

Opportunities of Social Networking Services (SNS) For Educational and Scientific Purposes: Multimedia Project “Family Memory of the Soviet Past”



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Abstract: The article shows the technology and some results of the multimedia research educational project "Family memory of the Soviet past", which operates in the Russian social network "VKontakte" for students of cultural studies in the Russian State Social University. The project is based on the research traditions "memory studies" and "oral history", it is carried out within the framework of the discipline "Applied cultural studies". During the network project, a digital archive of interviews transcripts with memories of the Soviet past is collected; as well as a photo archive; a library; a video library; an electronic thematic communication platform and a news section are organized.

In the process of the "Family memory of the Soviet past" project educational and scientific opportunities of the social network service VKontakte were identified and developed. Methodological foundations were developed, and the technology of international multimedia scientific and educational project was tested in the framework of future culturologists training.

The article analyzes the educational and scientific possibilities of the project. It is the realization of practical component in humanitarian education; group work; involving the scientific search operations and prospects of carrying out international empirical studies in the post-soviet space. The article presents some scientific results and prospects of the project on the analysis of transcripts, photographs, organization of digital archives, discussions. The risks of using social media in the educational process and scientific activities of students (for example, blurring the boundary between private and academic space) are identified and ways to overcome them are outlined.

The article shows how Learning Management System (LMS) of University – can be supplemented with educational and scientific capabilities of social networking service (also social networking site – SNS). The results of this article can be used in similar humanitarian research and educational projects on oral history and memory studies.

Keywords: e-learning, family memory, memory studies, multimedia project, social networking services, SNS, social media, oral history, scientific and educational project, VKontakte

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I. INTRODUCTION

Interest in social media use in the educational process is actively increasing after the appearance of the first social networks: in 2010, the first application for the integration of educational programs and popular social network service was developed and implemented [1]. Researchers point to such disadvantages of LMS, as limitation and rigidity, and these disadvantages have become the flip side of its universalism and versatility. It is noted that even such e-learning systems as Moodle (systems configured for open source) do not allow the use of programs of other developers without serious configuration [2]. Criticism of the limitations of traditional Autonomous education management systems (e-learning, LMS) sounds sometimes very categorical: "Autonomous LMS ordered to live long... Find a way to integrate it into your collaboration platform. This is where the future is taking us" [3]. The social media system based on Web 2.0 technology has transferred social communications to another level and for fifteen years of development of social networking services / social media in the general free access new means of social interaction, new tools for the organization of joint working, educational, scientific space have been placed. But all this is still little considered in traditional e-learning systems and in the education process in general. The existing experience is estimated by experts as not too high [4], the development of SNS capabilities, in fact, is just beginning. Therefore, the description, analysis, understanding of the experience results of using social networks for educational and scientific purposes is actual today.

Our experience of using social networks in science and education is a group work in the social network VKontakte on the basis of the multimedia research and educational project "Family Memory of the Soviet Past" [5]. The project has been implementing since 2014 as a part of the study of the "Cultural studies" discipline at the department of Sociology and Philosophy of Culture in the Russian State Social University in cooperation with Pavlodar State University after S. Toraighyrov (Kazakhstan). The project is a practical and research part of the discipline, where students implement their theoretical knowledge in the field of oral history, memory studies, qualitative sociology.



The main goal of the network project is to conduct in-depth biographical interviews with representatives of the older generation to restore personal and family experience of soviet everyday life, study the mentality of the soviet man, as well as recording evident accounts of the past events. The project is collecting of oral evidence-memories of the Soviet history from different regions of the former USSR. This data in the transcript form (transcribed interview) is posted online in a closed international student group.

A comprehensive analysis of the experience gained should clarify the prospects and risks of using SNS in the educational process and in the scientific activities of humanitarian students.

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodological basis of the multimedia project and its interpretation in this article is the scientific direction and the international research movement on oral history and memory studies as well [6]. Oral history is the collection, archiving, study of historical information by interviewing an eyewitness, recording interviews to the audio file and transcription. Oral history, unlike traditional written history, is searching for "hearing" and recording the voices of those social groups that for various reasons have been turned off from the system of written fixation in archives, libraries, museums, media and other institutions. Scientific interest in fixing oral evidence of historical events arose in the 60s of the XX century and was associated with the understanding of the controversial history of the Second World War [7]. The development of new technologies, the spread of audio equipment, and then the ability to store information digitally on the Internet – all this has led to the rapid development of oral history since the 1980s of the XX century in Europe and the United States.

An important milestone in the institutionalization and development of oral history was the work of the English historian Paul Thompson (b.1935), who established the journal and the professional association Oral history. His book "The Voice of the Past" (1977) [8] today is one of the main fundamental works, revealing the theory and practice of oral history. Speaking about the causes of the movement, Thompson writes about the one-sided nature of the written history: "The more personal, local, and unofficial a document, the less likely it was to survive. The very power structure worked as a great recording machine shaping the past in its own image" [8]. Thus, information about the everyday aspects of life of the working class, family, women and much more fell out of the official written history. Using ordinary people as a source of an autobiography fills this gap and makes history more multidimensional and more democratic. Thompson notes the special nature of university oral history group projects, in which a synthesis of research and teaching enhances the quality of both [8]. Further, we will see that this feature of oral history group projects using social media / social networking services not only successfully develops but moves to a new qualitative level.

