

One of the most intriguing phenomena observed during the study of social interactions is that people tend to mimic their emotions (e.g. facial expressions). This imitation, also known as mimicry of emotions, is helpful in better understanding other people. Then, one of the basic tasks of mimicry is to help us better understand what the other person is experiencing. That "insight" may be especially needed if we want to understand and predict the behavior of others. However, the evaluation of emotions is rarely based on observing the face and body posture on its own. More often we perceive a person in a particular environment, which is accompanied by a verbal message. What's more, the ever-increasing mobility and transfer of some of our contacts online (e.g. teleconferencing or e-learning) result in situations in which we can hear other people, but at the same time either we do not see them, or they do not see us. Despite different contexts, understanding what the other person feels remains the most important aspect of effective communication.

As part of our project, we want to consider various scenarios in which people do not have direct eye contact with each other or when it is limited (e.g. when one of the interlocutors has the camera turned off during a video conversation). As we know so far, not only what can be seen but also what can be heard (e.g. the content of the speech, tone of voice) can be a hint about the emotions experienced by other people. In the planned research, we want to better understand the differences and consequences of lack of eye contact, and how it can affect imitation and relationship with the interlocutor. We assume that imitating various emotions that can be heard in vocal expression (e.g. happiness, sadness, anger) or in the tone of speech, can contribute to a better understanding of the sender's condition and, as a consequence, compensate the lack of visual information. Moreover, we anticipate that not only the lack of the other person's view but also the feeling of being watched can affect the mimicry of emotions. In other words, the planned research will help show how the imitation of different emotions, expressed in different ways (i.e. through facial or vocal expressions) will affect the sender's rating and the recipient's behavior in situations where they will see each other, or this contact will be limited. Communication via the Internet is increasingly used to maintain professional relationships as well as to keep in touch with family members and friends. Therefore, in our project, we also plan to look at how the previously described conditions of eye contact will affect the imitation of people who are completely foreign to us or are in some way associated with them.

The results of our research will help in better understanding what affects the quality and course of social communication - mainly in the environment in which we are more and more often communicating - i.e. the messenger window. In recent years, there has been a clear trend to move services and even educational activities to the Internet. Current changes force us to adapt to the new reality in which are dominated by the indirect communication channels. The results of the research carried out in this project will show the extent to which our mind is already prepared for these global changes and whether we can still effectively understand the experiences of others, without being able to see their reactions.