
BLOGGERS IN THE SERVICE OF MARKETING

THE CASE OF SLOVAKIA AND CZECHIA

Daniela Kollárová* and Magdaléna Ungerová

*University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, Nám. J. Herdu 2,
91701 Trnava, Slovak Republic*

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Abstract

The subject of our investigation regards bloggers with their own channels on YouTube. We interpret the issue of blogging in the context of the Internet as a medium. We define blogs and microblogs; we characterize types of bloggers' videos on YouTube. As blogging abroad has a longer tradition, we pay attention to developing blogging in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic. We accomplish current situation with results of relevant research using also the Internet sources, while focusing on the Slovak and Czech blogosphere. In conclusion of the paper, we mention professionalization of the most successful bloggers and events, where they can meet their fans face-to-face.

Keywords: blog, bloggers, Internet, Utubering

1. Introduction

At present, it is not necessary to introduce the Internet as a medium. The same is true about its communication tools. The bibliography of domestic and foreign origin dealing with the phenomenon of Internet is huge. On the contrary, the issue of blogging is still waiting for bibliographic explosion in the region of East Europe in this respect. The subject of our investigation is in practice widespread, but in theory only marginally interpreted blogging. As blogging and blogs make together a rather wide topic, we have narrowed the focus of our examination to Slovak and Czech bloggers with their own channels in the service of YouTube.

2. Internet as medium

The transfer of information of various characters is mediated to us through mass media. When taking into account their features, the following aspects characterize them: they are universal as for their content, generally accessible and determined to general public. Under the term media we usually understand periodical press, radio broadcasting, television broadcasting and the Internet. Based on their features, there appear hypotheses on presupposed impacts of

*E-mail: daniela.kollarova@ucm.sk

media on individuals and the society. These lean upon conviction that media influence behaviour, attitudes, opinions of individuals; as a means of enlightenment they can expand horizons of knowledge; they can educate, help in consumer and political decision-makings, but also mislead and so on. From the functionalistic perspective, the following social functions can be attributed to the media in the support of continuity and order:

- Information one, for instance in providing information on events and conditions of life, power-sharing, arrangement of power relations, adapting to changes;
- Socialization one, for example in explaining and commenting on the significance of events, social relations, coming to a consensus, setting the sequence of priorities;
- Continuity one, e.g. in support of prevailing cultural patterns, exploring subcultures and new directions in the development of culture;
- Entertaining one, for instance in the offer of suspense, entertainment, distraction, means of relief;
- Gaining one, for example in agitating for socially important objectives in the sphere of politics, economy, and ecology [1].

The object of our research is the Internet, i.e. global system of interconnected computer networks which enables computers to communicate with each other using the protocols TCP, or IP. Its characteristic feature is the speed and time availability; communication on the Internet happens almost continuously. According to the Index of Digital Economy and Society, which assesses the progress of member states of the European Union in the digital domain, in 2015 nearly 86% of Slovak households had access to fixed broadband networks and 67% of households to high-speed Internet [*Digital Slovakia according to Brussels: Slower start, gradual improvement*, <http://spravy.pravda.sk/ekonomika/clanok/384794-digitalne-slovensko-podla-bruselu-pomalsi-rozbeh-postupne-zlepsovanie/>, accessed on 21 April 2016]. The Statistical Office of SR states that 77.8% of respondents use the Internet on a daily basis. Respondents use a desktop computer, laptop computer, mobile phone, start TV and game consoles to access the internet. The Statistical Office divided using the Internet for personal purposes into following activities: Communication (e.g. sending and receiving e-mails, participating in social networks, uploading of own content to share); Access to Information (e.g. searching information on goods and services, reading newspapers and magazines, searching for information in any field); Participation in civic and political activities (for example active participation in online discussions or in the voting, expressing opinions on civic or political issues); Working life (for instance seeking a job, participation in professional social networks) and Other online services (for example Internet banking, searching information on accommodation) [2].

The Internet communication means include: websites, websites of foreign companies, e-shops, e-mail, news portals, aggregators of reports, interest portals, specialized portals, blogs, microblogs, discussion forums, social networks, shared multimedia, wikies and social bookmaker systems [3].

2.1. Blogs and microblogs

The term blog was created by shortening the word weblog, which in English means Internet diary. Diary is a term for a notebook, into which there are written daily records, which implies if not daily, then regular publication of records, contributions or articles in the form of the texts, photographs, or videos according to the time sequence. The existence of web logs has been registered since 1994 and the introduction of the term weblog into the vocabulary of the language since 1997 and the words blog and blogging since 1999 [*Firms hunt in blogosphere. Blogbarometer 2015. Final report on the survey*, http://www.dbm.cz/pfile/1Blogbarometr%202015_CZ.pdf, accessed on 21 April 2016]. We denote the authors of web logs as bloggers, community of blogs and their mutual relationships as blogosphere. If a blog is made only from video contributions, we call it a vlog and the author as a vlogger. Blogging became very popular worldwide, which was registered in 2002 by a group of Americans who established a company specialized in the search and research of blogs, Technocrats [4].

