

HYPNOSIS IN THE INTERNET – INFORMATION OR DISINFORMATION



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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this article is to take a look at the veracity of information about hypnosis on the Polish Internet. The research question that was asked: is Polish Internet informative or disinformative as a source of knowledge about hypnosis.

To answer this question, content analysis was done and an interview with a hypnosis expert was undertaken.

This article shows that information about hypnosis that typical Internet users can find are more disinformative than informative, because only about 60% of it is true and it is not easy to detect false ones if a person is not a hypnosis expert.

Key words: hypnosis, Internet, information, disinformation

INTRODUCTION

People often have to look for information. Usually they use the Internet and when they use the Internet, they use Google. As the result of this the phrase *I'll google it* is so popular nowadays.

Hypnosis is very controversial topic. There are a lot of studies about it. Most of them were carried by psychologists or representatives of medical sciences. Hypnosis is poorly researched from the point of view of sociology.

In my article I will not define the Internet, but I will focus on typical users of the Internet and information about hypnosis that this user can find in it. The most important part of it is answering a question – is Polish the Internet informative or disinformative as a source of knowledge about hypnosis.

This article is a summary of my bachelor thesis²².

TYPICAL INTERNET USER

What does a typical Internet user²³ do to find information?

Typical Internet users use Chrome (32,20% of Internet users), Firefox (28,24%) or Microsoft Internet Explorer (11,85%) as a web browser (gemiusRanking, 2015a). Their operating systems are Windows 7 (43,91%), Android (15,47%) or Windows 8.1 (14,32%) (gemiusRanking, 2015b).

²² The thesis was written under the supervision of Piotr Toczyski, PhD.

²³ As typical Internet user is understood here as a Polish Internet user.

Typical search engine are Google (94,21%), Bing (2,88%) or Yahoo (0,71%) (gemiusRanking, 2015c). This implies that it is very improbable that typical Internet user would use other search engines than Google.

METHOD

The method that was used was content analysis of polish Internet pages related to hypnosis and comparison of collected material with a trustworthy source of knowledge of hypnosis – a hypnosis expert.

The first step was to make a list of Internet pages that would be later analyzed. To make the list Google was used as web search engine, because typical Internet users would do this to get some information about hypnosis. The word that was used was *hipnoza* which means *hypnosis* in English. In order to make results more probable to be achieved by typical Internet user, the searches were made from various access points in the Internet (e. g. libraries, academy) and different browsers (Opera, Mozilla Firefox, Internet Explorer and Chrome).

The research was performed from April 2015 to August 2015. The results of the searches were put into nine files with the record of the first page of Google search results²⁴ and files with every successive page that would be found by clicking the link in Google.

The second phase was ordering found pages. In order to do that, the first Google result got a value equal to 10 and each subsequent page a value less by one. When doing this, any result, that was not a leading page with text (e.g. to YouTube) was skipped. This procedure was made separately for normal pages and for advertising pages. Results of this step are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1
Ranking of normal pages

Id	Page	Total
1	http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hipnoza	80
2	http://www.e-hipnoza.pl/	72
3	http://www.hipnoza-warszawa.pl/	64
4	http://hipnoza.com.pl/	56
5	http://www.dagmarakonopacka.pl/	43
6	http://www.hipnoza.edu.pl/	42
7	http://www.hipnoza.pl/	22
8	http://intouch.edu.pl/	13
9	http://hipnoza.com.pl/warszawa-hipnoza-uzaleznienia-nadwaga-palenie-hazard-alkohol/	6

Source: Own research.

²⁴ Only first page of Google search results was used, because typically a user does not go to the second page.

Table 2
Ranking of advertising pages

Id	Page	Total
1	http://www.cro.net.pl/hipnoza/	70
2	http://centrumhipnoterapii.pl/	63
3	http://www.twojeemocje.pl/hipnoza	38
4	http://www.hipnoza.pl/hipnoza	24
5	www.zapmeta.com.pl/Hipnoza	11
6	www.pkt.pl/Hipnoza	11
7	http://hypnosispoland.pl/	8

Source: Own research.

