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MODERN RUSSIAN STUDENT PODCASTING

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Abstract

Podcasting is publishing and distributing audio outgoing via the Internet. Podcasting has begun to conquer the world in the early 2000s. Social network VKontakte has become one of the most modern and popular podcast platforms in Russia nowadays. The creation of high-quality, informative podcasts by a student can be equated with an excellent opportunity for mastering oral speech skills. That is the reason why podcasting today possesses a potential to become a key creative activity for professional training of a future journalist. The present research considers the examples of podcasts by radio RADI-ON by Tver State Technical University, the online community of Compromise and radio Diktum by Chelyabinsk State University, as well as the specificities of the student-led podcasting development. The authors of the research, exploring podcasts posted in the student media, mentioned above, has studied the structure of podcasts, genre forms, content, features of the editing process, strong and weak points of student podcasting, as well as prospects for its further development. The work also pays attention to audio blogs and defines the specific features of podcast and audio blog. The project of student podcasting is created by one of the authors of this article specially in the format of an audio blog. One of the results of the student podcasting study is the formation of basic practical recommendations for future journalists and beginner podcasters

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Keywords: Podcasting, podcast, audio blog, students-led radio, academic media, social network VKontakte.



1. Introduction

Podcasting is a new format for distributing audio and video content using the Internet. Researchers studying the phenomenon of podcasting note that the English word “podcasting” is derived from the words iPod, Apple's popular mp3 player, and broadcasting, which means broadcasting. The first burst of interest in podcasting occurred in the mid-2000s, when users started recording audioblogs using RSS feeds. In 2004, Hammersley, a Guardian journalist, wrote an article about a new phenomenon. He was the first who mentioned the term podcasting (Gagarina, 2016).

The history of the foreign podcasts emergence and its dynamics are outlined by Farivar (2014), Stulberg (2015), a retrospective of foreign and Russian podcasts, as well as features of the development of domestic podcasting presented by Litvinenko (2012), Golubovsky (2016), Kruglova (2018) Raspopova and Sablina (2018), Dorofeeva (2018). Zhuravleva (2014) has studied such a genre of domestic broadcasting as the audio diary, which is a prototype of Russian podcasting, which has contributed to its formation and development.

At the beginning of the 21st century, researchers viewed podcasting as a format for broadcasting on the Internet that allows to download programs on the Internet, listen to them on a PC, PDA or portable MP3 player, and post new programs on the Internet (Abrazhevich, Chumachenko, & Gerasimenko, 2007). Technically, podcasting is quite simple, in particular, that explains its popularity and wide distribution around the world and Russia. Legotin (2012) has considered podcasting as the 21st century audio culture phenomenon. Kruglova (2018) has analyzed the peculiarities of the Russian audio podcasting operation under the conditions of the media market development, studied the problem areas of podcasting. Dorofeeva (2018) has attributed podcasting to a new form of radio. The scholar has presented a typology of podcasts and delimited podcasts, traditional radio and the Internet. Raspopova and Sablina (2018) identified the distinctive features of podcasting and broadcasting, viewed the podcast as a speech and Internet genre, and explored the technology of creating podcasts. In the magazine “Journalist” Uporova (2018) published the review on the book “Podcasting” by Raspopova and Sablina, underlining the importance of this research as a historical document about the Russian podcasting.

Podcasting has covered today not only the well-known radio stations, but also individual web users who want to upload content in an audio format. The basis of such broadcasting lies in its periodicity, multiserries, and, as a rule, system. Podcasting is like an audio blog, but there are serious differences between them. Audioblog is a sequence of records in the form of html pages, while the podcast acts on the basis of the RSS format, which involves checking for updates automatically and sending to the subscriber a signal that new information appears. Today, every Internet user can put on the Internet one's audio program on any platform, either it is audio recordings on social networks or a personal blog, and still call it a podcast. However, it is important to understand that originally only those programs were named as podcasts that users posted on special resources — podcast terminals — websites that support media hosting and automate the subscription for their updates (Litvinenko, 2015). The most popular services are Pod.FM, Podster.FM, iTunes Music Store, and Sound Cloud Podcasting (<http://podfm.ru>; <https://podster.fm> and <https://soundcloud.com/for/podcasting>), the concept of which is that the user is registered and subscribes to a particular podcast and receives notifications about a new release. In September 2018, the podcasting platform appeared on the social network VKontakte. At the same time, the launch of the platform took

