

## Interdiscursivity in Blog Communication: The Case of Russian Journalists' Blogs

*Evgeny Alexandrovich Kozhemyakin and Anton Alexandrovich Popov*

Belgorod State National Research University, Belgorod 308015, Russia

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**Abstract:** The paper discusses interdiscursivity as a specifying feature of journalism in blogs. Journalistic blogs represent new communicative strategies of interaction with their audience and new approaches to construct their content. It is claimed in the paper that these innovations in their turn affect meaning structures of journalistic messages, since they cumulatively result from different discursive practices (visual, verbal and auidial; political, journalistic, recreational, advertising etc.; suggestive, informational, persuasive). The problem which is highly important here is that of interdiscursive and intradiscursive coherence. Does the mix of discursive practices construct a paradoxical or controversial picture of reality? How interdiscursivity influence the journalistic blog structure? Does it have an impact on the quality of journalistic goals? The authors of the paper observe the vast set of blog messages of Russian journalists to reveal which discursive practices occur there and how they affect the coherence of blog-texts and blog communication. The paper discerns the main types of interdiscursive processes which characterize Russian journalists' blog-communication. Constructive and destructive effects in terms of meaning coherence are also observed in the paper.

**Key words:** Journalistic weblogs • Journalistic discourse • Interdiscursivity • Coherence • New media • Blog communication • Weblog

### INTRODUCTION

Immense development and expansion of blogs is regarded as one of the key challenges for the traditional journalism since blogs possess a set of technological, communicational and social features which change considerably informational interactions between authors (journalists) and audience. Blogs have scarcely been recognized institutionally as a journalistic tool but nevertheless they contribute to mass communication being strong alternative media.

Describing internet blogging character, Donald Matheson points out that “we must look hard to find journalistic discourse where functional interactivity has had an impact, for it poses a significant challenge to news practices (...).The journalistic fiction that reporters know what is going on in the world better than audiences is severely dented as it becomes clear that, individually, many readers know a lot more than the journalist” [1: 168].

Popularity and efficiency of blogs seem to be linked not only to mobility, openness and operability of the very communication channel (as what traditional media are often lack of) but also to brand new ways of texting and

interpretation “techniques”. As opposed to professional “traditional” journalists, bloggers operate not as “knowledge missionaries” or key issues advisers, not as a professionally legitimated source of information, but as communicants whose credibility, reliability and omnitude are being proved in terms of the functional interactivity.

Blogs hold to hold journalists to the more interactional ways of communication and more trustworthy identity construction [2]. As T.J. Johnson and B.K. Kaye show in their online survey results, “blogs were judged as the most credible with issue-oriented Web sites also judged as highly credible” [4: 175].

Discussing attitudes of journalists toward interaction with their readers, Riley *et al.* [4] refer to those reporters who are “horrified at the thought of having to interact with readers instead of getting on with the next story” [1: 168]. These conditions show that the author of journalistic text faces different “risks” of interaction with his readers depending on the type of mass-medium he uses-whether traditional or new.

These facts prove the openness and flexibility of blog-communication. Blog texts are heterogenic, multigenre, multifold, etc. What is very much specific for

journalistic blogging is that coherence of messages is determined rather not by institutional journalistic norms and standards or editors' intentions, but by inner values of communicants, communication norms and communicative pragmatics. It means they are discursively constructed, therefore, it needs the discourse theory and methodology to adequately describe and explain them.

**Methodology:** As J. Bogaerts and N. Carpentier clarify, "discourse theory stresses that there is no inherent meaning to the concepts and practices of journalism, but that it acquires these in the process of articulation, i.e. the relations established among signifiers" [2: 62]. In this paper we make an attempt to describe general parameters and conditions of coherence of *discursive practices* in Russian journalistic blogs. We determine discursive practices as specific speech and thinking activities which are enacted in different communication events and are represented in different texts and refer to the order of a certain discourse. Thus, we keep up with the discourse-theoretical perspective (M. Foucault, N. Fairclough, T. van Dijk, C. Mouffe, N. Carpentier, etc.) according to which any social sphere or activity (e.g. journalism) are discursively constructed, being involved into the complex of inter-determined social, cultural, political, linguistic relations and contexts [e.g. 3].