The first step in the process of organizing this project was motivation development of students-culturologists, who in fact had to be involved in a new form of educational work. Such a motivation was the participation in the competition of socially significant projects Open Heart Eurasian Youth Forum in Yekaterinburg in 2014. Participation in the competition allowed to create additional motivation for

students, to develop a collective methodological base of the project, as well as to attract external partners. VKontakte network digital group "Family Memory of the Soviet Past" was organized.

The second step was the search for partners in the countries of the former USSR. With the help of Department of International Relations (Russian State Social University), inviting official letters were sent to universities of Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet countries for joining the project "Family Memory of the Soviet Past". Several interested teachers responded, but stable cooperation was subsequently developed with cultural scientists of Pavlodar University after S. Toraighyrov (Kazakhstan). The student audience is quite wide: students come from all over Russia and neighboring countries.

The third step is interviewing, transcript processing, network and face-to-face discussion of the project in the framework of applied cultural studies.

The fourth step is to publish the best transcripts of interviews with commentary and publish the results of the project in the professional press, this article is also a part of this work.

In 2014, the base was thus prepared and a pilot study was conducted. And further from 2015 to the present, all third-year students take part in the project every year.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

With the help of Paul Thompson activities, the digital sound archive "National Life Stories" [9] was founded, which collects thematic collections of the history of British society. Part of this unusual national archive is available through the oral history section of the British Library [10], also within the framework of the "Millennium memory bank" project [11]. It is interesting that some of them are intended only for users in accredited higher educational institutions, that is, they present special material for student scientific work. The institutionalized collections of oral evidence are in the USA, Czech Republic, Spain, Italy, Syria, China, and in the post-Soviet territory in Uzbekistan and Belarus [12].

The study of the past from the point of view of family, biographical focus began in the 1990s of the XX century, almost simultaneously with the development of oral history in Europe and the USA. A whole series of new projects related to the tradition of oral history has appeared, and they are still successfully operating. This is the annual all-Russian contest of works by high school students "Man in History. Russia - XX century" [13], devoted mainly to the history of the family in the context of Stalinist repressions; initiative of the Sociology Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg to create a bank of autobiographies of Soviet people [14]. Voronezh Center of Oral History within the framework of local history work project trains schoolteachers methods of oral history and collects relevant empirical material [15].

According to some reports, less than 50% of teachers use social networking services/social media for teaching in higher education, and most of them are humanitarians. The researchers note that "The use of social media scores many benefits for instructional and administrative use among faculty and students such as instant messaging and communication,

student recruitment, online discussions, inter and intrapersonal interaction, available current events, promotion of sense of community and belonging, sports, entertainment, job searching, and the sense of one world – ability to connect and interact with many people in other places" [4]. Overall, the academic development of SNS in higher education can be considered as a necessary language development of the new generation, which is called "digital native" – the first generation, that was brought up in the conditions of the Internet environment [16].

IV. RESULTS

The project "Family Memory of the Soviet Past" involves the collection and analysis of empirical materials across the geography of the former USSR from the point of view of the "family focus". The project involves the combination of several components: the study of oral history theory, memory studies, qualitative sociology and biographical method; interviewing respondents (witnesses) face-to-face, transcript preparation, reading and discussion of transcripts in the audience, selection and analysis of photos, formation of an electronic archive on the VKontakte page, networking of participants, creation, writing, publication of scientific works. The project has been running since 2014. Initially, the geography of the project included Russia (Moscow, Samara, Kargopol, Orekhovo-Zuyevo, Lipetsk, Kolchugino), Abkhazia (Sukhum), Kazakhstan (Astana, Pavlodar, Semey), Belarus (Minsk). Every year the list of cities expands, as students come from different cities and countries - former Soviet republics. Nowadays within the project work about 80 transcript texts, four audio interviews, about 100 photographs relating to different periods of Russian history of the XX century have managed to collect, all these materials have passed the primary analysis.

In the process of developing the project, its network structure was formed - the closed VKontakte group, the capabilities of which turned out to be easy to adapt to the requirements of the modern educational process. The structure of the training network platform includes several elements.

The first element of the training network site is a library combined with an archive. Here are links to the fundamental literature necessary for studying the theoretical basis of the discipline [17]. Here, in the Documents section, the texts of transcripts of interviews made by students, as well as the texts of the photograph analysis, are also placed. Thus, the Documents section is a constantly growing archive of biographical interviews, which has become an empirical basis for student research. Publication in the network of materials always implies both the consent of the respondent and the desire of the student. It should be noted that about a fifth of the interviews, at the request of the interviewers, are not posted on the network.