All of found pages (except *Wikipedia*) are pages that are used to sell products connected with hypnosis (e. g. hypnotherapy sessions, hypnosis training, etc.).

In the category of advertising pages five of them are similar to normal pages and two are some kind of search engines (because of that, these two pages were not included in the next steps).

The third phase of this research was content analysis of found pages. During the content analysis information about hypnosis (and hypnotherapy) that was available on the pages was coded as beliefs about hypnosis that results from the pages and could be developed in one's mind during reading the websites.

As a result of this third phase a list of 247 beliefs was elaborated. Most of them (exactly 197 – 80% of them) appears only on one page. Detailed distribution of frequency of occurrence of beliefs is included in Figure 1.

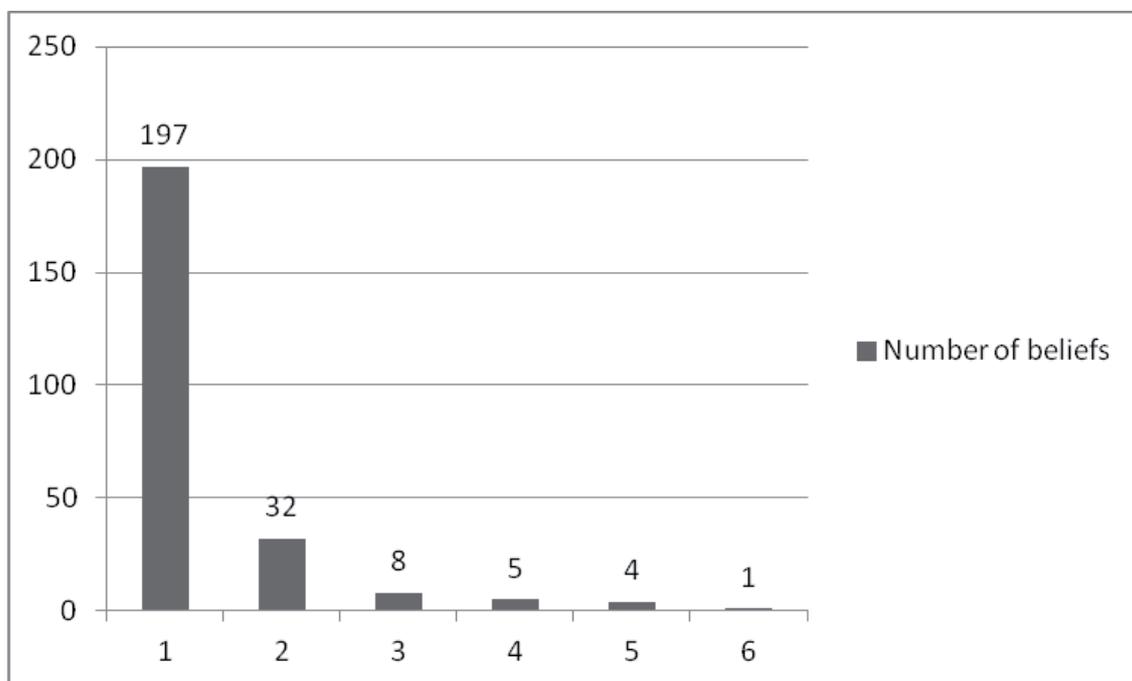


Fig. 1 Detailed distribution of frequency of occurrence of beliefs.

Source: Own research.

The fourth phase was to create analytical categories of beliefs that would ease understanding of thoughts about hypnosis that a typical user could have after using the Internet as a source of knowledge about this subject.

Five categories were created:

1. What is hypnosis and hypnotherapy? Definitions of concepts connected thereto. Kinds of hypnosis. Knowledge about hypnosis.
2. What is happening in/during hypnosis (both at the beginning, during and at the end)? How does the person feel?
3. What is possible under hypnosis? What is hypnosis used for?
4. Legal and ethical conditions of hypnosis and hypnotherapy.
5. Other beliefs about hypnosis.

