

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

Historical Narrative in Contemporary Blogger Practices vs History Textbook

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Abstract

Introduction. This paper continues to explore the characteristics of contemporary blogosphere, which has become one of the ways to spread historical knowledge. Blog creators have become direct participants in the formation of our country's history. The purpose of this paper is to examine the ways in which history is presented on contemporary websites, on blogs, and the features of presenting history in contemporary school textbooks. The focus on education in the study of blogs on historical subjects is necessary and topical: historical narrative is embedded in the public space, including the Internet, which is a more attractive source of information for modern schoolchildren than books. Results. There are anonymous blogs on the Internet whose creators claim that their content is historical. The content of such resources is of course not related to public history. Narrative of public history is linked to collective memory, to history as academic discipline, and has a fundamental historical significance. In a modern history textbook linear historical narrative is fragmented into separate stories by means of a special design; an attempt has been made to create the situation of getting information in a way familiar to the individual with fragmented thinking. Direct participation of professional historians in the creation of public history, its development, including the information and telecommunication network of the Internet will reduce the threat of chaotic development of public history, will significantly improve the quality of the historical narrative in the public sphere, will make modern blogs and history textbooks mutually complementary ways of presenting history.

Keywords: blogosphere, modern history, history textbook, public history.

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Introduction

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The article continues the study of the blogosphere as a modern method of communication historical knowledge. The author's previous work considered the role of blogs in the formation of Russian history, the platforms themselves were analyzed as a phenomenon of a new interactive political culture in the process of political communication (Tokareva,2020). The research perspective in this paper is focused on the field of education. By historical narrative in the article we mean the form of presentation of historical reality and the narrative itself, which contains the interpretation of the past, gives an idea of the state of affairs in the past.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The aim of this paper is to analyse the ways in which historical narrative is presented on contemporary blogs and in contemporary history textbooks. The analysis of the blogosphere focuses on history websites whose content is the most distant from, and in many ways contradictory to, the content of history textbooks, but is attractive to modern students.

The problem is topical because, firstly, the very ways in which historical knowledge exists in our everyday lives have changed. Historical narrative has become an integral part of the public space, including the Internet. Secondly, schools are educating a particular generation with clip (fragmented) thinking (short attention span driven by consumption of modern media), for whom the Internet, unlike books, is an essential component of everyday life. This requires a search for new solutions to create optimal conditions for mastering school curriculum, in full compliance with the FSES and the Concept of Teaching the School Course in Russian History (Ob utverzhdenii federal'nogo gosudarstvennogo obrazovatel'nogo standarta..., 2020). The study was conducted on the basis of such methods as analysis, synthesis, generalization, content analysis and structural content analysis, identifying abstraction.

The material of the work was blogs on historical topics, a school history textbook, scientific works on the features of thinking of modern schoolchildren (Kupchinskaya & Iudalevich, 2019; Mityagina & Dolgopolova, 2009; Staritsyna, 2018), devoted to the problems of public history research (Isaev, 2016; Sheveleva, 2013).

Literature review

By the third decade of the 21st century the process of accumulation and communication of historical knowledge has changed significantly (Abushouk, 2017; Thorp, 2017; Bühl-Gramer, 2018). It has not only been spread by academicians, professional historians and politicians. The practice of public history, which is related to the issue of historic preservation, important for every state, has expanded the range of actors

and changed the way the material is presented (Allyson, 2020; Bühl-Gramer, 2018; Hawkey, 2015.) Knowledge is communicated no longer by means of books or usual lectures and lessons about historical events, persons and facts.

Thanks to digital opportunities, web platforms have been created in which historical content, whether textual or media, is published.

But public history is a multifaceted field that still lacks clear, coherent mechanisms for building dialogue between the academic community, the creators of the historical narrative and the general public (Ryabov et al., 2020) And there is a threat of chaotic development of public history: digital public history interprets our multifaceted past in its own way, and the professional community, academic and pedagogical, finds it difficult to control this process.