Microblogs are understood as pictures, sound recordings, videos or short text messages and links in the range of 140 to 200 characters. They are usually intended for a specific group of users, who communicate among each other various reports, observations, comments, information on what is going on. The users appreciate the brevity of messages. It was Twitter that launched the interest in microblogging.

In recent years the modern trend is interconnection between blogs and vlogs, i.e. bloggers keep not only a text diary enriched by photographs for example by using WordPress, but also videochannel in the service of YouTube [5]. The objects of our further investigation are the bloggers with their own YouTube channels. YouTube allows billions of people to view and share videos, and distribute content of small and large creators and advertisers [*On the service YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/about/sk/>, accessed on 10 May 2016].

In the YouTube community there are established names for videos, taking into account their content, as follows:

- **Unboxing** (unpacking of new products) is a name for a video, in which a blogger unpacks a received box right in front of the camera. The course and entire length of the whole unpacking are directly dependent on the personality and style of the blogger. On camera, they unpack a box, whose content they ordered at their own expense or a package that was delivered to them by a cooperating brand. That is specified at the beginning of the video. They describe the size of the box, adequacy of protection against damage during the transport (quality and quantity of filler), delivery time

from the moment of ordering, delivery company that submitted it, the sum of postage and the payment method. If a package has been ordered abroad, a blogger can indicate the sum of the duties and other charges related to the importation from abroad. They gradually pull out the ordered goods from the package, while commenting on its quality, colour, details and describing satisfaction with the packaging of each product.

- **Haul** (also placed on YouTube as Consumed or Down) is a name for a video, in which a blogger on camera gradually pulls out items, for example from bags, boxes, bins that they have personally used during the previous period (number of days, weeks, months can be specified in the video) and they evaluate satisfaction with the brand, aroma, consistency, effects, the rate of satisfaction towards the cost and effort spent in the purchase.
- **Outfit** (LookBook) is a name for a video where a blogger presents their own style of clothes for different occasions, seasons of the year, or colour combinations or designs of clothing. In the video they describe what they are wearing, including accessories, jewellery or decorative cosmetics, they mention the respective brands of the described parts of the outfit and where they were bought. We cannot rule out that bloggers will express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with individual pieces of clothing, accessories, jewellery and decorative cosmetics.
- **Tutorial** is a name for a video, in which bloggers on camera describes executed activities and explains why they proceed in a chosen way or why they use products of a certain brand. They point out possible problems during the process. In essence, they provide guidance on how to e.g. properly clean complexion, how to do make-up for work, how to cook and bake healthily, how to take proper care of clothing and footwear, how to practice yoga and so on.
- **Giveaway** (Prize contest) is a name for a video where a blogger launches a competition for prizes. The organizer of a competition can be an advertiser cooperating with the blogger or the bloggers themselves. It is perhaps not surprising that the first variant prevails in practice. The advertiser and the blogger agree to e.g. review selected products of a specific brand and the blogger calls a competition on the reviewed products at the end of the video. Conditions for participation in the competition are usually very simple, it is sufficient if the contestant is a regular customer of the blogger's channel and posts a comment with their e-mails under the video.
- **Review** is a name for a video, where a blogger 'professionally' evaluates or assesses products or services of selected brands. The blogger state whether they bought the reviewed products on their own or whether they were addressed by a cooperating advertiser. It depends on the blogger, in which context they review products or services. Some of the bloggers pay brief attention to the history or philosophy of the brand; others directly review the products or services of the selected brand. If bloggers review services,

they usually provide temporal and geographical difficulties needed to obtain the service; they evaluate atmosphere of the place, performance of the staff, accompanying services and overall care. If bloggers evaluate products in the comfort of their homes, they assess for example possibilities of their use in this environment, package design, practicality of the use, or possible re-use, composition of the product, drawbacks of using, recommended practices, suitability for allergy sufferers, durability and the proportion between price and quality.

- **Vlog** is a name for a video, in which bloggers describe their personal lives and provide a glimpse into their lives (trips, family celebrations, photography taking and media interviews, participation in events for bloggers and so on) to customers and supporters of their channels; they introduce friends or family members, present their own opinions and positions on selected social issues and so on.

Below videos, bloggers place the so-called labels, i.e. brief information on the video, containing for instance list of promoted products and brands (size of package, shade); links to the Internet sites where the products were bought or delivered to them; links to their own websites and social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat). Unless the blogger had prohibited comments on the videos, subscribers and supporters can leave their comments below the video [6].