The fifth phase was an expert interview. The principal goal of this interview was verifying of correctness of beliefs. The expert that was interviewed was Michał Cieślakowski – founder of *Barwy Umystu – Development Center of Hypnosis and Hypnotherapy*. He had been chosen as an expert about hypnosis, because he is the only Polish trainer who can give NGH²⁵ certificates and he works on results (meaning that he does not charge for a session but for an effect (e. g. successful smoking cessation)).

The interview consisted of three parts: questions about interviewee; questions about hypnosis and hypnotherapy; request to determine the veracity of beliefs (the ones from earlier phases).

The interview was conducted in September 2015 and lasted nearly two hours.

The sixth phase of research was checking if the found beliefs about hypnosis was true or false. In order to do so, the comparison of beliefs and transcript of interview was performed.

The last phase consisted of different types of analysis of results obtained in the sixth phase.

RESULTS

To get the fullest possible knowledge about what people can find in the Polish Internet about hypnosis different types of analyses were conducted and will be presented below.

To make the analysis clearer, four categories of expert answers were created:

- True – for beliefs that clearly are true.
- False – for beliefs that absolutely are false.
- Needs more explaining – for beliefs that are not clearly true nor false.
- Expert could not tell – for beliefs about which expert could not assess the veracity (e. g. about methods used by FBI).

OVERALL ANALYSIS

This kind of analysis is about analyzing the totality of all beliefs. It takes into account every belief in every category. Results of this analysis are presented in Figure 2.

²⁵ NHG – National Guild of Hypnosis – one of the oldest and biggest international organizations for professional hypnotists and hypnotherapists.

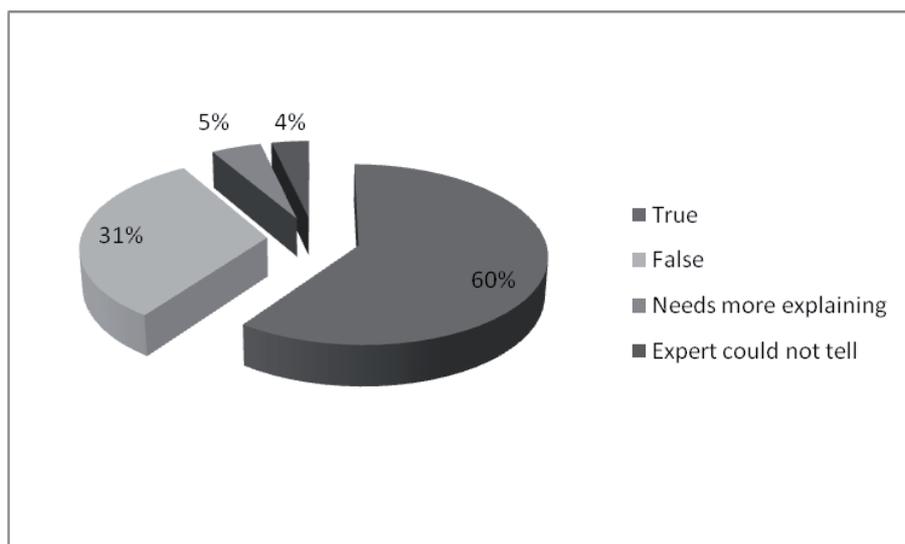


Fig. 2. The veracity of beliefs according to the expert.
Source: Own research.

147 beliefs out of 247 are clearly true and 78 false. 12 of them needs more explaining (it cannot be just said whether they are true or false). This data suggests that a person who looks for hypnosis in Google has about 60% chance of finding true information and about 31% chance of finding false information.

ANALYSIS IN CATEGORIES

This kind of analysis consists of analyzing the veracity of beliefs in its categories. The categories were presented in section *Method*. It shows that about some things people can have more accurate thinking and about some more misguided. The results of this analysis is presented in Figure 3.