The historical narrative in the blogosphere unfolds on web sites, which can be roughly divided into three types. Firstly, there are the sites of professional historians. The authors of the posts on historical topics have a higher education in history and usually have a PhD. They may work in research or educational organisations. Let us point out the blogs by A. V. Isaev, PhD in History (Isaev, 2021; *Poslednii gumanist galatnogo veka*, 2021), V. I. Baklanov, PhD in History (*Territoriia istorika...*, 2021), A. I. Fursov, PhD in History (*Andrei Fursov...*, 2021; *Andrei Il'ich Fursov...*, 2021) and a historian and writer S. E. Tsvetkov (*Zabytye istorii...*, 2021; *Sergei Tsvetkov...*, 2021). On these resources the authors talk about their books and express their own vision of historical events.

Secondly, these are web-sites where the creators of the site publish other people's texts. They post them with the author's permission or simply provide a bibliographic link to the material used. The date of the publication of the text may not be specified, and the opportunity to comment is also often disabled. However, such resources can be classified as blogs because interaction with the reader is set: everyone is asked to rate the article on a five-point scale and share the text on social networks. The website *Russian Empire: History of the Russian State (Rossiiskaia imperiia...*, 2021) can be referred to this type of web-platform. The creators of such sites openly speak about themselves or provide links to their other thematic blogs.

Thirdly, anonymous resources are being created on the Internet where the authorship of the posts remains questionable: there is no indication of the material used at the end of the text. Such blogs are created by users using Yandex.Zen platform or by opening separate sites. Among the sites of this type there are the following blogs: "History of Russia", "History of the USSR", "Historian" and "Stories from a Historian" (*Istoriia Rossii...*, 2021; *Istoriia SSSR...*, 2021; *Istoriik. Anonimnyi sait...*, 2021; *Istorii ot istorika...*, 2021).

The texts published on such resources are the most distant from the historical narrative of school textbooks, both in the way the material is presented and in the content. However, it is these blogs that compete with traditional textbook materials, as they are able to attract and retain the attention of schoolchildren for a long time.

At first glance, the anonymity of blogs should repel the content and cause distrust. This is not the case because of the special presentation of the material. If you go to the home page of any blog created on Yandex.Zen, the user will see a gallery of bright images. Each image has a title and the name of the resource. You can click on the image to open the post and you will be taken to the page with the text. Here are some of the titles of the blog whose author refers to his resource as a historical one; most of the titles are framed as a question:

which shooting arms were in service in the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War;

how did Chernobyl accident affect the collapse of the USSR;

what did the USSR look like at the time of its creation in 1922;

what castes existed in the prisons of the USSR;

why were taxi drivers disliked in the Soviet Union;

why were Warrant Officers in the Soviet Army called "Lumps" ("Kuski") or "Trunks" ("Sunduki");

in what order did the republics withdraw from the Soviet Union;

what weapons did the Germans fight with in the Great Patriotic War;

Why did Stalin give an ordinary cleaner the Stalin Prize of 50 thousand rubles (History of the USSR).

We emphasize that under each headline there is the name of the blog against a striking image: History of the USSR. Clip (fragmented) thinking (mind-set) (such term is used in relation to younger generation, born in 2000 and later) of a schoolchild, even without reading such texts, but simply flicking through the page, will build the connection of the topics stated in the headings to the history of the Soviet Union, which can immediately give a negative connotation in the perception of the school course of modern Russian history.

This is the structure of the main pages of blogs created on Yandex.Zen platform. As it has already been noted, it is attractive for clip (fragmented) thinking. The main features of this type of thinking are: a

simplified way of perceiving and expressing information, mobility and hastiness, including when formulating conclusions, being specific and difficulties in abstracting, a reduced ability to remember, and illogicality. A person with fragmented thinking perceives unconnected images, which anonymous blogs present in the form of bright pictures with captions - titles of posts and connects them into one structure thanks to the repeated name of the blog in each picture (in this case - the history of the USSR).