place as a pilot, in connection with which about one hundred official communities, such as Medusa, Dood, BeardyCast, Blitz and Chips (VKontakte launched a podcast platform, 2018), received permission to implement the format within VKontakte frameworks. However, today some of the communities and the media that are not included in the list are already using the podcasting platform. At the same time, such a sub-type of podcasting known as educational podcasts, created by students, is actively developing today. The typology of the Russian student-led radio, the specifics of its functioning and the prospects for its development are studied by Kolesnikova (2011), Kupriyanova (2013) and others. The higher educational institutions students podcasting and its features are under consideration of the present research.

2. Problem Statement

Listening comprehension is one of the main channels of the information perception. So podcasts, for whatever purpose they are created - educational, entertainment, etc. – are crucial for the information exchange and communication. From our point of view, podcasting today is becoming one of the key links in the system of the journalism creative activity as well as in the preparation of future professional journalists. The creation of high-quality, informative podcasts by a student can be equated with student's excellent mastery of oral skills. For a journalist, these skills are extremely important, they are included in his professional list of "must-have". That is why the present research examines the process of creating student-led podcasts of academic media and reveals its specifics. Both classic student-led podcasts and posted on VKontakte by the RADI-ON communities (radio of Tver State Technical University) and Compromise (a youth publication of students of Chelyabinsk State University), and audio blog podcasts put on the Internet by one of the authors of the present research in the framework of the student-led radio Diktum of Chelyabinsk State University are under consideration.

3. Research Questions

The present research is addressed to the formation and development of Russian podcasting in general and the development of modern student-led podcasting on a media platform, provided by social network VKontakte.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present research is to trace the locus of the podcasting development as well as to identify specific features and prospects for the development of Russian student-led podcasting on the examples of RADI-ON podcast (Tver State Technical University), the online community Compromise and Radio Diktum (Chelyabinsk State University).

5. Research Methods

The present research has applied the following general scientific methods: comparative analysis, synthesis, structural-functional method, methods of analogies, generalizations, observations. The method allow to identify the specifics of the development and functioning of student-led as well as foreign and

Russian podcasting broadcasts. The structural principle and systematic approach are the methodological basis of the present research. Both are implemented throughout the study.

6. Findings

Student-led podcasting is, first of all, broadcasting to a specific target audience, which is students of a particular university, in the narrow sense, and students of the city and region, in a broad sense. The main advantage of such a broadcast is its flexibility and creativity. In the format of podcasting one is able to fit any topic and almost any genre. There are the analyses of the three student-led websites podcasts, which are radio station RADI-ON, Internet periodical Compromise and radio Diktum. The following results are received.

I. RADI-ON is the radio station of Tver State Technical University. It is a part of the MEDI-ON media group, which also includes a television channel, photo project and magazine. The VKontakte public page of the MEDI-ON is: https://vk.com/media_on. Radio station RADI-ON put online podcasts "Evening without secrets", "YESCAST" and "VISI-ON".

1. "Evening without secrets" provides a duration within 30–50 minutes. Five issues have been published since the launch on VKontakte. There are several anchormen, who are constantly changing. The format of the radio station is informational and music broadcasting. Russian and foreign pop music is on the air. Subjects of issues lie within the interests of students (student activists, university organizations, creative teams and associations). The major genres are interviews and conversations. Two of the five podcasts are dedicated to certain events: "Choosing Mr. and Miss Polytech" and "Gala Concert of the Student Spring".