The second element of the training network site is the "Photo Album" section, where each member of the community uploads photos found and analyzed on the basis of the methodology of Peter Shtompka [18], representing a visual slice of the family memory of the Soviet period. Once, colleagues from Kazakhstan uploaded photos to the group a few days earlier than the transcript. And for the Russian participants, this turned into an exciting educational scientific task: on the basis of multi-genre photographs, it was necessary to determine the profession, membership in the social layer, background and approximate time of the hero's birth.

The third element of the training network site is the Discussion section. This section discusses topics suggested by the teacher or the students themselves. For example: "What will pass will be nice. Do you agree with these words of the Russian poet A.S. Pushkin?"

The fourth element of the training network platform is Audio recordings section, where at the moment there are only four interview recordings made in Pavlodar (Kazakhstan). Audio materials can also become very important authentic material for cultural studies. For example, an interview with a respondent posted by a student at Pavlodar State University after S. Toraigrov presents the tragic circumstances of the deportation of Chechens and Ingush to Kazakhstan in 1944.

The fifth element of the training network site is the News section - the section, where the teacher and participants publish information about current events on the topic of the group. The publication of news on the topic is considered as an option for students.

The sixth element of the training network site is a list of Internet links on the topic of the group.

Quantitative characteristics of all project sections development beginning from 2014 to 2019 are shown in Table-I.

The randomness of the sample of respondents and the small number of interviews do not yet allow a systematic analysis of all empirical material on the topic of the group. But now you can see that in the interview there are recurring topics and stories. The theme of a "strong emancipated woman" constantly sounds, which, according to one respondent, "pulls everyone up", like a nurse on the battlefield or the support of a large village family. This image is also confirmed by visual documents: often it is the older woman who becomes the compositional center of family collective photos. In family history inter-marriage facts, facts of social mobility in the first decades of Soviet power are often recorded: "the revolution mixed and grinded all the clans and families of different layers of society, as a result we got mixed families, if there had been no revolution, we would not have been"; "there was a fusion of cultural layers" [19]. In several interviews, evidence was found of tough tabooing of the relatives' memory abroad or relatives of the "noble estate".

Table-I: Quantitative characteristics of the main sections development of the network platform for the multimedia project "Family memory of the Soviet past" in 2014-2019

Section	2014/2015 academic year	2015/2016 academic year	2016/2017 academic year	2017/2018 academic year	2018/2019 academic year	Total
1. Library (number of uploaded documents)	26	20	13	13	33	105

2. Photo Album (number of uploaded documents)	74	6	8	20	12	120
3. Discussion (number of topics)	2	1	1	0	0	4
4. Audio recordings (number of uploaded documents)	3	0	1	0	1	5
5. News (number)	78	15	10	9	23	135
6. Internet links (number)	8	15	10	6	11	43
6. Participants(number)	18	15	20	29	20	102

This information was carefully hidden in the family history of the Soviet era to create an impeccable, safe biography, now they are irretrievably lost. Thus, the initial analysis of transcripts suggested the existence of cultural universals in Soviet society, such as inter-marriage, the family ideal of a strong woman, the close interweaving of private life and the state. The fixation in the transcripts of the living, colloquial speech of the respondents can be considered a separate scientific and memorial result of the project, requiring its own linguistic understanding. Obviously, even these preliminary findings can become the basis for encoding interviews and quantitative analysis in the "atlas.ti" program [20].

Despite the obvious educational and scientific successes of the VKontakte network group "Family Memory of the Soviet Past", there are also problematic places in this practice. Thus, during the use of network technology services, the boundary between private and academic space is actually blurred, since students use the account, they created in private life to work in a network group. Students for personal reasons can simply delete their account during the semester (there were no such cases, but they are possible). Since the use of a network group only complements classroom work, alternative forms of face-to-face participation are provided for such students. In any case, membership in such a network group should remain free and motivated primarily by a lively scientific interest. At the end of the project and the entire training, almost all students remain in the network group, which, in our opinion, indirectly indicates the freedom of choice.

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, in the process of the "Family Memory of the Soviet Past" project educational and scientific opportunities of the social network service VKontakte were identified and developed. Methodological foundations were developed, and the technology of international multimedia scientific and educational project was tested in the framework of future culturologists training. An electronic intercultural inter-university platform was organized to discuss issues related to historical memory. There was a start of the electronic educational archive collection of Soviet everyday life evidence in different regions and cultures of the former USSR, available for review and interpretation, and formulated the first hypotheses on the basis of these data. For the first time, the educational archive of transcripts and photographs is combined with a communicative platform for young people, which allows the project to solve scientific, educational and pedagogical problems, as well as the cultural and educational cooperation development.

The use of the VKontakte network group "Family memory of the Soviet past" as a supplement to the training of cultural studies students opens up prospects for international student research in the post-soviet space, expands the possibilities of mastering practical skills for the collection and analysis of empirical material, contributes to the implementation of the

practical component of humanitarian education, involves in scientific research activities, contributes to the self-realization of the study group as a part of the scientific community. In general, we can conclude that the opportunities of social networking services (SNS) in education and science are quite high and have not yet been fully realized.

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