

Blogs of Civil Servants of the Republic of Tatarstan in Social Networks

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Abstract

The influence of the Internet on the formation of public opinion is consistently growing. The Internet is the most important cultural factor, performing a number of functions (communicative, regulatory, integrating, informative, entertaining, creative, etc.), which are associated with social interaction of various segments of the population, including power structures. The increase in the number of targeted publications, the possibility of direct communication, the availability of information and its individualization on the worldwide web, as well as the development of new forms provide massive opportunities for popularization, dissemination of various kinds of data and formation of public opinion. Our research is devoted to a comparative study of traffic ranking of the blogs that social and political workers keep in the Republic of Tatarstan. The number of subscribers (the total number of visits of network users) is set as the main parameter for monitoring. The formal and informal nature of communication, structure of blog entries, style of publications, feedback from readers, as well as additional elements of user engagement have also been investigated and are described in our article. When studying blogosphere, publicly available statistical material on the blogs of public figures and influencers was also involved. As a result of our investigation, it is established that the specificity of textual forms of the socio-political blogosphere of Tatarstan is determined by cultural and national identity of the area and its people and is prone to increased formality, unlike the author's blogs of individual influencers. Based on the comparative analysis of existing models of interaction between representatives of government structures, as well as individual bloggers, we suggest it is necessary for the republic to expand and diversify the ways how to present information. When developing a national strategy, it is necessary to take into account the peculiarities of interaction with various social groups, as well as the personalization of information in the blogs of public personalities.

Key words: medialinguistics, political linguistics, sociolinguistics, social media, civil servants, blogosphere

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the XXI century, the Internet has actively invaded the socio-political sphere of Russian reality as a space for new forms of social interaction. Internet communication is closely related to the socio-cultural characteristics of the information society, presented in the works of many foreign and Russian researchers (D. Bell, T. Van Dyke, J. Galbraith, M. McLuhan, N. Farklow, S.V. Bondarenko, V.L. Inozemtsev, V.P. Karasik, etc.).

The study of blog posts as a special sphere of live communication is carried out today in the context of various sciences: medieval studies, pragmalinguistics, discourse analysis, psychology, computer science, etc. The blog belongs to the personality-oriented communicative sphere. Speech genres of informal communication are less studied at the present time than the genres of formal communication, while a blog in the process of its development may acquire signs of both spheres.

In connection with the development of the Internet, the idea of creating a unified information environment and providing equal opportunities for all its users to get access to information resources is gaining a bigger social relevance nowadays. Thus, it becomes an important factor in the socio-cultural and economic development of society. As the circle of Internet users expands, various social institutions adapt to the new communicative space, the image of the user is diversified, the need for new services, websites and technical solutions is activated, which leads to the expansion of the socio-communicative functionality of the Internet space" (Kochetkova, 2016). In this case, not only the blog itself as a form of communication is subject to study, but its functional potential, characteristics and features of implementation in a particular environment, i.e., its text implementation, correlate with an interactive interface.

Being a special system, the Internet has special requirements for the text, as well as for the ways to realize various forms of material presentation. The discursive research takes into account their specificity. The study of the blogosphere as a specific environment of Internet communication is one of the most actively developing areas of modern linguistics (Bronstein, 2013). Blog texts ("blog posts" – individual messages published for public reading) are also actively in demand as a material for the analysis in various research fields: political science and cultural studies. It is important for researchers to fix the current trends of the blogosphere, reflecting the current state of modern society in one of the aspects (You et al., 2017; Thompson, 2003; Yazdanifard et al., 2011). However, the pace of development of the blogosphere is outpacing the speed at which scientific publications devoted to this topic appear. In this regard, in order to present the current state, it is important to trace the dynamics of the development of the blogosphere. Functional specifics of the blogosphere as a special discourse and the dynamics of its development also determine the relevance of this work.

The specificity of textual forms of the blogosphere discourse is considered in the genre aspect one of the most popular aspects of blog text research. The genre approach set by M.M. Bakhtin and developed by his followers remain relevant due to the constant increase in the number and activity of transformations of genre forms, including those within the framework of the Internet space we are studying.

