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**EDUCATIONAL POSSIBILITIES OF A BLOG: THE ANALYSIS OF
PROJECTS IN THE BLOGOSPHERE**

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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to study a blog in terms of its use in educational and communication purposes. We used such research methods as statistics, content analysis, expert interviews. For the first time, an analysis of foreign and Russian experience in creating an educational blog has been conducted. In the analytical part, statistic and content analysis of 10 English and 10 Russian educational blogs was conducted to identify the most successful models for implementation and methods of communication promotion. The project part presents the authors' historical and cultural blog "Image of Omsk", there were given the results of its approbation and identified ways of correction based on the results of expert interviews. The results of the research: the blog can become not only a user's personal page, a "personal diary", but also an educational tool that is more effective due to its communication features, the possibility of feedback from a reader, and efficiency of response to new items in an educational environment. To achieve the effectiveness of the functioning an educational blog is possible under the following conditions: a unique trade offer of a blog, specification of the target audience according to the theme, the use of effective trend technologies of communication promotion.

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1. Introduction

In the 21st century, in the era of rapid development of information technologies, various social institutions undergo changes. The necessity for reconstruction has also affected the field of education. Creating a virtual reality on the Internet, the emergence of Web 2.0 services became a background for the development of such a new phenomenon as blogging. Bloggers have a great influence on the formation of people's consciousness, since they have a massive expansion, as well as their own personal audience, which is ready to accept the ideas and thoughts of the "personal diary" (Abrosimova, 2017, p.66; Russian videoblogging 2015. Role and meaning in communication in digital environment, 2015). The development of the blogosphere has led to the fact that the possibility of self-promotion has become one of the main reasons that may induce a person to create a personal blog (Starovoi, 2015, p. 63). Blogs can help you find a soul mate, get support. Some bloggers are quoted. Thus, bloggers may become leaders of public opinion (Tarasova, 2016). For this reason, the influence of blogs on the formation of personality is directly dependent. For some people, creating a blog is the way to the professional field. But despite this, the ideological motivation remains one of the dominant, many bloggers are driven by interest in this area, for someone creating a blog is an impetus for development in this area, for others it makes sense that no matter how professional you are, without self-presentation these skills will not be noticed. In any case, bloggers are trying to make high-quality content that meets the needs of the audience.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. With the development of the blogosphere, there are appearing a huge number of various blogs and their various classifications (Tekuteva, 2016; Starkova, 2014). At the moment in the literature there is no clear differentiation and understanding of the features of the educational blog, its specificity in relation to other various platforms, for example, to the forum platform. Often, researchers identify these two concepts.

2.2. The second problem that exists at the moment: whether the educational blog can become an integral part of the educational system, its obligatory component. Will the classification of blogs help in choosing the necessary material that corresponds to the goals, objectives and functions of modern education? When today there are many blogs with antisocial character (for example, pranks). How to differentiate blogging content and work with it in teaching and learning.

In the blogosphere, one type of blog is edublog (an educational blog). In the literature, there are two conceptions of an educational blog. The first one, which is often met in pedagogical literature, says that an educational blog is "a blog created for educational purposes. Edublogs archive and support the learning process of students and teachers, facilitate reflection, enhance asking questions to themselves and others, stimulate collaborating and providing contexts for engaging in higher-order thinking" (Ray, 2006, p. 175). Blogs of this format are created and used in an educational institution.

Ulyanova (2017) used educational blogs of such value in her work "10 ways for a teacher to use a personal blog in the educational process". In her work, she offers to make a blog as a working tool for teachers and include this tool in educational practice. This author identifies 4 models of using educational blogs:

1. Teacher's personal blog; 2. Blog to support the learning process; 3. Blog - summary (student portfolio, exercise book of a student or a whole class); 4. Blog for the professional community (Ulyanova, 2017).