The advantages of "Evenings without secrets" are high-quality sound and installation. The conversations take place on a pleasant musical background. There are some musical interludes. The topics discussed in one way or another, related to university students who are the target audience of a radio station.

2. YESCAST is the second project by RADI-ON on the podcasting platform VKontakte. Duration of the podcasts is 40 minutes. The podcast is relatively new since there are only 2 releases. YESCAST is an authorial podcast by one of the students at the MEDI-ON. Subject issues are devoted to the scope of women's interests. The genre deals with live conversations, discourses, conversations, reflections.

The main advantages of the project are good music and screensavers, nice show for the background listening. The disadvantages lie within bad voice sound due to technical problems, as well as topics discussed is for female audience only. It arises the problem of the local identity for a listener. On the one hand, the author focuses only on the custom audience, on the other hand, that would place risks of losing new listeners.

3. VISI-ON is the third project by RADI-ON on VKontakte. Duration of podcasts lie within 15-30 minutes. To up today, there are four issues posted on VKontakte. The genres performed include information and analytical interview with representatives of the FOT-ON photo project of the MEDI-ON edition.

The Pros of the format is an excellent quality of the recording as well as unobtrusive calm background music. Moreover, the anchorman performs high quality work by interesting and diverse issues, covering many topics related to photography, being ready to improvise and provide an ease of

communication. The information and analytical focus of the podcast implies an active, “included” audience participation. The Cons include the technical errors in the edit.

II. The community of the youth print and online periodical *Compromise*, created by students of the Faculty of Journalism of Chelyabinsk State University, has existed since February 2018. The first podcast is released on the public page in an audio recording format in April 2018. Since November 2018, when the community had access to a special VC platform, podcasts have begun to appear on a regular basis. The VKontakte community of *Compromise* is at: <https://vk.com/kompromissss>. The podcasts last for 40–80 minutes. At present there are 13 issues. The structure of podcasts is the following: there are two permanent anchormen and a guest. The discussion varies from the latest news, eternal questions and philosophical problems, everyday difficulties up to the issues of journalism, culture and everything related to people's lives. Vivid examples can be found within the podcasts: “On feminism, men and hints”, “On advertising, music and Russian cinema”, “On life in Moscow, salary and fashionable bows”. Consider the structure of one of the latest podcasts “On television, language and love” (recording time of the audio is 1.5 hours) can be divided into several steps: 1) the opening comes out as a continuation of a conversation that had started before the air instead of the traditional greeting; 2) discussion of the February edition of “vDud” by Dmitry Kiselyov; 3) discussion of the objectivity and subjectivity of presenting information in state and non-state mass media; 4) the theme of independent living, how to move from parents and the coup with the emerging problems; 5) the theme of choosing a life path, following the family traditions; 6) a discussion of the relationship between boys and girls in adolescence, the criteria for choosing the second half, the fate of “relationships at the age of sixteen.” During the final editing, the order of thematic blocks has not been violated, the issue itself is reduced to 69 minutes.

The advantages of the *Compromise* podcasts are that: the target audience is young and middle-aged people, so the range of topics for discussion is not limited; the recordings are of a good quality, which is maintained in a specially equipped radio studio; the presence of humor and in-depth knowledge of many topics make a podcast appealing. The disadvantages are that: there are deviations from the topic of conversation; there is a problem of local identity for the listeners; the podcasts are too much timekeeping. In addition, the absence of musical interludes and any other compositional elements of the program often leads the listener to the lose of the key idea of the conversation, which, at times, turns into a stream of consciousness, where, as you know, thoughts are inconsistent and fragmentary.