The blog as a genre of Internet discourse has already been actively considered by researchers (E.A. Bazhenova, T.M. Germasheva, E.I. Goroshko, Bronstein, J., Hookway, N., etc.), but socially determined dynamics of the development of the blogosphere has not yet been considered.

2. Methods

Our analysis involves authors' texts in personal blogging journals (personal author blogs maintained by one person) created and functioning in the blogosphere of the Runet since 2001 (approximate date when the use of blog platforms in the Cyrillic segment of the Internet started) till the present. For Tatarstan, the active use of the blogosphere in the political sphere began around 2012.

Blogs, being a product of media, are precisely "new media" and, therefore, are primarily a platform for communication. The appeal to the blogosphere discourse as new media implies the need to take into account social factors of its development in two aspects: (1) the impact of social needs for the use of Internet space; (2) the impact of internal communicative, functional and technical changes in Internet space that meet those needs.

The blogosphere discourse is characterized in two aspects: firstly, in the sociolinguistic aspect, the implementation of which is based on sociolinguistic position of the dependence of language on social conditions (Sh. Bally, V.E. Goldin, T.V. Kochetkova, U. Labov, N.B. Mechkovskaya, O.B. Sirotinina, E.N. Shiryaev, etc.); secondly, on the basis of the significance of the communication channel through which social communication is carried out (A.A. Kibrik F.I. Sharkov and others).

As a result, the blogosphere discourse is defined as personality-oriented on a sociolinguistic basis, based on the results of contrasting the type of discourse to institutional discourses (Kibrik, Karasik, etc.) and defines its specifics as institutionally unregulated, focused on "communication for the sake of communication" and information-open (V.B. Kashkin, A.A. Kibrik, M.L. Makarov, I.A. Revzina, I.V. Silantyev, etc.); according to the type of communication channel the considered discourse is one of the components of Internet discourse (E.N. Galichkina, T.M. Germasheva, I.N. Zagoruiko, K.O. Kvyatkovsky, Thompson, G. etc.).

First of all, we need to understand what kind of blog you are dealing with. Translated from English, blog (or web log) means "online magazine", "online diary". In it, the user shares their thoughts, talks about their lives, publishes news or just some informational material. The type and nature of the published content is determined by the blogger - the author of the text. A special distinguishing feature of this genre of media is intonation. Surprisingly, if at first people just liked to share their lives with friends and others, then later, the blogosphere became a popular platform for people who are specialists in a certain field, seeking to bring knowledge and relevant information to the masses. Moreover, the blog has also become popular for representatives of official local and international organizations, which directly correlates with the political life of society (Evsyukova & Germasheva, 2015; Al Hadhrami & Al Saadi, 2021; Al Qassabi, Al Dhuhli, & Al Qassabi, 2021).

The term "blogosphere" (the author of the neologism is Brad Graham) appeared in 1989 and meant "the totality of all blogs", which at that time was incomparably less than now. Then there were only a few hundreds of them all over the world, and now, according to some expert estimates, more than a hundred million ().

Among the striking distinguishing features of the blogosphere as one of the media genres is the degree of trust of the audience. It is necessary to recognize the fact that the blog has the highest degree of trust from its addressee. So, the author of the blog "Goodbyofis"

Nastya Derbasova writes: "The reader should focus on their inner feelings at the time of reading. They will feel when a blogger writes from the heart, and when he or she squeezes something out of themselves" (<https://goodbye-office.com>). The trust factor when reading blogs is the only confirmation of the written words. By the way, this is the key point for turning to critical thinking and filtering the information of the blogosphere (Ivanova, 2020).

The next essential feature is personalization. If we draw a parallel line between blogosphere and media, we can see that the target audience of the media (the group of users targeted by advertising events) is a wide range of readers, while the target audience (TA) of blogs is a certain group of people. People create blogs about travel, gardening, sports, politics, psychology, motherhood - everything that is interesting to one person, and is not interesting to another. Thus, a person has the opportunity to choose information that will be relevant to their area of interest, but not all news in a row (Thompson, 2003; Yazdanifard et al., 2011).

In politics, the relationship between the media and political space has been called the "mediatization" of politics. This trend has a number of advantages, for example, the availability of information, the expansion of the audience. This process is designed to significantly strengthen democracy. An undoubted benefit is the fact that the blogosphere allows readers to consider the blogger-politician from different angles - as a person, as a professional and as a whole.

