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INTERNET BLOGGING AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION AND SELF-EXPRESSION FOR YOUTH

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the blogging phenomenon in the modern society. Penetration of the Internet-communication in all spheres of human life is high. Lately the increasing number of young people have become launching and developing their Internet blog. Internet-blogs may be of various thematic content and direction. By the dynamics of development and the scale of audience, an Internet blog can compete with traditional mass media. The article considers the problem of youth involvement into the blog sphere. The purpose of the study is to define the level of youth involvement into the blog sphere. The purpose is achieved through the usage of theoretical methods of research (analysis, interpretation); the empiric method of primary information collection (online survey). The analysis of theoretical sources helped revealing the types of Internet blogs, the basic differences between blogging as the communicative instrument and traditional means of mass communication. The empiric research was conducted in Moscow in 2018, with the overall number of 510 respondents. The respondents were the senior schoolchildren, college and university students in Moscow. The article contains the main results of the research, describing the peculiarities of how young people use the Internet space, how they are involved into the Internet blogging, and why they are interested in blogging. The authors revealed the motives of young people blogging: the motive of self-expression, drawing attention to the own self, development and perfection of communicative skills, life-sense search, connected with the financial component of blog sphere. The conducted research helps drawing the conclusion about the future of blog sphere and its influence on the youth.

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Keywords: communication, online-blogging, youth, internet, user-generated content, social networking.

1. Introduction

During the last decade the blogging phenomenon has appeared and is actively developing. A large number of people create Internet blogs, enrich them with content, influencing the blog audience.

The blogging phenomenon appears due to the spread of Internet-communication. The heart of blogging is to create and regularly renew the web site content, account in social networks, Internet page in a certain resource. The blog authors may be both individuals and social groups.

The informational content in blogs may be presented in various forms, depending upon the Internet platform: in visual, audial, textual or complex form.

The foundation of Internet blogging is the idea of diary method. The diary method is used in the field of scientific and casual activity. The idea of the diary method is to fix the events, social facts, experience, people opinion on a problem or a theme. In the pre-Internet time the diary method was used with the help of written or printed factual fixation. With the appearance and development of Internet communication the opportunities for diary method increase in number, and online diaries appear. Modern blogging is the online diary which is written by a certain individual, a social group or an organization. With an open or partially open access to the Internet blog material, the audience interest for the blog rises and various segments of the target audience are influenced.

1.1. Main types of Internet blogging

The Internet communication scholars distinguish several types of blogs (Heinze et al., 2019).

The first type is personal blogs. A certain person creates personal blogs. The content for blog enrichment is chosen by the blog author or freelance copywriters, specially producing content for a certain blog according to the set tasks. The content in personal blogs may touch upon various themes, but all the topics are highlighted from the blogger's personal position. For example, a blog about family cookery recipes, about the immigration experience in another country.

The second type of blogs is business blogs. Business blogs helped influencing real and potential consumers. Regular content posting in blogs on a trademark, its characteristics and benefits, demonstration of trademark consuming influences the target groups, encouraging the desire to buy the goods and service. For example, beauty blogs, fashion blogs.

The third type of blogs is the niche blogs. The niche blog content is devoted to one of the specialized topics (for example, topics of orphans, health, weight loss etc.). The blog topic is focused on certain groups of necessities, which are character for representatives of some audience segments.

The fourth type of Internet blogs is a complex blog. The given type of blog, as a rule, is kept by a moderator, the blog content is provided by any user or subscriber. The blog may be devoted to one or several topics (for example, educational topicality). Whether the blog type be, its creation may be initialized by both an individual and an organization. There have recently been created platforms which provide an opportunity to keep a blog and to promote it among the young audience (for example, Blogger, WordPress, Tumblr).

1.2. Differences between blogging and traditional mass media

We shall define the main differences between blogging and traditional mass media.