The difficulties of organizing education of modern schoolchildren and students are the subject of consideration in scientific works of the 21st century (Daisy, 2018; Justin, 2017; Fordham, 2017; Festle, 2020). The questions about the changes in teaching methods, methodology, in educational model in general are raised, and the emergence of individuals with fragmented thinking is called a natural process of social development (Caferro, 2020). O.A. Staritsyna points out that it is impossible to fight clip thinking and expresses doubts about the call by teachers for a return to conceptual thinking. As for the solutions that can help adapt the learning process to the peculiarities of modern students' perception of reality, the researcher points out the use of gamification technologies, "game design methods for non-game areas"; inclusion of drills "for training attention, perception, thinking and memory" directly into the lesson; use of graphs, mental maps schemes when explaining new material (Staritsyna, 2018, p. 273). M.A. Kupchinskaya, N.V. Iudalevich suggest "...to reconsider the content of teaching material; organise information in the form of clips; change the format presenting information; apply bright, clear and visual presentations with clear, original, catchy wording" (Kupchinskaya & Iudalevich, 2019, p. 69).

However, not all solutions proposed are suitable for use at history lessons at school. The method of game design, conveying information in the form of video clips is questionable. The advice to revise the content of the teaching material looks doubtful: this revision has always been carried out in education at the state level to clarify terminology and include the latest historical material. And presentations with bright slides and training videos have long been successfully used by teachers in explaining the material.

Methodology

It is significant that modern school history textbooks do, in fact, take into account clip thinking of schoolchildren. We are going to look into the textbook for the 7th grade "History of Russia: XVI - the end of the XVII century" published by "Drofa" (Andreev, Fedorov & Amosova, 2016), designed for 14 year-old students. The historical narrative about the events of the stated time period is developed in the book in a sequential manner, which corresponds to the linear system of teaching at school. The linear way of presenting material allows to demonstrate in the lessons the continuity of stages of Russian history, development of statehood; it contributes to the formation of students' historical thinking as "the ability to

consider events and phenomena in terms of their historical conditionality and relationship, in progress, in coordinate system "past - present - future" (Ob utverzhdenii federal'nogo gosudarstvennogo obrazovatel'nogo standarta..., 2020, p. 7); meets the historical and cultural standard of national history.

The linear way of presenting material is more suitable for the "man of the book" with conceptual thinking than for the younger generation - "screen people" with fragmented thinking. However, the authors of the textbook for the 7th grade, "History of Russia: XVI - the End of the XVII Century" published by "Drofa" managed to solve the contradiction: the historical narrative is fragmented into separate historical stories with a special design.

The upper part of each page is decorated with a dim illustration, the border between the illustration and the text is somewhat blurred. The book has 6 chapters and the pages where each chapter begins and the introduction page at the top have the same coloured illustration, the principle of blurring the border of the picture and the white page with the text is maintained. These illustrations at the top of the page should be seen as a meaningful visual aid for fragmenting linear historical narrative and, consequently, for better comprehension of the material by the pupils with clip thinking. Similar organization of visual material is common to every website. The design of the upper part of any web resource, the so-called header, always gets a lot of attention. Moreover, during the transition from the main page to other sections of the site header can be modified: change the size of the image or the image itself.

Results

In a modern history textbook, we can see the usual web-based learning situation for students with a typical clip thinking. The fragmentation of the linear historical narrative occurs through the repetition of the top illustration on the page where each chapter of the textbook begins. Let us consider other means of fragmentation and ways of adapting the learning process to ways of thinking of the younger generation.

Each chapter begins with a question, which is progressively expanded in the paragraphs. This creates the situation familiar to students to search for relevant information on the Internet, when a request is typed into the search box, and the system gives the answer. It should be noted that students return to the main question of the chapter after mastering the material in this chapter, i.e. the question is perceived by a person with fragmented thinking not only as a kind of search query, but also as a tag associated with a specific plot. It is significant that students are asked to choose among three answers: here again a familiar situation of using search engines is created, when the system offers several resources to choose from as an answer to a search query. Basic concepts and names of historical figures are also tagged, all of which are placed before the beginning of each paragraph.