III. The third object to study is a podcast for *Reviewer.FM*, which represents an audio blog format, released on *Diktum* radio channel of Chelyabinsk State University. It is an authority project by student Shishkova. VKontakte public page can be found at: <https://vk.com/omyfilm>. A podcast is 6–13 minutes. Totally put online issues number is 10. The author performs the duties of an anchorman. *Reviewer.FM* is an entertainment blog, providing information and analytiscs. The form and content are significantly different from the podcasts presented on the *RADI-ON* and *Compromise* platforms. The first two dealt with interviews, discourses and conversations, *Reviewer FM* conduct a music radio station format. It should be noted that while at *RADI-ON* and *Kompromissa* broadcasts are unloaded on VKontakte Podcasts platform, *Diktum* is considered as an audioblog, putting its content online as a radio channel. *Reviewer.FM* programs are published as regular audio recordings, i.e., not using RSS. That means that there is no possibility of

subscribing and receiving notifications. At the same time, the issues have features of a podcast. There is frequency and multiseriess, which to some extent allow us to classify them as podcasts.

So, the editions of Reviewer.FM are made in the format of reviews of popular movies and TV shows. The main features of which are: 1) the choice of films is not based on the principle of recent release, but based on the preferences of the author; 2) the main thing in the evaluation of the film is to offer a new, creative, subjective (or not objective) perspective on it; 3) irony, self-irony, humor, comparisons, analogies are the methods to discontinue the traditional approaches; 4) dynamic presentation of information, the presence of complex sound design are performed systematically. The first release of the podcast is devoted to the film "It", released in 2017. The following are Avengers, "Movement Up", "I'm Losing Weight", etc. In 2018, the author prepared episodes devoted to TV series, as well as special podcasts in the genre of interviews on film themes. The latter is similar in the form to Compromise and RADI-ON but undertaken in a more concise version.

The advantages of Reviewer.FM podcasts include: the sound variety and complex editing; a radio text is accompanied by background music, sound effects, transitions, screensavers and fragments from films. In some issues, in addition to the author, there are new characters who give comments (under the heading "Opinion that I don't care about") or enter a dialogue with the anchorman. The reports, polls, dialogues with artificial intelligence are inserted into a podcast permanently. In such cases, the voice assistant Alice by Yandex is acting out a scene from a movie to make up a parody. The basis of the review, despite the fact that the author largely uses information from official sources, telling about the film, its director, heroes, etc., is still his own opinion.

The disadvantages include little chance to receive serious information expected from a classic review; clear entertainment focus.

During the consideration of student-led podcasting and its analysis, as well as a result of our own experience of creating podcasts, the necessity to form basic practical recommendations for future journalists and beginner podcasters is carried out. 1. VKontakte podcasts should be applied for creating student-led podcasts since the platform is the most convenient and well-known. 2. It is compulsory to reduce the timing of releases that sound for 45 minutes or more, as well as to maintain the dynamics of the conversation throughout the radio interview. 3. The balance between the central topic, which deals with the interests of students, and the related topics is to be preserved. 4. Not only the conversational student-led podcasts with a minimum number of guests, switching, attention to detail, etc., but also experiments: to produce complex, multi-part programs and use multi-track editing are should be implemented.

7. Conclusion

So, the present research has focused on the analysis of three student-led media resources with podcasts. The first student podcast website provides a few different programs on the university radio of Tver State Technical University. The radio station project is implemented through a grant support and is included in the media complex of the university. Nevertheless, RADI-ON radio shows are made at a high professional level. It can even be put on a par with the famous Russian radio stations' shows. The students' periodical Compromise, although being the student media, distances itself from the image of the corporate university periodical. It considers the target audience to be adult. Therefore the thematic content of the

podcasts is different from what the Tver editorialists are producing. Reviewer.FM provides a smaller coverage, since the podcasts are originally created in the framework of the academic course, and it is not intended to reach a wide Internet audience. However, the project is highly creative and experimental. In addition, it should be noted that all three platforms perfectly cope with the skills formation necessary for managing the oral speech quality as an important tool, the mastery of which will allow students to communicate better on the air with the listeners, guests, to understand an interlocutor. Further scientific study of the topic examined is advised to turn into a comparative perspective of development features, genre preferences of foreign and Russian student podcasting, metropolitan and regional student podcasting, etc.

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