2.2. Slovak and Czech blogosphere

Not much is known on the Slovak blogosphere. On the one hand it is related to the technical complexity of blog identification, on the other hand, to the reluctance of providers of blogging platforms to share basic demographic data. Thus, the ideas of marketers as well as the whole society on the blogosphere are created according to the bloggers who are most visible [7]. The advertising agency Triad Advertising attempted to improve this situation in Slovakia in 2012. On a sample of 300 respondents, it conducted a survey to determine how bloggers behave and what motivates them. Partial results of the survey were published through publicly available sources. Out of them it results that among bloggers we can find enthusiasts who have their blog as a hobby or using it they present their products, services or themselves. Most of blogs are devoted to technologies, Internet and marketing. Blogs on food and lifestyle are increasingly more popular. Slovak bloggers write in order to be read. In relation to cooperation with companies, they are motivated by exclusive and interesting information, by products for testing, invitations to events and money. Exclusive and interesting information is the basis of their work and a tool for differentiation from the competition. It is however not sufficient. Credibility is strengthened by personal experience with the tested product even if the result were negative for the blogger, e.g. in the form of an unpleasant allergic response. Invitations, whether to meeting of bloggers who regularly review products of a particular brand, to presentation or training related to the brand, to testing the

product in practice, to awarding prizes or socially significant events strengthens the position of the blogger in the eyes of the public together with the sense of importance and appreciation for the work. Slovak bloggers are not interested in the money of companies. Nevertheless, in 2012 92% of respondents were open to cooperation with businesses. Of which, 58% of them would write for a company for a non-financial reward if they could maintain their independence and 11% of them would write in favour of businesses for money [*Do not be afraid of bloggers*, <http://adma.sk/2012/09/nebojte-sa-blogerov/>, accessed on 14 January 2016].

Unlike Slovak ones, Czech marketers have much more knowledge on their current blogosphere. This is confirmed by the results of the survey Blogbarometr 2015. The survey was conducted as a part of the project IPREX BLOGBAROMETER™ 2015, which has been running since 2014 as a part of an international network of agencies IPREX operating in the segment of Public Relations. The aim of the survey is to map the Czech blogosphere, to record annual trends and to focus on future plans of the bloggers. 482 respondents have been involved in the survey. Compared with the results of the survey in the first year (in 2014) we can identify two major changes: bloggers have become professionalized and companies take them as their partners. Respondents intensively promote their blogs on social networks: 71.8 % on Facebook, 49.7% on Instagram and 21.8% on Twitter. More than a fifth of them plan to promote their blog on other social networks. In 2015 companies contacted bloggers in about one third more than in 2014: 85.1% with the offer to cooperate, 78.2% with the offer of samples and products for testing, 63.2% with invitations to events and 63.8% with invitations to events specially designed for bloggers. Women are more active in blogging than men, although their presence is directly dependent on the themes they devote to when publishing and on their age. Women prevail in the fields of cosmetics, fashion, food, cooking, health, lifestyle or do-it-yourself guides. The largest group of female bloggers is aged 25-34 years. Men dominate in technology, society and politics. The largest group of male bloggers is between 45-54 years. Year on year (2015/2014) there was noticed a decrease in the number of day-to-day contributors approximately by a half. Daily there blog 6.6% of respondents, several times a week 39.1%, several times a month 39.1% and less often 15.2% of respondents.

While personal motivation of Slovak bloggers is readership, Czech bloggers keep their blogs for fun, sharing experience, promoting a positive influence and professional growth [5]. Since summer 2013, the Czech and Slovak community of selected bloggers with own channels in the service of YouTube is represented by the media net Vidadu. It helps famous bloggers to reach set targets; it is helpful for high quality and so far undiscovered bloggers on their way to success. It builds its portfolio with the focus on gaming, vlogs, sketches and other creative activities [*What are the requirements for a partnership program*, <http://www.vidadu.net/partnerstvo/>, accessed on 03 March 2016]. In the Czech Republic talented creators are represented by the company Get BOOST!, the first one of its type. It exclusively represents best bloggers in

the segments Beauty & Fashion, Lifestyle & Entertainment, Gaming & Technology [For advertisers, <http://www.getboost.cz/pro-inzerenty.php>, accessed on 03 March 2016]. Stagnation of traditional media, development of social networks and onset of the Generation Z belong to the main factors supporting the choice of companies for cooperation with bloggers. Although bloggers communicate with a relatively small group of people, they can actually address majority of them. According to BlogHer, 98% of readers trust blogs and 87% of them have made a purchase at least once right according to their recommendations [*Cooperation with bloggers. Win or a hard nut?*, <http://mycz.tumblr.com/post/129065927495/spolupr%C3%A1ce-s-blogery-v%C3%BDhra-nebo-po%C5%99%C3%A1dn%C3%BD-o%C5%99%C3%AD%C5%A1ek>, accessed on 21 April 2016]. Advertisers choose bloggers on the basis of the size of their community. They evaluate number of fans on their Facebook profile, amount of comments under their contributions on the blog or number of regular readers. The most successful Slovak and Czech bloggers with the channel on YouTube are subscribed by hundreds of thousands of users of this service; GoGoManTV even more than 1.3 millions, by which they can compete well with traditional media [8].