Paragraphs of the textbook are divided into small parts - paragraphs, each of which is numbered and has its own name. This principle of organising teaching material was also typical of history textbooks in the USSR. However, the textbook under review has a significant innovation: each paragraph is followed by questions. On the one hand, they serve the usual purpose for the teacher and students: they allow them to check the degree of the uptake of the material, to revise or to make a different focus in the historical material. On the other hand, questions after each paragraph become one of the structuring tools of the linear historical narrative: they clearly break up the narrative into short fragments.

Interestingly, when these textbooks appeared, some methodologists spoke of the inappropriateness of highlighting the main question and offering multiple choice questions (Baranov, 2018, p. 17). We believe that such assessment was made without taking into account the need to fragment the linear historical narrative for modern pupils by means of a special presentation of the material.

The means considered for fragmenting the linear historical narrative in the Year 7 textbook, as well as the special way of presenting the material - formulating the main question of the chapter before the narrative begins and returning to it after the material has been mastered - show: the format of presentation has already changed, and it takes into account the peculiarities of modern thinking of schoolchildren.

Discussions

However, the problem of influencing the younger generation with web resources that position themselves as historical remains. First and foremost, we are talking about anonymous blogs. In the first decade of the XXI century, according to the researches of that time, young generation still chose between the Internet, television, printed books, mass media, radio (Mityagina & Dolgopolova, 2017), then at the beginning of the third decade the choice is obvious - it is the Internet. The peculiarities of presenting the material on anonymous blogs were discussed above and its visual appeal to students with clip thinking was highlighted. Let us briefly consider the content of such web sites.

Let us pay attention to two of the cited titles of posts on the blog "History of the USSR": "What shooting arms were in service in the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War?" and "What weapons did the Germans fight with during the Great Patriotic War?" The very fact of placing the second post together with the first one on one resource poses a far greater threat than problems in mastering the content of the school course of Russian history. There is already a danger here for personality formation, world view, patriotism and respect for the Fatherland.

If this blog "History of the USSR" has only 335 subscribers and an audience of 5 242 users, the data for the

blog "History of Russia" is much more serious: 188 806 subscribers and an audience of 3 326 306 users (data as of 24.02.2021). Audience is an indicator of Yandex.Zen platform: the figure shows how many real Internet users have read at least one article on a particular blog, and found it on the platform's personal recommendations feed, which appears below Yandex search bar.

The History of Russia blog also has a discrete way of presenting material, appealing to someone with fragmented thinking. Nearby texts are published about White generals managing their own execution, Napoleon's fallacies and the toil of barge haulers, the fate of the conspirators who killed Paul I, Marx and Engels' hatred of Russians and the famous living Rurikovich descendants today, the last Russian prince of the British Isles King Arthur, the care of landlords for their serfs, the feeding of Mongol warriors in a campaign, and so on. In such posts, a particular historical fact often becomes the occasion for an alternative historical plot, a domestic description, a tabloid narrative.

Web resources created outside of Yandex.Zen platform also create and publish material using the similar principle. For example, the creator of the site "Historian" (IstoriK. Anonimnyi sait, 2021) positions his resource as a blog of historical facts of XIX, XX and XXI centuries - this name of the resource is seen by Internet users who search for a "historian" in a search engine. However, on the site itself one can learn about historical facts in the section "War"; other sections of the "historical facts blog" are dedicated to cinema, success stories, fashion and style, and love stories: these are the sections included in the top menu of the web resource and are immediately visible to the user.

At first sight, the historical narrative on the anonymous blogs could be classified as public history: posts are written on historical topics; texts are sometimes published about unrealised models of political development ("What if Russia had stood up to the Mongols?"; "What kind of SSR did Gorbachev want to create and why was it not realised?"). However, the posts rather belong to the sphere of popular history, like films, computer games on a historical theme. They offer a sense of history, where real events are mixed with fantasy, conjecture, predictions and tabloid details. Such resources lack the emphasis on the usefulness of historical knowledge that is characteristic of a public history narrative and do not encourage in-depth reflection on the public connection to the past.