Firstly, social distance between the target audience and a blogger is shorter in comparison with the distance between mass media and the audience. The image of a blogger is close to the representative of the target audience. A blogger communicates with the target audience in a comprehensive language, using the fact, examples, comparisons, which are interesting and available for young audience understanding. The traditional mass media use a more significant distance, they are far away from its audience.

Secondly, the blogger himself, as a rule, defines the content, its themes which he will show to the audience. The traditional mass media have quite a strict agenda, whose frames can not be broken, i.e. the content, amount, characteristics of the information presented are controlled and regulated by the mass media and single channels owners.

Thirdly, the most of the bloggers express their opinion, judgment, i.e. present the content of evaluative character. The main part of information spread in mass media is factual.

At fourth, with the audience increase a blog gradually transforms into the communicative channel which may be compared to the channel of traditional mass media. Any contemporary mass media has a financial foundation i.e. gains finances for advertising or is financed by founding companies. Responsibility for the advertising content on the channels of traditional mass media is regulated by the legislation, responsibility for the advertising content in a blog is carried by the blogger. It should be noticed that platforms for blog creation and development, for example, Instagram, Tumblr may advance additional demands and restrictions for advertising placements.

At fifth, traditional mass media of various level of submission present interests of business, government, local communities. Bloggers above all follow their interest and risk their own reputation from advertising and sponsoring integration.

At sixth, the pace of content preparation in the blogging sphere is higher than in traditional mass media. It is connected with the fact that technological process of news and information preparation in mass media consists of several stages, none of which cannot be omitted: problem statement, information collection, information processing, news or any other material preparation for mass media, material statement, material posting. While preparing the material for blog posting some technological stages may be omitted (for example, problem statement, material statement) which makes the process of creation of information more dynamic.

At seventh, the ways to measure the effectiveness of advertising posting in mass media and in blogs are different. The traditional mass media use the basic indexes of channel rates, audience number, which define the price for advertising posts. Measuring the communicative efficiency of advertising in traditional media bearers demands extra research; economic effect measuring is suspended. In blogging the communicative efficiency is measured with the audience involvement (the number of likes, reposts, commentaries), economic efficiency is measured with the number of hyperlink uses, product orders, buys.

At eighth, the degree of personification, identification of the target audience representatives and blogger is higher than the degree of identification with a leading, popular mass media journalist. This leads to the fact that in the world with multiple informational flows people trust the blogger's opinion and make decisions corresponding their opinion due to the limited time resources.

2. Problem Statement

Problems of blogging study are considered in the works of authors-representatives of various scientific fields.

In social sciences the blogging phenomenon is studied from the viewpoint of self-expression, personal self-identification.

Hutchins A., Tindall N., Kertamukti R. in their researches pay attention to the fact that many teenagers keep a blog with the purpose to draw attention to themselves, spread of social contacts (2019). So, an Internet blog may be used as a platform for self-expression.

Artwick C.G. and Yang C. consider that for a number of Internet users blog sphere presents a leisure form (Yang, 2016; Artwick, 2018).

In economic sciences blogging is considered as a channel of influence on consumer's opinion. Serman Z., Sims J. think that with the help of blogs we may draw the direct attention of the target audience to goods and services (Serman, Sims, 2019).

Harmeling C.M., Mofflett J.W., Arnold M.J., Carlson B.D. speak about the involving blogging power due to the usage of net Internet-space (2017).

Hudson S., Huang L., Roth M., Madden T. appeal to the blogging influence on the formation of brand following at the expense of a more personified information presentation about the brand (2016).

Coombs W.T., Falkheimer J., Heide M., Young P. consider a blog as a new Internet-reality which helps forming the company image, a political leader and a blogger himself (2018).

In humanitarian sciences the accent of attention is placed on the type of communication, happening within a blog: in what way the blog authors present the content, what ways of text construction they use, how they keep in touch with audience (Chu, 2019; Reale, 2019; Newson & Patten, 2016).

A number of authors state facts about the structural change in communicative processes in contemporary mass media and in the whole society due to the active development of blogging (Turow, 2019; Hill & Bradshaw, 2018; Lipschultz, 2019).