However, when considering media communication issues, it becomes obvious that in order to attract a larger audience, posts often turn into a kind of "game" that influences the audience in the opposite way, pushing readers away, thus making them lose interest to blogs, and to serious political issues, in particular.

Since a blog is a media space, it is necessary to pay attention to the distinctive principles of mass media:

1. Technological principle

The technological principle has a direct connection with the technical features of those platforms on which all interaction takes place. Each of them has its own privacy policy, in accordance with the law.

2. The principle of the current context

This principle includes the connection of the text with relevant events to a current date.

3. The principle of replication

This principle makes possible a diverse number of acceptable originals and its modified copies. Such copies may vary depending on a person's worldview, culture, erudition and various extralinguistic factors.

4. The principle of a (broad social) audience

This principle focuses on the communicative effect that should be exerted on the audience, in accordance with its needs. Thus, the fulfilment of a communicative goal can be achieved by applying all kinds of stylistic techniques, manipulative and expressive means for more engaging and interesting content. Along with this, such content should be in close-up mode (the mode of smallest distance), non-stop (constant, continuous), on-line (synchronous), no-resistance (barrier-free) and interactive (assuming feedback).

5. The principle of repetition

The principle of repetition is the repeated repetition of information and its possible modification, implemented in the so-called remake. A remake is a retelling or repetition of information, the report of which has already caused a positive reaction once. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind the preferences of the target audience.

6. *The principle of temporary capacity build-up*

Here the principle of rewriting is used, which implies rewriting the text and its transformation, based on the available source text. Of course, in this case we are not talking about quality and uniqueness, but about quantity.

7. *The principle of promotion*

It is important not only to find your target audience, but also to attract the maximum of them. Many sites already offer their paid promotion services, but they are not mandatory. There are also other ways to implement this process, for example, mutual promotion, in which both sides of the process mention or advertise each other in their posts, as well as many others based on psychological or emotional effect that dominates the promotion process.

8. *The principle of intertextuality*

This principle is based on the interrelation of thoughts arising from reading and their contact with other thoughts, entering into a dialogue with them and creating a special semantic space. The key points of such knowledge are culture, environment and personal education.

9. *The principle of multimedia*

It consists in the relationship of textual data together with a number of semiotic means (figure, table, picture, word, etc.)

10. *The principle of interactivity*

The basis of this principle is the ability of the recipient to give an instant response in the form of a comment. The verbal and cognitive aspect in the mass media is an actual object of research by specialists in the field of psycholinguistics (<https://www.researchgate.net>). Each political personality tries to create its own unique media image by using various manipulation techniques.

Particular attention should be paid to the features of the presentation of information in the media space such as the use of pseudonyms and nicknames. At the same time, it is necessary to understand that their frequent use leaves its mark on the reputation of the individual.

In the course of study, a little more than a dozen blogs belonging to well-known socio-political leaders of the Republic of Tatarstan were reviewed, and a comparison was carried out between the leading influencers of Tatarstan and abroad in order to establish a strategy for further development of the blogosphere. The development of such recommendations and their implementation in the process of training young social activists can significantly affect the process of interaction between government structures and the population and have a beneficial effect on the popularization of the strategic lines of development of the republic in future.

3. Results and Discussion

According to the data provided by the website of online publication "Idel" (Khabibullina, 2021), the first place in the blogosphere among the leaders of Tatarstan is occupied by Rustam Minnikhanov, the President of Tatarstan. His blog is the leading one in Instagram. He doesn't have a specific style, but the blog reflects everything that happens in the

republic (more about specific of politic language of the Republic of Tatarstan: (Galiakberova Rimma et al., 2019; Akhmetzyanov et al., 2020)). The blog is considered to start on March 11, 2013, and about 12 thousand publications were made during this period. The traditional photo of the Freedom Square which the President's workplace windows are facing is easily recognizable. The president focuses on posts, while stories are rarely published.

The blog of the ex-Minister of Youth Affairs of the Republic of Tatarstan D. Fattakhov, which he started 8 years ago, also attracts subscribers. Traditionally, he publishes department reports in his account, but there is also some personal content, for example, the heading on weekends #Papinden, where there are fishing trips with children, his spouse, etc. One post is usually published every day. There Damir Fattakhov publishes his personal view on current topics in posts and stories accompanied by surveys and giveaways.