**Main Part:** The most significant *communication events* in blog communication are posting, discussion, replying to questions, commenting. General types of *texts* are posts, comments, reviews, ratings, gifts, charts, avatars, photos, videos, articles, discussion threads. Meanwhile, we face certain difficulties when estimating the type of discourse which determines the content and specifics of discursive practices of blog-journalists. Evidently, it is not the journalistic discourse as a set of professional standards of production and reproduction of socially relevant facts and their meanings. We should rather talk about blog texts as a result of co-implication of different discourses. In other words, topics, comments, the way the author determines a situation, possible interpretations of messages depend not only on journalistic discourse norms and communicants' awareness of them, but also on the types of socially relevant discourses take part in agenda formation for both bloggers and their readers. We can say that meanings are constructed in blog-communication rather socially and culturally than professionally: what communicants believe to be relevant and important in a social and cultural context occur much more crucial in blog-communication than professional

demands of journalism as institution. However, there is a very wide spread idea of weblog discourse and weblog as a convergent discourse and media (A. Korochenskiy, L. Manovich, R. Nielsen, etc.) [see, e.g. 6-9].

Thus, if discursive practices of traditional mass media "submit" to the logics of the professional journalistic discourse with its norms of objectivity, monologue strategy, trust to the source of information, then journalist blog communication is grounded on many other standards of cognition and communication. Radical interactivity of blogs means that bloggers and their readers bring their own "background knowledge", opinions, world view and communication experience to the process of knowledge construction and translation. As a result, blog communication presents the mix of different discourses. It has several aspects.

*Firstly*, we can observe the plexus of different "receptor" discourses-visual, verbal, aural, which alike television is. Anyway, the difference is that basically verbal discourse is a backbone for log communication, since, at least, the most expected reaction to non-verbal messages is still a verbal reply.

*Secondly*, the blog sphere has the mix of different institutional discourses (political, educational, religious, entertaining, juridical, etc.). The examples are the messages of a well-known reporter for the radio "Ekho Moskvu" Alexander Plushev which were posted on his blog in succession with small time periods.

*Decision on Samodurov and Erofeev is unfair and illegal and it has to be canceled as soon as possible. Or even it'd be better if it becomes the precedent forever. Maybe not formally, because we have different legal order, but factually. The decision must be canceled by right of absence of a crime in their act as well as in the similar acts of NASHI members. Well, they spread the caviar on the icon of Blessed Virgin and they applied the fascist uniform on the photographs, so what? Absence of self-irony and moderation towards acts of hystericals is a very dangerous symptom [10].*

This post shows the comment of the journalist on court and political processes in the country, thus the author realizes standards of the political discourse: flatness, agonality, expressivity and opposed position n. The next post in the blog has a clear advertising character and corresponds to the norms of advertising discourse-brevity, informational content, imperativity:

*If anyone needs a vuvuzela, now you can order it on DealExtreme by \$3.90, free shipping [11].*

At last, very often is representation of the professional journalistic news (informational) discourse.

Of course, such juxtaposition of three types of discourse (political, advertising and informational journalistic) is rather typical for the discursive practices of traditional mass media. For example, in almost any newspaper we can find the succession of political comments, advertising messages and reporting texts. But still, in journalistic blogs this discursive convergence is often lead by the principle of hypertextuality and interactivity: messages can obtain certain discursive features due to usage of links to the text of a different discourse field or due to the change of an initial discourse register in discussions and feedback. Though, it is obvious that the content of the discussion will be determined principally by the initial text and its discourse mode. The author who made the post of a political character will at least try to hold the discussion in the context of the political discourse.