3. Research Questions

The research considers the following research questions:

- how often do they address to the Internet-space?
- how do young people use the Internet-space?
- what is the purpose of keeping the blog?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research lies within the search of importance of Internet blogs in the life of young people.

5. Research Methods

The research was conducted with the use of theoretical and empirical methods of the research. The first stage contained the analyses of the theoretical material, social facts touching upon the research topics. At the second stage we developed the questionnaire and conducted the online survey to understand the attitude of young people to blogging, the degree of youth involvement into blog sphere, peculiarities of Internet blog keeping. We surveyed 510 respondents. The respondents were young people at the age of 16 to 25, their main type of activity is the education in senior classes at school, at colleges and universities of Moscow. The electronic database of answers was processed with the application SPSS. The percentage of respondents in educational institutions is the following: 30% - senior schoolchildren, 60% - university students, 10% - college students which corresponds the percentage of students at different levels of education in Moscow.

6. Findings

The research results testify the deep penetration of the Internet into the youth environment and the high involvement of young people into blogging.

Young people use the Internet space daily, spending there a various amount of time (Figure 01).

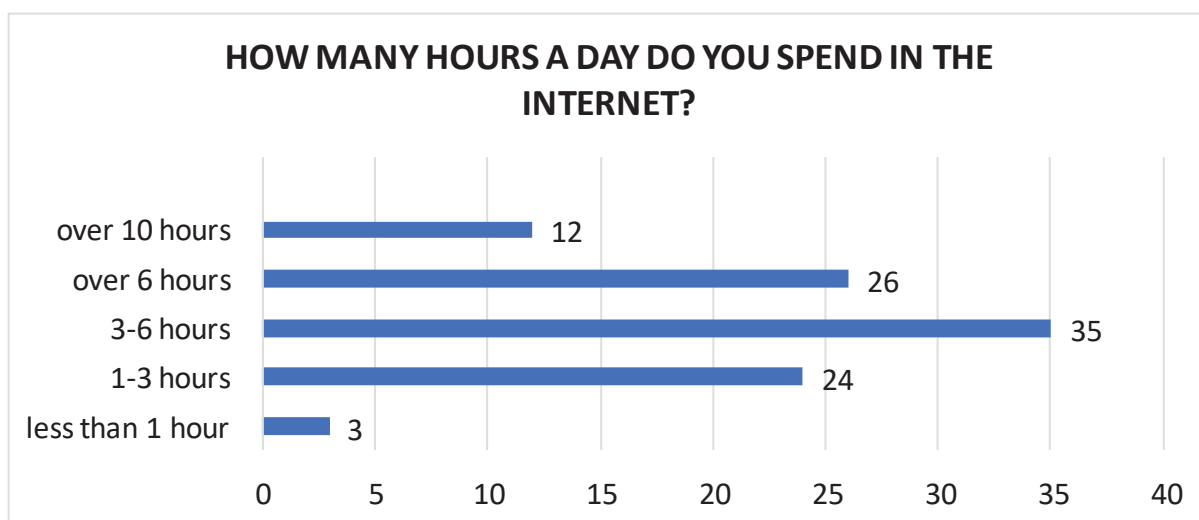


Figure 01. Involvement into the Internet space

The research results testify that every fourth young man uses the Internet for over 6 hours a day and every tenth young man does it for over 10 hours a day. Such a great number of hours for the Internet testify the high penetration of the Internet communication into the life of young people.

Indeed, the large number of hours spent by young people in the Internet indicates that online communication, virtual space is gradually replacing real human communication, interaction and other forms of leisure and study time.

Young people are increasingly distancing themselves from spending their time offline, choosing virtual ways of communicating, spending leisure time and solving certain tasks.

Since the main activity of respondents was study activity, it can be concluded that a significant proportion of respondents use the Internet not only in their leisure time, but also directly in the learning process or at the same time with the educational process.