One of the leaders in the popularity rating among the accounts in the republic is Natalia Fishman-Bekmambetova [more: 11]. She tries to blog in a certain style. Among the publications there is information about the implemented projects in Tatarstan, also about the future of the republic, a little personal life with her husband (Timur Bekmambetov's account has 142 thousand subscribers). She also has cute labradors who like to pose for photos. Subscribers can also find catchy phrases about love, about the city, and about life in her account. Natalia puts out more stories than posts.

The Minister of Digital Development of Public Administration, Information Technologies and Communications of the Republic of Tatarstan, Airat Khairullin, is also an active Insta-blogger. The account description says: "What is the meaning of life? Do good!" He does not have a certain style of his blog, but is open to feedback, at the end of the post he always addresses subscribers: "What do you think? Write in the comments." Of course, he doesn't publish posts every day, but he definitely makes a post once a week.

The Minister of Sports of the Republic of Tatarstan is also actively leading the instablog. Vladimir Leonov, who shares upcoming sporting events with subscribers, also shows his intense activity. He publishes interviews with athletes who have won in competitions. The minister posted his first text back in 2012. He publishes not much of his personal life, but you will always be aware of RT sports events. Sometimes Vladimir Leonov puts out stories while swimming, but he makes posts quite regularly.

Heads of districts, such as Almetyevsk district, for example, also communicate with the population through social networks. Timur Nagumanov weekly conducts live broadcasts with stories about his activities, makes statements and answers subscribers' questions. In his account, photos of Almetyevsk or its residents alternate with saved live broadcasts. The Head of the administration of the Kirov and Moscow districts in Kazan Sergey Mironov and the Head of the Kukmor district Sergey Dimitriev are not far behind.

Deputies of the State Duma of the Russian Federation from Tatarstan are actively working in social networks, for example, Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Economic Policy, Industry, Innovative Development and Entrepreneurship Alfiya Kogogina.

The Mufti of the Republic of Tatarstan Kamil Samigullin is not included in the list of instapolitics, but he discovers high social activity in different groups through subscription.

The unifying feature of the above-mentioned collection of blogs is the choice of the Instagram network as a platform for communication, the spatial and temporal binding of

accounts to the peculiarities of the Republic of Tatarstan (language, culture, traditions, people, etc. (Galiakberova Rimma et al., 2019; Akhmetzyanov et al., 2020), as well as professionally balanced and verified publications. Our attention was drawn to the fact of information broadcasting.

In the popularity rating of YouTube blogs of Tatarstan, published by the online publication Real Time (Golyzhibina et al., 2020), there are no accounts of people associated with the official political sphere of the republic. However, in terms of popularity and influence over public opinion, this network is constantly picking up momentum.

About 15 years ago the first video was published on the site YouTube.com — the story about a trip to the zoo lasting only 18 seconds. Today, this platform is gradually gaining TV audience, becoming the main source of news and entertainment video content for adult (but not ageing) audiences.

According to the authors of Real Time, a paradoxical situation has developed in the Tatarstan segment of YouTube: the republic has given the world the most powerful authors-YouTubers, but we have practically no YouTube stars of our own.

So, young Alina Shaekhova from Nizhnekamsk began to conduct her own small channel in 2017, in which she talked about needlework techniques and unpacked toys presented to her. Her lively reaction to the lack of viewers during her online broadcast caused a surge of interest – the video went viral with 7 million views, which led to her being invited to a fan meeting with the titled volleyball player Ekaterina Gamova in November 2017. In January 2018, Alina was invited to visit the channel "Russia 1". Alina's simple videos of making children's crafts have since gained thousands of views.

The second YouTube channel which should be mentioned is the Ildar Auto-selection channel (Ildar Avto-podbor. Now Ildar is the face of a large Moscow company specializing in auto field in Moscow. His blog with three million subscribers has turned into a corporate YouTube account and does not actually host advertising or "regional" content. Therefore, it is not considered within the scope of the study.