Blog messages are also determined by the topic of the blog, by goals and intentions of the author, but because of different cultural and social backgrounds of active discussants the fact of the complex mix of discourse genres, argumentations and descriptions remain evident. It is rather often in Russian journalistic blogs that, for example, the initial political post gets juridical or entertaining development. One of key symptoms of such discursive convergence is the use of lexical items of different discourses, the use of different types of argumentation (e.g. dogmatic alongside with empirical), genre and stylistic variations. The post from the blog of Elena Vaytsekhovskaya (reporter of "Sport-Express") can clearly illustrate this:

*Our synchronous legs are the best in the world, this is the axiom. They are for sure half as thick as American chicken legs, but they do not need such thickness. Far and by, we are going to have two golden medals today and this is so evident that it's hard to get rid of light journalistic disappointment: where is the intrigue? Where is the intrigue? Keeping this thought I am dragging to the tribune and thinking about American chicken legs coz got no breakfast again [12].*

The journalist uses the style of everyday conversation with a bit of slang lexics. Meanwhile she provides the estimation and prognosis of events from the

point of view of a sport journalist which correlates with the expectations from professional journalistic texts.

Thirdly, blogs contain discourses with different goals: persuading, suggesting, informing. Unlike traditional mass media where journalistic discursive practices enact generally in correspondence with the goal of informing, blogs give the opportunity to actualize a broader spectrum of goals. It is so because communication acts of discursants are based on wider set of motives-from self-presentation to collective cognition.

The note from Natalya Radulova's blog, the magazine "Ognyok" reporter:

*Gadgets for traffic safety.*

*In continuation to the issue of traffic safety gadgets. In France they use the gadget which helps scorchers not to be scared of traffic cops. It alerts when one approaches the traffic radar. Well, though it is not what serves for traffic safety. Actually, otherwise (...). The first "breathing pipe" was patented by the German company Drager in 1953. These gadgets are widely used for the control over soberness in hazardous production facilities and for the drivers testing. In our country a part of such alcometers has the certificate of Ministry of Health and their values are regarded in court as evidence (...). What are common for all the gadgets are an electrochemical indicator and a printer to print the test results. And here is my personal wish: let all the traffic police cars have video cameras as American police have. Let all be registered! Every word. And every gesture. [13].*

In this post the journalist formally realizes her professional functions-she provides the objective information, explains the issue, consults and formulates her own position on the issue. Though, it is done in a common blog-journalistic manner as the blogger accomplishes not only the informational but also the emotive goal.

Fourthly, in blogs one can clearly see the evident shifts in the structure of the discursive practice (intradiscourse transformations). While in traditional mass media there are sharp distinctions between the content, opinion and discussion, in blogs these distinctions are often effaced. Many posts are a comment of a blogger to a text taken from a different source and in this case it is rather difficult to fix what is the core content of the message-the information of the event or the author's opinion on it. The example taken from the blog of the journalist Vladimir Solovyev represents it:

*In Nice four Chechen men beat a policeman. The incident, as agency members told, took place in Thursday night at the tobacco rack in a bar. A criminal police agent passed a remark to a man who tried to jump the queue. After this the man and his three friends dragged the policeman to the street, stroke him done and started to beat him. The policeman's colleagues came to the rescue and managed to arrest three of the attackers who appeared to be the Chechnya residents. On Saturday, August 28, arrested Chechens are to face trial in court. Lenta.ru*

*This is how the police work there. Our militia works differently.*

*"Pearl Warrant Officer Blogger Kicker. On August the statement against his acts was recorded. Almost 20 days after "it was reported that Saint-Petersburg militia was not ready to exhibit a charge on anyone on this affair because the personality of the militia officer is not identified. Soon after this, the radio station site published a photo of the warrant officer undersigned "wanted by investigation". (...) The readers of the site of the radio "Ekho Moskvyy" identified the personality of the officer. As it was announced in Petersburg investigation committee they were not ready to exhibit a charge on the affair of "the pearl warrant officer" who was insulting and beating on July 31 the participants of the action for the defense of the Constitution. The personality of the violator is not identified, as it is reported by investigators. Ekho Moskvyy.*

