



Article

Criteria for Topic Selection in the Activities of Bloggers in Karakalpakstan

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Abstract: The article analyzes the practice of topic selection in the activities of bloggers in Karakalpakstan, the main criteria determining this process, and the social significance of the topics selected. In the contemporary information environment, particular attention is paid to the rapid coverage by bloggers of events and developments that are relevant to society, consideration of audience interests, and addressing issues that have not been sufficiently covered by official media. The purpose of the study is to identify the criteria used by bloggers in Karakalpakstan when selecting topics and to assess their role in the information space. The study employs content analysis, comparative analysis, observation, and methods for examining bloggers' activities. Practical materials from the Karakalpakstan blogosphere were analyzed, including bloggers' coverage of social, critical, legal, environmental, and everyday issues. The findings indicate that, when selecting topics, bloggers primarily rely on such criteria as the impact of an event on society, public interest, citizens' rights, environmental problems, individual life stories, and social significance. The study also establishes that audience needs, the accessibility of information sources, the urgency of events, and alternative approaches to materials published by official media are important factors in topic selection. The study concludes that the topic-selection practices of bloggers in Karakalpakstan play an important role in expanding the local information space, drawing public attention to social problems, and strengthening communication between the state and society.

Keywords: *blogosphere, information, information space, audience, content, journalist, official media.*

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary information environment, filling the national information space with high-quality and competitive content has become an increasingly urgent task for journalists, bloggers, and other communicators. The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh. M. Mirziyoyev, has provided journalists, bloggers, political scientists, and representatives of other fields with clear recommendations concerning the selection of topics for their work: "It is an evident fact for all of us that the issue of filling the information space with high-quality and competitive national content is becoming more relevant than ever" [1]. National content includes not only content in the Uzbek language but also content in the Karakalpak language.

The way in which a blogger selects a topic for a given piece of material largely determines the reach, credibility, and social function of that material. Long before the emergence of blogging, journalism scholarship had already established that not every event has an equal chance of becoming news. In their classic taxonomy, Galtung and Ruge identified a set of factors — including an event's proximity, its unambiguity, the number

of people it affects, and its relevance to the audience — that together determine an event's newsworthiness [2]. This taxonomy has since been revisited and extended to account for the conditions of digital and social media, where sharability and audience participation have become additional selection factors [3].

Closely related to news-value theory is gatekeeping theory, according to which every stage of information production — from an individual reporter's news judgment to institutional editorial policy — functions as a "gate" through which some information passes while other information is withheld [4]. Bloggers occupy an ambiguous position with respect to this classical model. As Professor F. A. Muminov observed in his article "Do We Need Street Content?", bloggers are individuals — not necessarily trained journalists — who record events taking place in public spaces and institutions and publish the resulting audio and video material on social networks; because such material mainly reflects the texture of everyday street life, Muminov collectively describes it as "street content," and stresses that the blogger movement is expanding rapidly and that its influence on public life is increasing every day, in Uzbekistan and worldwide alike [5].

This growth is documented at the national level. A 2025 survey of 182 active social-media users in Uzbekistan found that the large majority primarily follow video bloggers rather than traditional outlets, underscoring the extent to which blogging now functions as an independent social force operating alongside — and, at times, ahead of — institutional journalism [6]. Reporting on the Fergana Valley has likewise described how ordinary citizens equipped with little more than a phone camera have accumulated large followings by holding local officials publicly accountable, a role that would have been unthinkable in Uzbekistan's media environment only a decade ago [7].

Despite this growth, the concrete criteria that guide topic selection among bloggers in Karakalpakstan — a region with a distinct language (Karakalpak), a legacy of ecological crisis around the Aral Sea, and settlements that are widely dispersed geographically — have not been systematically examined. The purpose of the present study is therefore to identify the criteria used by bloggers in Karakalpakstan when selecting topics for their material and to assess the role these criteria play in shaping the regional information space. The remainder of the article is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the materials and methods used; Section 3 reports the results, including the criteria identified and the case-based evidence that supports them; Section 4 discusses these findings in relation to news-value, gatekeeping, and audience-oriented theory; and the final section presents the study's conclusions.

2. Materials and Methods

This The study adopts a qualitative, exploratory design that combines content analysis, comparative analysis, and non-participant observation of bloggers' published output. Content analysis followed the general procedural logic set out by Krippendorff, under which texts are treated as data to be systematically coded for recurring categories of meaning rather than read impressionistically [8]. The analytic frame further draws on the concept of "gatewatching," which describes how online publishers monitor the output of other sources and republish, comment on, or extend it rather than exercising the exclusive editorial control associated with a traditional newsroom gate [9]; this concept is well suited to a blogosphere in which individual authors frequently build on, verify, or challenge material first raised by official media or by other bloggers.

Data sources. Materials were purposively selected from Karakalpakstan-based blogs and channels active between August 2011 and February 2024: the website kkreporter.ucoz.org, authored by blogger Bukharbay Tleumuratov; the messenger channel published under the names t.me/Qaraqalpakstan_xawazi and y.me/Qaraqalpaqstan_xawazi; the website operated by correspondent Guloyim

Qaniyazova (time/Hoja_uz); and the Instagram channel @Turtkul24news. These sources were selected because each has (a) a sustained publication history of several years, (b) publicly documented audience figures that allow reach to be compared across time and against print circulation, and (c) coverage spanning the principal thematic domains identified in the literature on participatory and citizen journalism, in which the professional newsroom's traditional "open gates" are increasingly shared with the audience itself [10].