The PR agency Media In reacted to the growth of blogging in Slovakia in May 2015 by the first year of the competition Blogger of the Year. Slovak bloggers living in Slovakia and currently even abroad could join the competition. The aim of the agency was to map Slovak bloggers and to create their own platform for presentation of a wide spectrum of contributions in following categories: Travel; Gastronomy; Economy; Society & Business; Information Technology & Innovation; Beauty; Healthy Lifestyle; Fashion; Life, Art & Culture and Videoblog. In 2015 more than 800 bloggers registered for the competition, out of which 510 accomplished conditions of the competition. Votes of the public and professional jury decided on the winners. Professional jury evaluated interactivity of the bloggers with the audience on the blog and on their own social networks, their personal contribution (name of the blog, information value of the contributions, uniqueness, innovation, professionalism and timelessness of contributions), creativity of language (attractiveness of the content, ability to attract attention) and visual aspect of the blog (aesthetic view, clarity of the blog, colours, quality of photographs, illustrations or videos, logo, other interesting features). The results of the second year will be announced in May 2016 [*General conditions and rules of the competition #Blogger of the Year 2015*, <http://www.bloggeroka.sk/2015/vseobecne-podmienky-a-pravidla-sutaze/>, accessed on 10 May 2016].

In Czech Republic there is an inquiry for Czech bloggers called Blogger of the Year, whose results are announced in November of corresponding calendar year. Announcement of results is conceived as a gala evening with the participation of personalities of the Czech social life. It is public voting that decides on winners in the categories Blogger and Video blogger [*Rules and course of the inquiry Blogger of the Year*, <http://www.bloggeroku.cz/podminky>, accessed on 10 May 2016].

2.3 Utuberbing and Generation Z

A group of enthusiasts from Prague reflected on the interest of the public in blogs and especially in bloggers. They organized in Prague in June 2015 the first festival of its kind in Europe, whose main participants were ‘stars of Generation Z’, i.e. bloggers and musicians who have gained recognition mainly in the field of the Internet. The areal of the festival had a shape of a ring with four thematic zones: Gaming (best gamers of the most popular games), Beauty & Fashion (cosmetics, fashion), Entertainment (artists) and Music (musicians). In each of them there was a rich programme from 12:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m., which was prepared for the participants of the festival by performers. The dominant of the ring was the main stage, on which there played musicians during the day that also performed in the zone called Music.

The primary target group of the festival was, and in 2016 still is, Generation Z. Its dating is not the same, however most often it is mentioned that it involves people born in 2000 and later [*Generation Z: Ultimate Individualism . What to do with them in a company*, <http://hnporadna.hnonline.sk/clanky-168/generacia-z-individualizmus-na-entu-co-s-nimi-vo-firme-606549>, accessed on 3 March 2016]. It is technically brightest generation of all times. The Internet is their life; they are attracted by web, social networks and blogs. They are bound to the mobile phones. Its members belong to skilful on-line consumers who can find the best offer. They grow up on the Internet searching. They are fascinated by music, video and interaction in real time. They are convinced that the Internet can be used for anything, including searching a job. They will not become workaholics; they want to have too much, without much effort and as soon as possible [J. Koníčková, *What is Generation Z like?*, <https://eduworld.sk/cd/jaroslava-konickova/325/aka-je-generacia-z>, accessed on 3 March 2016].

3. Conclusions

In respect to the information we have acquired so far, we can state that in our paper we have devoted only to initial fields of the issue of blogging. With the support of the theoretical outcomes we have defined blogs, microblogs and bloggers. With the support of results of surveys, inquiries, specialized articles and discussions we have provided a typology of blogs on the channels of the YouTube service, we have pointed out professionalization and awarding of the bloggers’ favour, as well as a unique event in Europe – Utuberbing. The issue of blogging is wider than we have assumed, which leaves us with other topics for elaborating in near future. Special attention can be paid to professionalization of bloggers, agencies representing them, advertisers addressing them for cooperation, reasons why the importance of cooperation with bloggers is rising at the expense of traditional media. Similarly, we can also pay attention to bloggers, their community, inquiries, self-promo, and opportunities of further commercial or personal growth, exhaustion of topics they are dealing with. Or as

the case may be, other related topics that might appear with the onset of agencies, databases of bloggers, research results on their impact on readers or viewers and so on.

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