5-Minute Crafts: the project, originally from Tatarstan, specializes in entertaining needlework and unusual tips. Recently, the project was highlighted in Forbes, because in less than 4 years of operation, the channel gained 15 billion views and 66 million subscribers, having occupied the third place according to the number of subscribers of entire video hosting. The audience of the projects on Facebook exceeds 230 million, and on YouTube — more than 300 million accounts. 1.5 thousand videos in 17 languages are posted monthly on AdMe platform. The project's audience became really huge when they changed the concept, becoming a project about everything good and interesting. A giant drive to AdMe was given by social networks that were just gaining their strength and the focus on international audience.

Topics of patriotism, feminism or veganism are gaining millions of views in "Secrets" as well. The channel "Secrets" has about 515 thousand subscribers and 37 million views. "Secrets" broadcast social experiments, verbal battles and conversations on a variety of topics. The content is often ambiguous, even rather aggressive. Views of individual videos go far beyond a million. The channel is constantly in search of heroes for its videos: you can often come across an advert in the social networks of the project "we are looking for heroes who believe that the problem of ecology is exaggerated", or "those who stand for polyamory". Among the advertising partners of the issues, you can find links to giants like Yandex.Food.

And also, the “Secrets” channel has its own small online store selling branded clothing.

Popularizer of science and space Artem Kuznetsov: 366 thousand subscribers. His channel "Simple Cosmos" (Kosmos prosto) with 366 thousand subscribers and 24 million views. In a very simple form, in the simplest language possible, they talk about stars, galaxies, and black holes. Every month, the blogger makes collections of interesting space events and discoveries, and you can always find high-quality graphics, strong sources and a nice edit in the videos of "Just Space", as in "Secrets". Unlike its more "highly social brother", the educational channel by Artem Kuznetsov lives, among other things, on donations.

The listed accounts have their own focus, that is informing and entertaining subscribers. Strictly speaking, official accounts of political figures and blogs of influencers cannot be compared univocally. These accounts were analyzed in order to identify technologies that bloggers used to expand the audience.

So, Instagram data for the Republics of Tatarstan with a population of 3,894,120 people according to the Internet (data from 17.09.2021):

Rustam Minnikhanov, @ rusminnikhanov, 568,000 followers

Damir Fattakhov @ damirfattakhov 30,000 followers

Natalia Fishman-Bekmambetova @nataliafishmanbekmambetova 38 000 followers

Airat Khairullin @ khayrullinayrat 31.5 thousand followers

Vladimir Leonov @leonov 28.1 thousand followers

Timur Nagumanov @nagumanovtd 25.7 thousand followers

Alfiya Kogogina @ akogogina 15.9 thousand followers

Kamil Samigullin @ kamilhazrat 51 thousand followers

(cf. the data in the article by A. Khabibullina dated 02/19/2021 (Khabibullina, 2021)).

By themselves, the indicators of the number of subscribers of accounts cannot be unambiguously interpreted, except by the parameter of popularity among the audience, which, of course, is important. However, different social networks may have different ratios and criteria. To understand the strategy of further development, it is necessary to understand that the number of subscribers, which forms the rating indicators, may be related to territorial and administrative characteristics and individual interests of subscribers, as well as the popularity of a particular social network.

For comparison, the official account of the President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin (<https://twitter.com/KremlinRussia>), has 3.4 million readers. At the same time, there is a parallel official channel on Youtube, where statistics are provided on each topic separately and can vary from several thousand subscribers to tens of thousands (<https://www.youtube.com/user/kremlin>). Even by the parameter of the population of the Russian Federation, which, according to official Rosstat data, is 146 million people, it is impossible to determine the importance and success of communication between government structures and the audience.

However, it is possible to note certain elements that affect interest of the people and thus attract subscribers, which directly leads to the dissemination of ideas and an increase in influence over the audience.

For example, Artemy Lebedev, Yuri Dud, Ilya Varlamov, Nikina Mikhalkov, Anton Pivovarov, Leonid Parfenov, Ksenia Sobchak and others were named among the TOP 10 most influential politically oriented bloggers in Russia by White Square Journal (<https://popsters.ru>). In the structure of publications of these blogs, in addition to the information part, there is a wider palette of tools: an expressive personal position, wider provision of feedback, age gradation of materials, use of different types of social networks.