Young people use the Internet space with various goals (Figure 02).

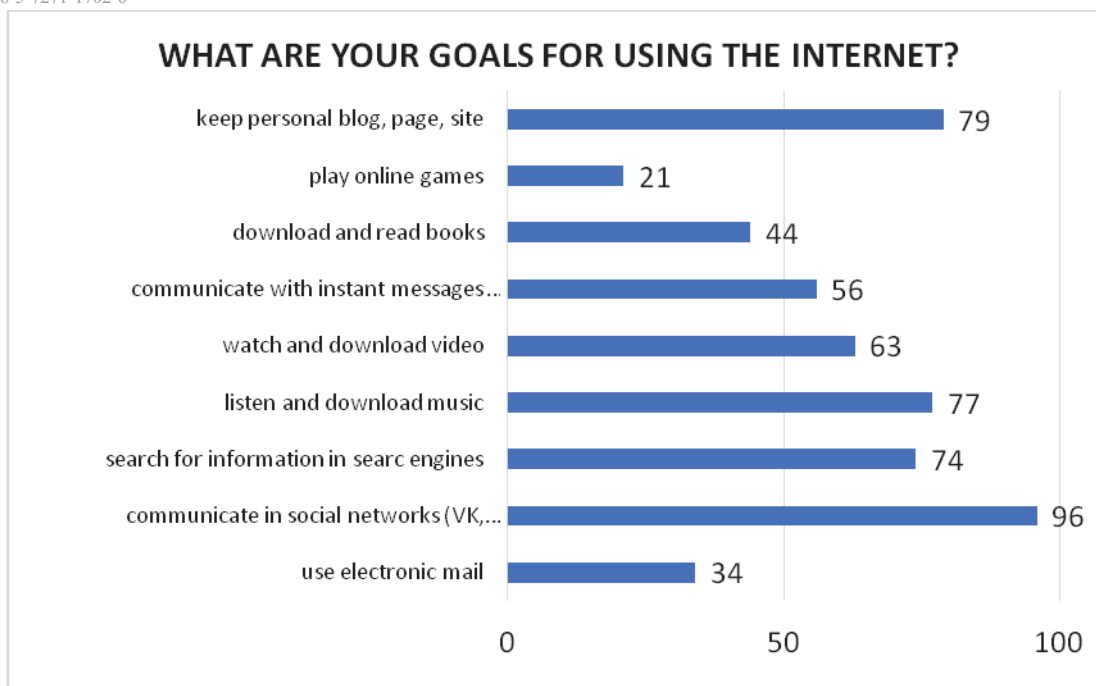


Figure 02. Goals for using the Internet.

Respondent's answers to the questionnaire illustrate the possibilities of satisfying different needs through the Internet: recreation needs, entertainment needs, communication needs, need to find content that meets the interests of respondents, need to search and share information, need to find soulmates, need to develop social connections, need to identify yourself with social group, need for self-realization and self-development.

Almost all the respondents (96%) pointed out that they use the Internet space for communication in social networks (VKontakte, Facebook, Instagram). The second popular reason is the personal blog, page, site (79%). Also young people actively listen and download music in the Internet (77%) and search for the information in search engines (74%). In the research of 2014 the share of young people, keeping their blog, is only 7%. For five years the involvement of young people into blogging grew by more than ten times. These results testify that young people satisfy a number of their needs through blogging.

Young people keep blogs of various thematic ranges and of different audience number. Almost all young people, who keep blogs, stated that in the blog they publish the information about themselves and the way they spend their time (with no certain details), what they think and see, the way they react to different situations, i.e. they lead an online diary. Though among the respondents' answers we encountered the following thematic blogs: about pets, about the healthy way of life, a poetic blog, about the sport nutrition, about the youth fashion.

Most young people keep their blogs in Instagram and have a various audience: below a thousand followers (12% of respondents); 1-5 thousand followers (23% of respondents), 5-10 thousand followers (24% of respondents), 10-50 thousand followers (18% of respondents), 50-100 thousand followers (18% of respondents), over 100 thousand followers (5% of respondents).