Unfortunately, in this work, as in many others, there are no clear boundaries between the concept of a blog and the forum platform. Among the examples of a blog for the professional community is "UDMteacher", which is a forum platform, not a blog. In this regard, it is worthwhile to separate the two concepts and say that the forum site is the result of the collective activity of a group of people on the Internet on a certain resource. A blog is "a website (or a section of a website) containing dated multimedia entries arranged in a reverse chronological order, with the possibility of leaving comments on records and viewing any entry on a separate web page" (Kalashnikova, 2010, p.172). Unlike the blog, there is no nominal "leader" in the forum in the process of interaction among network users; here everyone can answer the opponent's question and help sort something out. The blog communication is mainly carried out and initiated by the content creator, he is the main "person", he sets the vector, the topic that will be discussed. Thus, often forums created for educational purposes in a classroom (school) or in a group in colleges and universities may be incorrectly identified as educational blogs. And it can be noted that in the first sense a blog will be educational if it is conducted, for example, by a teacher, focusing on the material in the disciplines, rather than being created by each participant in the process.

This difference and this type can be traced in the work of Maksimova (2014) "The use of pedagogical blogs in the system of formation of learning environment of an educational institution." The author emphasizes that "it is possible to create professional blogs that will be directly related to the subject: a lesson, a section, teaching methods, classroom guidance, preparation of students for exams, and work with parents and colleagues" (p. 5).

The second meaning of an educational blog is derived from the classification of the blogosphere offered by Tekuteva (2016, p. 109). In this classification and in this sense, educational blogs do not have a direct focus on the formal education system. These blogs are independent and affect the sphere of non-formal and informal education, as they are created by authors in a free form, not focusing on curricula and ready disciplines. Creators of such blogs can be students of an educational institution, graduates, and even practicing teachers, including teachers with scientific degrees.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. What features should an educational blog have to become an integral part of the educational system?
- 3.2. What are the advantages of a blog in relation to the formal education?
- 3.3 How to achieve the most effective functioning of an educational blog?

4. Purpose of the Study

4.1. It is necessary to identify what blog and blogosphere's features give them advantages for using in the learning environment. How will an educational blog be useful for formal education and what kind of relations may appear from their interaction?

5. Research Methods

5.1 The information about the most popular educational blogs of Russian and English segment of Youtube was collected with statistics method.

5.2. There statistical data with a unique content offer, distinctive features of a blog, its focus, and its meaningfulness were collected with content analysis. Using content analysis, Both methods were complementary in our study.

5.3. The role of the expert interview was to evaluate the practical component of our research - the results of the creation of the author's local history blog «Image of Omsk».

6. Findings

6.1. We analyzed 10 English and 10 Russian educational blogs (CrashCourse, Khan Academy, Veritasium, Vsauce, TED-Ed, MinutePhysics, Mental Floss, Thomas Frank, OverSimplified, Stuff Mom Never Told You – HowStuffWorks), which have quite wide audience and revealed dependence in the presence of a unique trade offer of blogs and their popularity.

In the analysis, we identified several parameters: the number of subscribers, the description of the channel / blogger, the specifics of the content, the frequency of posting, a unique trade offer, ways to monetize and the percentage of conversion.

Content of almost all channels varies. It is possible to notice that some bloggers prefer to create videos no longer than 5 minutes, so that you can easily perceive the information.

The frequency of posting different channels varies depending on the complexity of the content. The target audience of blogs naturally depends on the direction of a channel. Some channels have a fairly wide audience, and it is difficult to select a certain segment, since the material can be quite easily understood and suitable for adults and children. For example, the channel "TED-ed."

Not all channels have a unique trade offer. The channels "Vsauce" and "OverSimplified" have distinct unique trade offer. And here we can notice a pattern with video conversion. The more expressed the unique features of the channel, the greater the conversion. For example, the channel "Khan Academy", which has no unique trade offer, has the lowest conversion rate. And such channels as "Vsauce", "Veritasium", "OverSimplified", in which we highlighted the uniqueness of the content, have the highest conversion percentage.