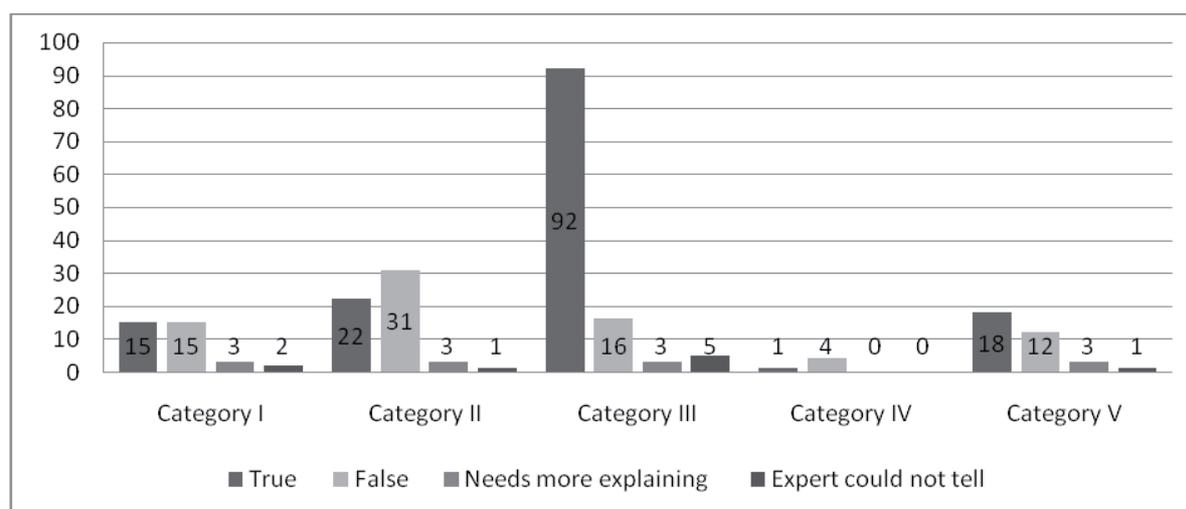


Fig. 3 The veracity of beliefs by categories
Source: Own research.

ANALYSIS OF PAGES THAT HAVE HIGHEST POSITIONS IN RANKINGS

This kind of analysis consists of analyzing beliefs from each website separately. In this paper only analysis of pages that has first positions in rankings (as normal page or as advertising page) will be presented, because showing the whole analysis would take too much space. The results are included as Figure 4 and Figure 5.

First, non-commercial page is Wikipedia. 37 beliefs out of 68 are clearly true and 21 false. Most people believe information found on Wikipedia, so it could be the first-choice page for most Internet users.

First, commercial page is cro.net.pl/hipnoza. This page sells hypnosis trainings of Janusz Gołyński. Total amount of beliefs on this page is 64. Only 34 beliefs out of this number are clearly true and 27 false.

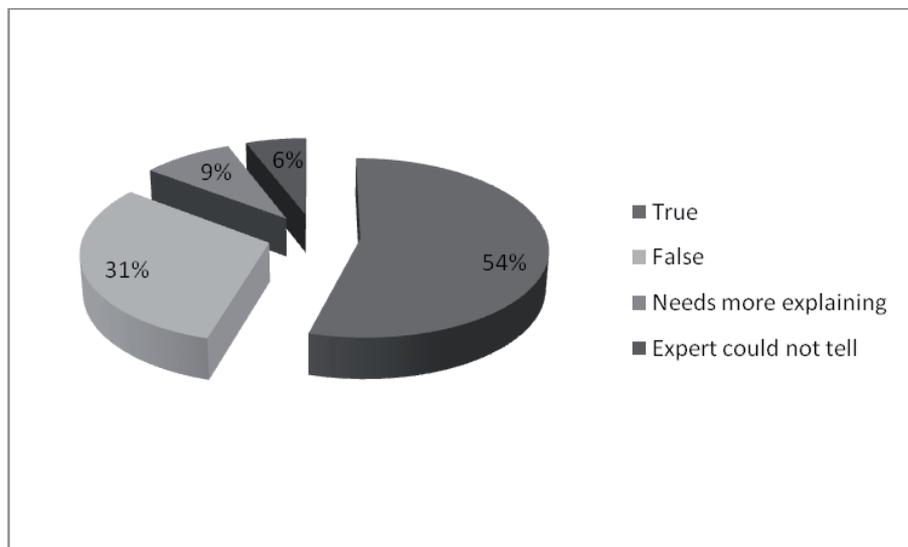


Fig. 4. The veracity of beliefs on *Wikipedia*.

