% of respondents working as directors, managers and business owners. The highest percentage was recorded among the persons aged 30-39 (33%), and among the younger persons (29%).

Popular online forums have been assessed higher by respondents in terms of accessibility (5th place, 17%), while slightly worse in terms of usefulness (6th place, 15%), and reliability (7th place, 12%). The qualitative part of the research shows that respondents first of all search there for information about the law in less significant issues. The users look for descriptions of cases similar to their own, and if they do not find them, they ask questions and request opinions of other users. Justifying the low assessment of reliability, respondents pointed out that at online forums users could speak anonymously, without incurring any responsibility for their statements. Therefore, according to respondents, it is always necessary to verify the information acquired in this way, and only in insignificant matters one can rely on advice obtained at an online forum.

The number of respondents who within the last 3 years had used specialist online forums was significantly lower – about 6%. This group was definitely dominated by senior white-collar workers and other white-collar workers. Most often they were persons using the Internet everyday or almost everyday.

3.2.5. Education

In the research carried out in 2013, a general question was asked about acquiring the information about the law during education. Only 21% of respondents stated that they had received some information about the applicable law during their education. The largest percentage were persons aged 15–29, but even in this group it was only 28%, and if we deduct those who had used that source of information about the law more than 3 years ago, this

percentage drops to 20%. During the qualitative part of the research in the groups consisting of students, the majority of respondents declared that they had some contact with information about the law during their education, but did not think that the information acquired in that way was relevant. There were only occasional opinions that such information makes it easier to deal with law-related issues. In turn, during the interviews with economically active persons, some respondents indicated that in connection with their work they had participated in various types of training dedicated to legal issues. These types of training were usually assessed as very useful.

It is worth mentioning here the results of research carried out in Norway in the 1950s. Two rounds of the research were conducted on knowledge of the law on working conditions of employees in households (both employees and employers were surveyed). The first round, in 1950, was carried out one year after the entry into force of the legislation enacted by the legislator, and the other – 6 years later. It turned out that general awareness of the existing legislation was quite low. In the second round of the research, there was an increase in the knowledge of the legislation only in a group of younger respondents, both among employees and employers.²⁷ This shows that either the younger persons from the same social group acquire more information about changes in the law, or that to some extent the information about the law, which we acquire when we are young, is harder to change when we are older. Regardless of the interpretation, it shows how important it is to include the information about the law into the universal education.

3.2.6. Office and court employees

In the research carried out in 2013 respondents were asked about a possibility of acquiring information “from office or court employees when handling some matters”. The use of this source of information about the law was declared by one-third (33%) of respondents, including 21% in the last 3 years. Again, persons with higher education and senior white-collar workers were overrepresented in this group.

Acquiring the information about the applicable law “from office or court employees when handling some matters” was assessed relatively high by respondents in terms of “accessibility” (4th place, 25%), even higher – in terms of “usefulness” (2nd place, 25%) and it proved to be the best-assessed source in terms of “reliability” (1st place, 28%). These results

²⁷ Cf.: T. Eckhoff, *Sociology of law in Scandinavia* [in:] *Norms and Actions*, red. R. Treves, J.F. Glastra van Loon, Martinus Nijhoff, Haga 1968, p. 29.

contradict the stereotypical belief that Poles are distrustful in relation to information obtained from government offices and courts.

3.2.7. Experts

In the research carried out in 2013 respondents were asked about using expert assistance, both paid (lawyers, notaries, etc.) and free assistance (citizen advice bureaus, student legal services).

Paid expert assistance was used by 22% of respondents, half of whom used it less than 3 years before the study. Among those who had ever used paid expert assistance, persons with higher education (40% of them used such assistance), senior white-collar workers (45% of them used such assistance) and residents of big cities (42% of them used such assistance) were overrepresented.

Paid legal advice from experts has received the lowest marks from respondents in terms of “accessibility” (6th place, 16%), higher – in terms of “usefulness” (5th place, 21%), and even higher – in terms of “reliability” (3rd place, 24%). The high level of trust to this form of acquiring information about the law was confirmed by the qualitative part of the research. During the interviews, respondents pointed out that they used this form of assistance in difficult and important situations.

Far fewer respondents had experience with free expert assistance. It was used by less than 13% of respondents, of whom only half used it in the last 3 years. The statistics concerning this group of respondents are similar to those for the group of persons who used paid expert assistance. Both groups were characterised by overrepresentation of persons with higher education (20% of them used such assistance), senior white-collar workers (23%) and residents of big cities (27%). This last indicator may mean that in big cities it is easier to obtain free legal assistance, since a major part of citizen advice bureaus and most of university legal services are located therein. This is confirmed by responses to the question about the accessibility of this source of information about the law – in big cities the figure was at least twice higher (15% of answers compared to 2%-7% of answers by residents of smaller towns).