It can be stated that English blogs with unique trade offer have a much higher conversion rate than those that have a standard format without unique content.

In the Russian segment of video hosting, we identified the most popular ones: Scientific, Simple Science, Artur Sharifov, Smash, Topless, Utopia Show, Physics from Pobedinsky, KREOSAN, Simple Pictures, Hellscream Academy

6.2. In the process of analysis of the Russian segment of educational blogs, it can be noted that there are few bloggers who use "ready" formats from foreign experience. If we continue to compare with English educational channels, we can say that Russian blogs have less distinct unique trade offer. Most of the authors "win" due to the subject of their videos, charismatic presentation of the material, humor. Like foreign bloggers, Russian authors add visualization to the content, animated inserts, tables, video cutting examples,

etc. Another similarity is that bloggers try not to make long videos. Basically clips last no more than 10 minutes.

The target audience of blogs naturally depends on the direction of a channel.

A scientific approach and a scientific argument are used in most video blogs. Some channels even indicate sources in the description below the video. For example, the blog of Arthur Sharifov. Often, the authors rely on modern and relevant research by foreign and Russian scientists.

Among the goals and objectives of these blogs we distinguished the following:

- popularization of science (popular science orientation of blog content);
- creation of accompanying material for professional education;
- formation image of blogs' creators;
- profit from their activities;

It can also be noted that most blogs have a fairly high level of material content, which has a scientific focus, veracity of information, links to authoritative sources, although many also try to present their content in an accessible, clear form, understanding the specifics of their audience, which may not always be ready immediately to the academic level of material presentation.

6. 3. Blogging has great potential for use in Russian education. At the moment, works on the use of blogs in education are concentrated mainly in Western European and American literature. In Russia, a small amount of papers is devoted to the issue of including blogs in the educational process and about their educational opportunities. Therefore, this problem in the realities of Russia is of great relevance.

Of course, now in the pedagogical environment there emerged a question about the support of the educational process with blogs. But at the moment, the creators of blogs are not tied to the educational system of schools, universities, secondary specialized colleges, and are an alternative source of information that, although may come across with the educational theme of the educational process, but has the greatest autonomy in the choice of content, "creative approach" to content making and may express different points of view on issues (sometimes at odds with the official version). Blogs have great efficiency in response to new information, which gives them an advantage over the printed source of information.

According to Osipova (2016), a blog can assist the educational environment (p.198). It can be used as an accompanying material in the independent work of students. Scientists believe that it is more advisable to work with an educational blog during extracurricular activities, but before this, a teacher needs to instruct students how to work with blogs and make requirements to assignments, discuss possible difficulties and common errors.

The uniqueness of a blog is that it can be used in a system of formal education an accompanying, supplementary material, and can be an alternative option in non-formal and informal education.

In the first case, interaction of bloggers with the content will be organized in the model of blended learning. And here may be applied various models. For example: flipped classroom, stations' rotation, laboratory rotation, etc. (Watson, 2015). Blended learning is applied in classes at schools, colleges and high schools.

When comparing blogs and massive open online courses which are widely spread in the past few years in the world, you can notice the following: Unlike MOOC, with systematic organization of discipline according to a certain logic from beginning to end, integration of blogs in the educational process with

blended learning technologies has more freedom, great opportunities in creating various formats of interaction. A teacher can vary and use material where necessary. For example, the blog Khan Academy contains materials that will be useful for students of specialized institutions regarding mathematical and physical disciplines. In addition, the blog is constantly updated, it contains relevant and actual information, there may be clarifications and disproves of previously exposed materials. Whereas MOOK is created as a ready system, difficult to change. And if to take into consideration science, then various phenomena can be conceptualized, and then some materials may no longer be relevant. Rapid response to the development of scientific knowledge - this is one of the possibilities, one of the advantages of using blogs in education.