In order to attract subscribers and readers, creators of web resources often include in their posts titles and at the beginning of the text the words and sentences that form a negative attitude to the educational process and to teaching history at school. Here is how the post about the Russo-Turkish wars, dated December 17, 2020, published on the anonymous History of Russia blog, begins "From the schoolroom we have been used to the belief hammered into us that Russia did not attack anyone, but was only attacked." Here is also

the beginning of the text "Alexander III's circular on 'cook's children': a mistake that cost the country" from the same blog, with a negative review of textbooks: "Russian history knows thousands of decrees, hundreds of laws, dozens of manifestos, but try to remember even one 'circular' that would be worthy of mentioning in textbooks". As we can see, the posts of anonymous blogs can not only negatively affect the perception of a school history course, but also discourage textbooks altogether.

Conclusion

Public history is socially constructed and contributes to the reinforcement of history as an academic science in public existence. E. M. Isaev notes that "the phenomenon of the emergence of public history is closely linked to the desire not only to overcome the growing gap between academic history and the public, but also to meet the public demand for history" (Isaev, 2016, p. 8). In this regard, the question of creating a historical narrative that has historical significance, can be included in the collective memory and, of course, which is based on a genuine academic story becomes relevant.

The study revealed that there are currently anonymous blogs on the Internet, whose creators do not even think about such characteristics of the historical narrative, although the content posted on their sites is positioned as historical. However, the content of such resources is not related to public, but to popular history. Many texts from anonymous "history" blogs can have a negative impact on the formation of the personality of schoolchildren, their world view, their sense of patriotism and respect for the Fatherland, as well as on the perception of a school history course, including the rejection of a textbook. The creators of such web sites take into account fragmented thinking of the younger generation and make content attractive to them. In addition to anonymous blogs, historical narrative is posted online on the web sites of professional historians, as well as on the platforms where they publish articles by professional historians and provide links to their work.

Authors of a modern school history textbook take into account peculiarities of the way of thinking of modern schoolchildren by applying special visual means to fragment the linear historical narrative. By means of using pictures at the top of each page, placing the main question before the beginning of each chapter and returning to it at the end of its study, offering a choice of three answers to the main question, including questions at the end of each paragraph, a familiar situation for students with a clip mindset of searching for information online, and learning the content on an interesting website is created.

Although creators of modern teaching materials take into account peculiarities of thinking of the younger generation, and educational literature is regularly reviewed not only in terms of updating the content (including the latest historical material, clarifying the concepts), but also in terms of methods of presenting historical material, we believe that this is not enough. Modern schoolchildren, as "screen people", are

primarily focused on the Internet rather than on printed books. Information and telecommunication network allows them to activate those aspects of clip thinking which contemporary research defines as positive. This is the desire to consume a significant amount of information, the ability to switch from one piece of information to another, the need to consume information due to the awareness of the importance of mastering it (Kupchinskaya & Iudalevich, p. 69).

It is significant that the necessity of mastering the network space is realized by the representatives of modern pedagogical community. At the All-Russian contest "Teacher of the Year" presentation of the web-resource is a mandatory stage of the competition. Many teachers continued to work on their websites even after the end of the competition. The web sites were also created by teachers of history and social studies (Saity uchitelei istorii i obshchestvoznaniia, 2021).

Professional historians, scientific and pedagogical employees, surely, can not control the emergence and development of resources such as the reviewed anonymous blogs. However, the academic and pedagogical community is able to participate directly in the creation, development, public history, also by means of the Internet, thereby reducing the danger of its chaotic development. History today is an open virtual information and communication platform for everyone, including members of the academic and pedagogical community. Such participation in the creation of public history can influence the quality of historical narrative in the public sphere, the quality of work with historical material and set specific standards for this activity. In this case it would not be possible to speak of an opposition between historical narrative on contemporary blogs and a history textbook, but a mutual complementation of these two ways of presenting historical material.

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