*If the militia cannot identify their own officers and then they cannot find them, how can they catch criminals? Can't they identify the warrant officer? [14]*

As we see, the pragmatic goals of journalist bloggers are not simply to inform readers or to transmit them certain meanings but to discuss the information and to co-create interpretations and knowledge about events. Rhetoric means ("how can they catch criminals?") are apparently used for rendering the author's view of the issue and provoking the certain interpretation (sure, militia do catch criminals, the question is about protecting their own officers from legal prosecutions), but the journalist is surely aware of the possible readers' reaction to such provocation.

Such position, different from traditional journalistic one, means that the author would aim his or her communication acts not for "a typical representative" of the audience, whose reaction would be unseen or temporally delayed, but to certain users, whose reaction to the text would be less likely passive. Moreover, the blog reader is regarded not as "an object of enlightenment" but as an agent of "mutual knowledge construction".

## CONCLUSIONS

In terms of intense development of blog-journalism there is one question which seems rather important for estimation of actual journalistic perspectives. How can the mix of different types of discourses and discursive practices be used for journalistic purposes? Does such "democratization of media discourse" [6] provide more efficient functioning of journalism in terms of informing, enlightening and translation of cultural and social experience?

Evidently, the wide range of discursive practices helps at least enlarge the audience of a blog due to engaging culturally, socially and professionally different readers to discussions. In its turn, interaction of different points of view, interpretations, attitudes can surely help constructing the objective and adequate knowledge of the social world.

Another advantage of interdiscursive processes is the advancement of suggestive function of journalism, reinforcement of authors' positions and personal potentials of journalists. In terms of "homogeneity and authoritarianism of the journalistic field" (Bourdieu) this strategy can be extremely important for articulation and translation of non-engaged views.

Besides these advantages, interdiscursive aspect of blog-journalism provides efficient adaptation of information to addressees' demands and interests, overcoming the professional barrier between journalists and readers. It also helps integrate journalistic knowledge into the everyday life structures of readers. In other words, interdiscursive blog sphere expresses its key principle of communicational and cognitive equality of authors and readers. Bloggers oftener regard readers as possibly more competent individuals than they, bloggers, are. As Lev Manovich remarks, the last decade show the great interest of the internet audience to non-professional blogs and its volume exceeded the quantity of professional journalists' blogs readers to the year of 2010 [7]. It demonstrates that co-construction of the knowledge

in blogs today is less determined by the professional affiliation of authors, while the credibility of bloggers depends on the character and quality of their participation in discussions instead of the kind of institutional structures they represent.

However, interdiscursive character of blog communication can be also estimated not only in terms of positive effects. Besides evident advantages which blogs have for journalism and journalists, they have a negative impact. Non-structured mix of discourses in blog communication can hazardously be the factor of fragmentation of readers' minds and world views. Entwinement of political, journalistic, advertising and religious discursive practices often leads to "the loss of adequacy" of texts and purposes in communication, since regardless the formal likeness of, for example, publicist and political texts, they have different-if not controversial goals.

Moreover, the tendency of deprofessionalization of journalism in blogs have more negative than positive effects. With new possibility for expression of ideas, journalists face the real perspective of loss of former strictly determined professional status. Today everyone can become a communicator. As a consequence, "mass individual communication" (or even "mass self-communication") becomes a reality of the modern time. It brings to life principally new problems of regulation of informational flows [6]. It contains the menace of lack of standards of veracity and trustfulness of information. But still, if bloggers follow professional norms of working with socially relevant information, blogs are seen as a highly important resource for democratization of mass communications and development of their multifold aspects.

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