It is especially important to pay attention to such a feature of public political statements in blogs as their specific structure. It provides a clear and logical communication and well-organised train of thoughts. The audience is already prepared for such a traditional composition of the performance and there is no point in modifying it. However, this structure may not be observed in posts. It is not necessary to greet the audience every time, especially if the posts come out regularly. Here the sender can afford to write only the main idea, for brevity. This is partly due to the fact that the audience of social networks does not always finish reading large texts. For example, as for the social network "Instagram", the study carried out by "Popsters" (<https://popsters.ru>) indicates that it is posts of medium length (160-1000 characters) that have the greatest ability to involve the audience. The number of reactions to such posts is 56% higher compared to long posts and 18% higher than compared to short ones (<https://popsters.ru>). As a rule, the language of political speeches is dry and concise, rich in generalized terminology, with a peculiar use of emotive units.

4. Summary

It is impossible to deny the influence of the factor of formality / informality of the account (in our case, maintaining a private blog and a blog from an official as a representative of government structures). Thus, when analysing the accounts of foreign political leaders, the possibility of more "intimate" communication with the population is revealed by creating parallel accounts where a political person can show a greater degree of likeness to an "ordinary person" - they can show their emotions, have the same problems as the "average citizen".

An increase in the degree of emotionality due to expressive evaluative judgements, small deviations from a certain standard, for example, clothing "not according to protocol" (see the blog of the Royal Family of Great Britain, <https://vk.com/royaluk> or The British Royal Family | Facebook <https://ru-ru.facebook.com/BritishRF>), as well as "publications near miss" (see the now blocked account of Donald Trump), contribute to an increase in the number of visits to accounts, but can also lead to undesirable consequences.

Most often, such elements are not present in politicians' blogs, but in popular influencers with commercial projects. The YouTube network is in particular demand.

The popularity of blogs also depends on the tasks it performs. The most characteristic trends identified by political scientists in this regard are: 1) the use of blogs to inform, consolidate supporters and coordinate their actions; 2) propaganda and "test run" of their ideas; 3) counterpropaganda, the fight against political opponents (Krestinina & Chernyshov, 2008).

Abroad, many politicians are increasingly using their blogs as means of communication

and increasing their popularity. There are diaries opened on behalf of Hillary Clinton, Angela Merkel, Segolene Royal and even Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The informational role of blogs as a kind of alternative to the official media is also increasing. In particular, during the Iraq War, blogs of American soldiers appeared, reporting on what really happened in the arena of military operations (Krestinina & Chernyshov, 2008). Politicians often use blogs not only to promote their ideas.

When promoting blogs, it is also necessary to take into account the fact that an ironically critical attitude towards politics and politicians is very common among bloggers: "The most noticeable phenomena, events and people in the "offline" life often fall out of the field of view of the average blogger – and the most insignificant, but for some reason things described in blogs, on the contrary, are made the most discussed" (Kashin, 2007).

To date, the most visited Russian social networks are, according to various sources, odnoklassniki.ru (about 10 million users are registered) and vkontakte.ru (about 7 million users) and YouTube.

5. Conclusions

The use of network structures for socio-political purposes allows, on the one hand, to organize a wide broadcast of information and its discussion, and on the other hand, it makes it possible to take into account the individual needs of users.

The coming of politics into the Internet leads to the fact that any serious problems in the "national" sectors of the blogosphere immediately get resonance. The audience of blogs responds quickly to the materials published on the web.

The diversity of opinions and information presented in them is very high, and in order not to miss the opportunity to build the connection with the population, even with significant indicators of the number of subscribers among representatives of government structures, in the Republic of Tatarstan, it is necessary to 1) expand the use of various social networks and types of content, which can be achieved by running parallel blogs on several platforms (active users of networks - Rustam Minnekhanov, Damir Fattakhov, etc.); 2) diversify the content of blogs according to the target principle (informing, popularization, etc.), as well as by age criteria (traditional social orientation or its expansion); 3) use the accumulated positive experience of commercial projects, successful influencers, as well as foreign colleagues. Maintaining accounts in social networks also needs to be taught, and not only to political science students, since trends change so quickly, and much help is needed for a successful presence in networks especially for an average politician working full day.

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