Social networks as a search tool for historical sources

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Abstract. This article is devoted to the use of social networks as a search tool for historical sources. The opportunity is analyzed to use social networks for surveying witnesses and participants in the considered events of regional history of the second half of the 20th century. This article also analyzes advantages of addressing social networks in the students' projects to improve the oral history methods and development of professional skills of data search and processing. The importance of such joint activity of historians of various generations for patriotic upbringing is emphasized, the relevance of addressing online sources under the pandemic conditions is determined. The use of social networks as a means to replenish gaps in the set of sources is exemplified by the project devoted to social and economic history of Sevastopol. It is summarized that the most informative was the communication with Odnoklassniki network, since it is the leading platform in the Russian segment of Internet regarding the age group of concern: 46+. The methods of operation with social networks are not confined only by the oral history. A researcher is capable to study materials of profile groups and to detect unique photos. It has been concluded that it would be reasonable to perform historical research in social networks by interviewing respondents: bearers of historical memory.
Keywords: social network, historical research, historical source, oral history.

1 Introduction

One of the main functions of history as a science is preservation of social memory, and respectively, the task of humanitarian knowledge is translation of past spiritual, industrial, political experience to present. However, nowadays universities and their students face some challenges dictated by new realities: in particular, under the pandemic conditions, the students of departments of history lost access to the archives for quite some time; however, this did not eliminate the necessity to collect and to analyze empirical material for historical studies. At the same time, with the development of technologies, emergence of new data sources in free access, there appear new opportunities for search of materials and formation of a set of sources. At present, the relevance of media space in total significantly increased.

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This work is focused on such element of Internet space as social networks, which can serve as a search tool of historical sources.

The research novelty is that Sevastopol and Crimea are not the regions with steady traditions in the field of oral history, contrary to Barnaul, Petrozavodsk, Vladivostok, Tomsk, Tambov, St. Petersburg, and Moscow. In these cities various projects devoted to oral history are executed starting from 1990s–2000s [1]. In addition, it should be mentioned that at present in modern historical source science the potential of social networks as a heuristic tool is not completely disclosed.

The research objective is to study potential of use of social networks material as historical source at current stage of development of historical studies.

The following tasks were formulated to reach the mentioned objective:

1) to analyze opportunity to use the methods of work with social networks as with search tools of historical sources;

2) to consider the methods of involvement of students into analysis of regional history using materials of social networks in order to perform educational and research works;

3) to analyze opportunity and prospects of involvement of young people into new types of activities and practice aimed at development of their educational route and professional competences.

The research hypothesis is as follows: studies of regional history on the basis of materials of social networks promote students' interest in the past of their city, support their patriotic feelings, and provide development of professional competence in the field of humanitarian historical knowledge.

2 Methods

The research methodology was based on the oral history methods implemented through interviewing in social networks. Such selection was predefined by a set of circumstances. The regional industry was selected as the research object, which, due to historical peculiarities of development of Sevastopol, was oriented mainly at military industrial complex. Archive funds of the respective enterprises were mainly disassembled due to changes in departmental subordination, forms of ownership and other circumstances related with difficult period of disintegration of the Soviet Union, some documents were totally lost in 1990s, some of them remained secret and unavailable for researchers. In this situation, the task of replenishment of gaps in the set of sources became highly urgent.

3 Results and discussion

According to the data of SimilarWeb analytical company, in Russia, as of November 2020, the most popular after search engines are social networks (VKontakte: 2nd position, Odnoklassniki: 6th position) [2]. The use of these resources of media space in educational purposes seems to be promising.

I.Yu. Vasil'ev analyzed the potential of social networks as a historical source and concluded that they could be used in this capacity, provided that certain principles were met (verification of the obtained data in other sources, systematization of the obtained data, processing and analysis of global materials) [3]. The structure of Odnoklassniki social network is described in [4].

While studying the Soviet history of the second half of the 20th century, it would be most reasonable to use Odnoklassniki social network as a search tool of new sources, since it is the leading platform in the Russian segment of Internet regarding the age group of concern: 46+ [5]. Herewith, VKontakte, being the most popular social network of the Russian Internet,

also contains numerous opportunities for researching activity: groups by topics and interest (for instance, regarding the history of Sevastopol: Historical Hotel "Kist"[†]) or the users of the social network, who can become potential respondents.

Currently, the formation of a worldview of young people takes on special significance under the conditions of various information in free access, including unverified and even obviously malicious data in Internet in total and in social networks in particular. In this regard, media competence plays peculiar role [7]. In the sphere of humanitarian education, there emerged the issues of correlation between knowledge and information, selection and critical analysis of information, teacher's role under the new conditions [8]. This topic becomes relevant in the context of the fact that, probably, the future will be mostly determined by development of digital sphere. Education is not an exclusion, since development of digital technologies transforms traditional education[‡]. In this context, the project of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, Nastavnik, is a research ground, which allows a university teacher and young scientists to conduct educational work among pupils, cultivating appreciation to the history of their region as well as interest to research activity. Such profession-oriented training, aimed at actualization of the set of knowledge and skills of young scientists, is a unique opportunity to apply in practice the set of skills and habits acquired in the course of the project (for instance, preparation and conductance of interview, data acquisition and processing, presentation of the research results in various forms, etc.).