Only every fifth young man claimed that he gains profit from blog sphere. Other respondents stated that they keep their blogs but they have not used any advertising integration or have used it rarely.

Young people demonstrated different reasons for keeping a blog (Figure 03).

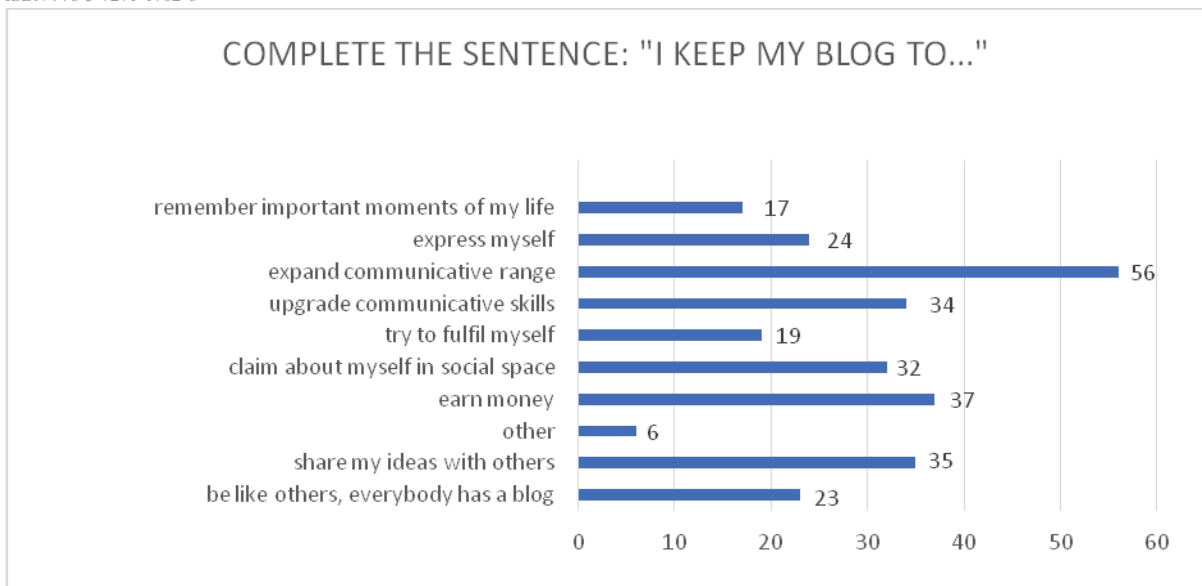


Figure 03. Reasons for keeping a blog

Over half of young people (56%) mentioned the increase of communicational range as a main reason for keeping a blog. The second important reason is the opportunity to earn money from blog keeping. Reasons connected with meeting the need for self-expression, self-realization and communication are also encountered in the respondents' answers.

It is also important to notice that young people actively consume the content of various blogs, follow the publications and renewals, participate in interactive mechanics, which are provided by other bloggers (lotteries, cross subscriptions, giveaways, events).

7. Conclusion

On the basis of theoretical analysis and empiric research we may draw the following conclusion:

Firstly, young people are active users of the Internet and social networks. They address to the Internet communication with various goals: search of necessary information, social communication, social contact building, spending leisure time.

Secondly, young people are involved in blog sphere. A small part of young people does not have their blogs. A larger part of young people keeps their blogs. Blog keeping helps young people to express themselves, to feel involved into social space, to satisfy their needs for self-realization, search for their place in life, self-identification. Also the contemporary blog keeping helps to develop the communicative skills as well as to gain profit.

Thirdly, young people do not see themselves outside the Internet space. They actively manifest themselves, communicate with quite a large audience through their blog, express the opinion and influence the audience, competing with traditional mass media in trust and personification.

The accent shift in the communicative sphere towards blogging testifies the changes in informational processes.

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