Due to the much lower awareness of the possibility of acquiring free legal assistance, in the category of “accessibility” free experts were ranked 12th (6% of all indications), in the category of “usefulness” and “reliability” – 11th (7% of answers in each category). During the qualitative part of the research, persons who had no experience with free legal advice were afraid that experts providing free advice are less committed to their cases than those who

receive remuneration. Therefore, such persons declared that they would not apply for such assistance in matters of great importance. Persons who had experience in using such advice were satisfied with advice they had received. However, even among them there were the opinions that in the most important matters paid legal assistance should be used. Therefore, there is a common belief in Poland that free legal assistance is not valuable.

3.2.8. Social contacts

Processes in which information about the law is obtained through social contacts are the largest category of the analysed communication processes. The above-mentioned Norwegian research from the 1950s show that, although at the very beginning of a new regulation being in force the impact of mass media and social contacts on the knowledge of the given regulation is similar, the importance of social contacts increases over time. After some time, the means of mass communication stop showing new information about a given regulation, while through social contacts the information about this regulation spreads in a manner similar to that of a wave on the water²⁸ – it becomes weaker over time, but at the same time covers the increasing range of participants.

The research carried out in Poland in 2013 shows that 48% of respondents looked for information about the law by means of “social contacts, colleagues, friends, family”, while 14% of them added that it had been more than 3 years ago. The percentage of persons who acquired information about the law through social contacts in the last 3 years increased with the level of education – from 19% of respondents with primary education, through 31% of respondents with basic vocational education, 38% of respondents with secondary education, to 52% of respondents with higher education. In the group most often using this source of information persons acting as directors, managers and business owners (61% of persons from this group) and senior white-collar workers (60%) were overrepresented.

Social contacts have been assessed by respondents as the most accessible (1st place, 45%), the most useful (1st place, 34%) and the most reliable (1st place *ex aequo* with contacts with office and court employees, 28% of answers) source of legal information.

During the qualitative part of the research, respondents pointed out that they willingly used that source of information, because information is communicated not in an abstract, but in a specific and concrete manner.

²⁸ T. Eckhoff, *Sociology* ..., pp. 29-30.

3.2.9. Summary

The discussed research shows that information about the applicable law has been consciously sought by two thirds (64%) of Poles aged above 15. If the study is limited to the last 3 years, this group is reduced to 51% of the population. The remaining part of the population, if complies with the law, does it unconsciously, largely by imitating others.

Information about the law is most actively sought by persons (“leaders of knowledge of the law”):

- aged 30-39,
- with higher education,
- working at managerial positions or being white-collar workers,
- living in the city,
- with high income,
- regularly using the Internet.

If we ignore the sources, which are one-off and are not used to find information when it is needed in practice (e.g., radio or television), it turns out that the most often used sources of information about the law include:

- 1) social contacts,
- 2) websites,
- 3) office and court employees,
- 4) popular online forums.

These sources of information which are generally the most popular are considered to be the most accessible and useful. Only the assessment of the sources reliability slightly differs from the knowledge of the sources and assessment of their accessibility and usefulness. In this category, “personal” sources of information – office and court employees as well as experts providing paid legal advice receive higher marks.

Assessment of usefulness of a particular source of information among younger people is slightly more correlated with assessment of its accessibility, and among the more experienced persons – with assessment of its reliability.

3. Models of seeking and verifying legal information

3.1. Introduction

The quantitative and qualitative parts of my research allow to reconstruct two models reflecting the methods of seeking and verifying legal information.

3.2. Model functioning among “opinion leaders”

Both on a basis of the presented study results, as well as on a basis of other surveys among Polish lawyers, it is possible to reconstruct the following model of seeking and verifying legal information by “legal opinion leaders”:

- 1) for this purpose, the following sources are used (starting with the most often mentioned sources):
 - legal information systems,
 - legal and economic portals and forums,
 - legal literature in paper form (accessible both at courts or law firms and in libraries);
- 2) information obtained in this way is verified by comparing with official journals and through consultation with other lawyers.

3.3. Model functioning among other persons

Those who are not “legal opinion leaders”, but occasionally seek information about the law, find and verify such information mainly based on sources, in which the information is processed from the general abstract information contained in legal acts into specific and individualised information. Social contacts and sources accessible on the Internet prevail in this regard. At the stage of deepening and verifying the information obtained in this way, sources providing specific and individualised information still prevail. They include both experts and court and office employees. Only some recipients use sources providing general and abstract information, i.e. text of normative acts, at this stage.