Source: Own research.

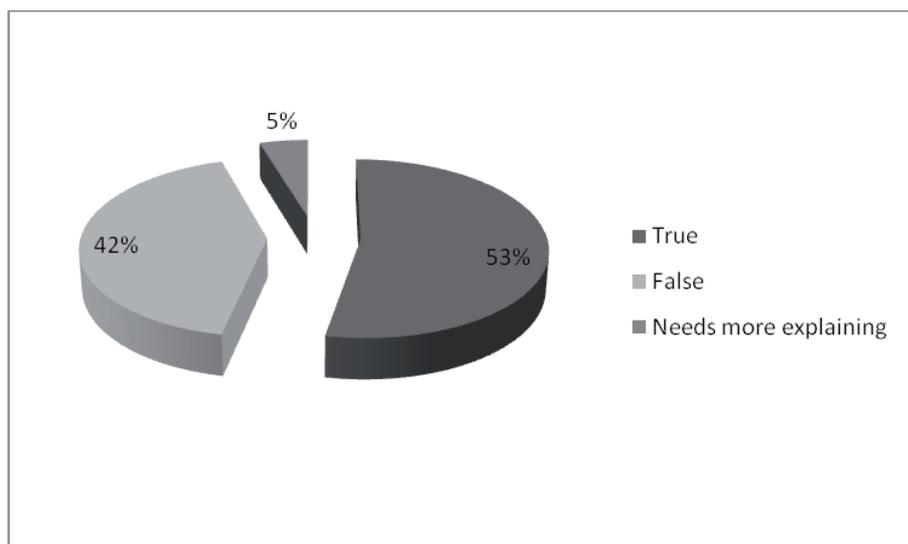


Fig. 5. The veracity of beliefs on: cro.net.pl/hipnoza.

Source: Own research.

ANALYSIS OF MOST POPULAR BELIEFS

This kind of analysis consists of analyzing the veracity of beliefs that occurs on three or more pages. This kind of analysis is accurate for people who would read the whole content of all analyzed pages and would believe that true belief are the ones that are repeated. The results is included as Figure 6.

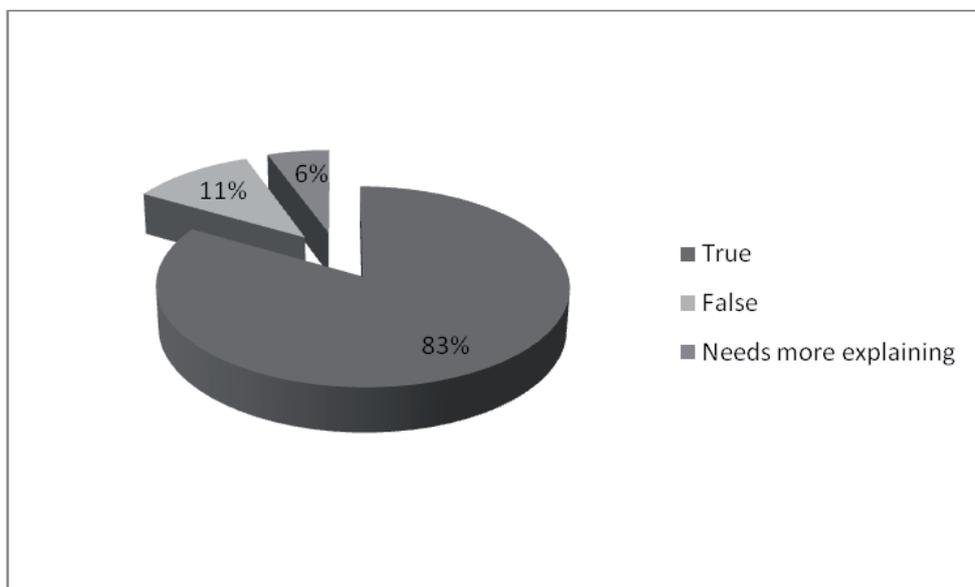


Fig. 6. The veracity of beliefs that are on at least three websites.