In the frames of the project of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, Nastavnik, the research was conducted titled Reflection of socio-economic history of Sevastopol in the formation, development and post-Soviet transformation of electronics, instrumentation and information technologies in 1960- 2014. The participants in the project searched for information about the history of electronics industry, instrument making and information technologies in Sevastopol in 1960–2018 in Internet, including the social networks used as a tool for data search (77 correspondences in Odnoklassniki social network).

The primary meaning of the use of social networks for a historian is in expansion of source database. Aiming at efficient analysis of these materials, the following principles should be adhered [10]:

- to comprehensively analyze all sources obtained by means of social networks;
- to take into account the phenomenon of fake, that is, false personal page;
- to use materials obtained by means of social networks at final stage of research.
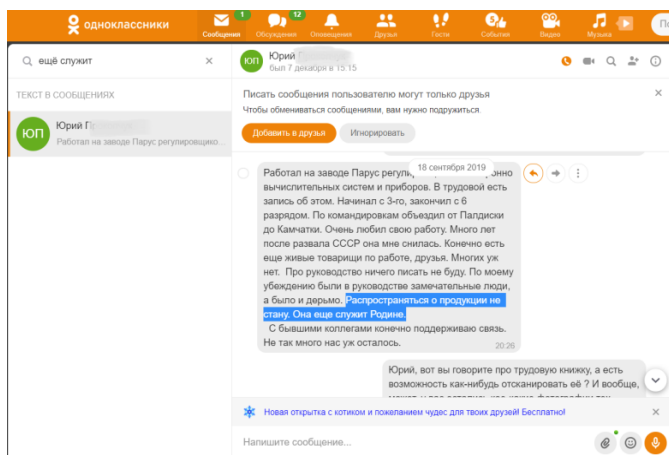
Provided that the aforementioned rules are complied, the materials, obtained in social networks, promote verification of information obtained from traditional sources, expansion of prosopographic data (biographies of certain historical persons), replenishment of gaps in sets of sources, as well as studies of everyday history in the frames of historical anthropological and social psychological approaches.

One of the practical results of the work was introducing the students into solution of a historical problem, which contributed to fostering of patriotic feelings in them. The students interviewed former workers of regional industrial enterprises of the Soviet period and often met examples of conscientious performance of official duties and devotion to their country. In particular, in an interview (in the form of correspondence), the question about the goods produced at closed military factory received the following response: "I will not disclose details, the products are still in service for the Motherland" (Fig. 1.).

[†] VKontakte group, devoted to the history of Sevastopol: Historical Hotel Kist [6].

[‡] Digital Economy of the Russian Federation [9]

Fig. 1. Correspondence with the worker of Sevastopol Instrument Making Plant.

E.A. Rostovtsev has concluded that the oral memory method was subordinated to general research tasks in the field of Memory Studies, related with analysis of social and cultural memory. This researcher also mentions that: "social order in the form of local communities interested in the history of native district, city, house" significantly promotes development of oral history. "In the frames of 'pedagogics of historical memory', the oral history is considered as a tool of active teaching having peculiar educational potential", summarizes the St. Petersburg researcher [1].

Similar conclusions were obtained by M.V. Sokolova regarding school teaching. The researcher mentions that introducing pupils to the method of oral history (mainly in the frames of planned extracurricular activity) is a constituent of methodological basis of pedagogics oriented at historical memory [11].

The researchers from Tambov came to the conclusion that creation of oral history archive promoted implementation of cultural and educational practices as well as formation of research competences for students. In addition, the researchers mention that the work in a created archive promotes correct functioning of retention and translation of historical memory of native region [12].

A.V. Marushchak mentioned that *"bearers of social memory are individuals and certain collective representations of the past, used jointly by the people more or less permanently"* [13]. Groups in the social networks, combining former participants in one working staff, conform with such definition of social memory bearers.

Foreign historiography also analyzes potential of social networks as environment containing historical sources [14]. In addition, there are studies devoted to the confidence level of data from web environment [15].

4 Conclusion

The example of analysis of socio-economic history of Sevastopol demonstrates prospects of joint work of young scientists, students, and even pupils under the guidance of a teacher, devoted to collection of sources in social networks and their processing: for young researchers, such work not only supports development of professional skills but also awakes interest to the history of local region, since the data obtained from the first person are most impressive. Under the modern conditions, the most suitable research ground for such interaction of respondents, bearers of historical memory, and various generations of researchers is presented by social networks. Such work can result in development of database

containing interview of workers of industrial companies of the region, and the collected empirical materials, in their turn, can be used as a base for new studies on social and economic history of the region.

Acknowledgments

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