6.4. In addition, the use of blogs is not limited to its use in formal education. An educational blog itself is an alternative source of information that can relate to both non-formal and informal education. It can be used as an supplementary material simultaneously to formal education, as well as the user himself can choose which channel he is more interested in. Thus, blogs encourage long life education, that is one of the priorities in the world's education of the beginning of the 21st century. Thus, educational blogs have enabled a person to get accessible information for free, creating an educational field for self-development throughout life. The choice of content will be determined by the interests and needs of the person. Among educational blogs are defined narrow range professional ones (for example, aimed at mastering new software or developing rare vocal techniques).

Not only educational blogs can be part of the informal educational area. For example, travel blogs broaden minds of the audience. And if before a person could learn about other countries reading a book, atlases, etc., or specially created advertising products, now a user can see a real travel of a person to another country, see it "from the inside", see cultures and mental peculiarities of peoples. In this case, a person will not necessarily understand that he is currently engaged in self-education (A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, 2000).

In addition, some blogs relate to such practical skills in life, which are not a part of the formal educational system. Blog "Thomas Frank" has its mission: helping students to learn more effectively and achieve their goals. There is an analysis of productivity from life experience and historical personalities. We can say that this blog concerns the issues of self-management and time management, which is so necessary for the modern student.

The relevance of creating educational blogs in Russia is evidenced by the fact that, according to lenta.ru, most Russians would like to learn creative activities such as singing, drawing and playing the instrument (The most popular desires of Russians are named, 2017), which indicates a high degree of interest in self-education.

Analyzed blogs have a high response rate to new items. This gives them an advantage over formal education. And the inclusion blogs in the model of blended learning or use of blogs in the non-formal education can increase the percentage of relevant information received by a person.

In addition, blogs can include content that contains a regional component, which also gives benefits. The formal education system does not always include regional characteristics. For example, in the study of history or geography, blogs may be used as additional material that emphasize local features.

6.5. Based on understanding and goals of this region, there can be created blogs that are relevant to this territory (Garant – information and legal portal, 2016; IMC Network, n.d.). Based on the analysis of

the governing documents of the region (Omsk region), as well as the need for an emphasis on historical education, there was created a project of regional natural history blog, which was tested during December 2017 - April 2018. We analyzed the results and found out the opinion of experts about the project. The blog focuses on the main features of the region and identifies important key points and conceptual dominants in the development of the territory. The results of expert interviews conducted by us after testing the product led us to the following conclusions. At the moment, created videos are interesting for a narrow audience, passionate about history. This material can be used as additional, or as informal education for students and pupils.

7. Conclusion

7.1. The blogosphere has tremendous potential for educational use. Blogs are used both in formal education in the form of blended learning, as well as non-formal and informal education.

Analyzed educational blogs have a number of positive aspects:

- efficiency of response to new discoveries;
- dialogue format (exchange of views, information with the audience);
- scientific content;
- material flexibility (it is easier to integrate it into the educational process rather than the MOOC);
- the relevance of the content (material, which is interesting to understand by a large number of people);
- modern presentation of complex material (the presence of visualization, compression and at the same time meaningfulness, with humor);
- the possibility of using themes with regional specific character, which is usually lack in formal education;

7.2. But despite these advantages, in order to use the blog in the educational system, several problems need to be solved:

- How to develop criteria for the quality of blogs so that they can be used in formal education;
- what mechanisms should be worked out between formal education and content creation blogs (“Order” of current visual didactic material for work in an educational institution);
- How to teach students and pupils to select quality blogs.

7.3. Blogs have a high potential due to the fact that many creators become “opinion leaders”, authorities among young people who can be motivated to learn. In order to be effective, an educational blog should include communication technologies to promote it (Lozovik, 2016, p.62; Targeted advertising: what it is, goals and objectives and how it works, 2018). And there is also more freedom than in formal education, which is not used to market relations on the Internet.

As a result, it can be concluded that a blog can become not only a user's personal page, a “personal diary”, but also an educational tool that is more effective due to its communication features, the possibility of feedback from a reader, and efficiency of response to new items in an educational environment.

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