Source: Own research.

There are only 18 beliefs that are on at least three websites. This shows that only 7% of beliefs repeat on different Polish Internet pages. 15 out of them are clearly true and 2 false.

DEFINING HYPNOSIS

As a result of analysis of the first part of our expert interview there exists one definition of hypnosis that can be quoted: "Hypnosis is a bypass of critical faculty and to establish selective, acceptable thinking"²⁶ (Elman, 1970, p. 40; Parkhill, 2010, p. 21).

There is one problem with this definition - to explain this definition fully would take much time and space (it takes Gerald Kein (n. d.) about ten pages). For that reason, hypnotists usually give a briefer and simpler definition - hypnosis is the ability to accept suggestions (especially ones that cannot be accepted without hypnosis). During our interview, the expert said that "hypnosis is increasing susceptibility to suggestions".

DISCUSSION

The principal goal of this research was to establish if for a typical Internet user, the Polish Internet is a source of information or disinformation about hypnosis.

²⁶ This definition was also given by the expert. It was available on one of analyzed websites too.

It is most likely that a typical user would not go through all results (even from first page of Google results) but he or she would be satisfied with just one page. This one page would be Wikipedia. Why? Because it always is the first Google result (except advertising results). Furthermore Wikipedia is the only website that is not trying to sell anything to Internet users so he or she could think that it should be truthful (because if pages are trying to sell something, there is a probability that they do not tell whole truth).

What would happen if a person read only Wikipedia in order to get information about hypnosis? The person would get only 54% of clearly true beliefs (and he would get 31% of clearly false beliefs).

Furthermore, a lot would depend on if a person reads the whole article or just some parts of it, because Wikipedia (about hypnosis) is full of contradictions (e. g. one paragraph ends with statement that tells the reader that hypnosis can be used to make somebody murder someone and the first sentence of the next paragraph tells a user that it is impossible to make somebody do something he does not want to do).

It would be better for a person seeking knowledge about hypnosis to surf through more pages. The typical Internet user who would do that could have about 60% of true beliefs about hypnosis (a 31% of clearly false information). It is better than reading only Wikipedia, but still, it is only 60%.

In this case, a lot would depend on the category of beliefs. In the first category (defining hypnosis) there is 43% of trustworthy information and 43% of false beliefs. Second category (what is happening in hypnosis) is even worse – only 39% of beliefs are true and 54% are false. Third category (usage of hypnosis) is more optimistic – 79% of beliefs are true and only 14% are false. Fourth category (legal and ethical conditions of hypnosis and hypnotherapy) is the most disinformative one – only 20% of beliefs are true and 80% are false. The last category (other beliefs about hypnosis) – 53% of information are true and 35% are false.

This categories shows that a person using the Polish Internet (and reading more than Wikipedia) would know a little about what hypnosis is, would expect things during hypnosis that would not happen, but he or she would know why to go to hypnotist/hypnotherapist. This user would know almost nothing about legal and ethical conditions of hypnosis.

There is one more possibility – the user could read every page (from first page of Google results) and then belief in beliefs that occurred more often (at least three times). In this case, a person would get 83% of true information about hypnosis and only 11% of clearly false beliefs. This is much better than any other option but still – 11% of false information is a lot and can influence a person to make wrong decisions (e. g. about the choice of the hypnotherapist). But there is one problem – the typical Internet user would not do that. It is very inconceivable that a lot of people would read all these pages and then compare them.

SUMMARY

There is a lot of true information about hypnosis on the Polish Internet (around 60%), but it is hidden among false, and a typical Internet user who is not a hyp-

nosis expert would not know which are true and which are false. For that reason it can be stated that the Polish Internet acts as disinformative source of knowledge about hypnosis and hypnotherapy.

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