Procedure. Twelve individual pieces of material published by these sources were read in full and, where necessary, translated. Each item was coded for the criterion or combination of criteria that appeared to motivate its selection as a topic (e.g., social impact, audience interest, citizens' rights); coding categories were built up inductively from the material itself rather than imposed in advance. Where audience figures were available for a given item, they were compared with the contemporaneous circulation of the leading regional print outlet, *Erkin Karakalpakstan*, to gauge the relative reach of blog material against an established offline benchmark.

Supplementary interviews. Informal interviews were conducted with a number of active Karakalpakstan bloggers to corroborate working methods inferred from the published material — in particular, the practice of maintaining a standing "reserve" of topics, facts, and expert contacts, and the practice of publishing an initial, minimally verified announcement of a breaking event followed by fuller storytelling coverage as additional information becomes available. This two-stage pattern is consistent with the audience-orientation described by uses-and-gratifications research, which holds that media producers seeking to retain an audience must continually address that audience's felt needs for timely, relevant information [11]; it is also consistent with the immediacy that has been observed as social platforms increasingly function as an "awareness system" running alongside conventional news cycles.

3. Results

3.1. Criteria for topic selection

The analysis of Karakalpakstan bloggers' practice shows that the criteria used for selecting events and topics can be arranged as shown in Table 1.

No.	Criterion for topic selection
1	Events that bring benefit or harm to society
2	Events that are of interest to the population
3	Citizens' rights
4	Environmental issues
5	Interesting episodes from everyday life
6	Family relationships
7	Individual human destinies
8	Timely payment of salaries
9	Events reflecting the future of young people (and others)

Table 1. Criteria for topic selection identified in the Karakalpakstan blogosphere.

3.2. Case-based evidence

Political and security relevance. On August 7, 2011, blogger Bukharbay Tleumuratov published a material entitled "Kyrgyzstan: The Consequences of Political Deviations..." on kkreporter.ucoz.org, commenting on the political unrest in Kyrgyzstan and warning of its implications for peace in Uzbekistan. The material reached 758 readers that day — a substantial audience for a single blogger when set against the roughly 3,000-copy circulation of the leading republican print publication, *Erkin Karakalpakstan*, at the time.

Professional accountability. On August 23, 2011, Tleumuratov published an “Open Letter to Uzbek Journalists,” directly questioning colleagues about their silence on criticisms of press freedom voiced elsewhere and calling on them to overcome indifference — an example of bloggers using their platform to hold the journalism profession itself to account.

Cross-media cooperation. Karakalpakstan bloggers frequently cooperate with, rather than simply compete against, print and other online outlets. Tleumuratov’s interview with Narigul Nagmetova, chairperson of the Karakalpakstan regional “Hunarmand” Association, discussed the republic’s artisans and their growing importance [12]; the same material had first appeared one day earlier in Erkin Karakalpakstan, and on the day it appeared online the website recorded 6,774 users, more than double the newspaper’s circulation. A comparable pattern of inter-site cooperation is visible on February 9, 2022, when the channel Qaraqalpakstan_xawazi published “How Could You Not Know for So Long?”, extending an official qalampir.uz report in which a deputy head of Uzavtosanoat acknowledged that automobile customs duties were excessively high.

Public-service failures. On February 10, 2022, correspondent Guloyim Qaniyazova published a video report, “Emergency Services Need Help!”, documenting an ambulance breaking down mid-transport in the Oqdaryo district. The report, roughly two minutes long, reached the website’s 11,295 subscribers as of July 2022 and typifies the blogosphere’s coverage of infrastructural failure with direct social consequence.

Institutional criticism. Official institutions that appear unresponsive or inconsistent are a recurring target. On January 2, 2023, Qaniyazova’s “The Ministry That Never Stops” questioned why Ministry of Preschool Education officials had reportedly been summoned to a meeting on a public holiday, reaching 11,285 subscribers that day; a further report on February 1, 2024, “School Textbook: How Many Mistakes Did You Find?”, criticized spelling errors in schoolbooks and proposed that the ministry required its own dedicated printing house.

Effective institutional response. Critical coverage does not always end in stalemate. After the channel Qaraqalpakstan_xawazi published a critical post about Khalq Bank on February 21, 2023, the bank’s information service issued an official response the following day, reporting disciplinary measures against staff and an internal meeting on service culture — an example of the blogosphere prompting a documented institutional correction.

Consistent critical coverage. The channel @Turtkul24news, with more than 31,000 Instagram subscribers, has sustained a critical thread across several months: “Three in One” (August 7, 2023) documented a malfunctioning traffic-signal intersection; “Is There No Law for Those Who Enforce the Law?” (August 31, 2023) covered an allegation of rude conduct by traffic police; and “We Went to the Law to Look for the Law...” (October 24, 2023) followed up months later to note that the Internal Affairs Department had still not issued an official response.

Debatable and ethically ambiguous topics. Not every case admits a clear verdict. “Let Not Your Left Hand Know What Your Right Hand Has Given” (January 24, 2024) covered a subscriber complaint that charity photographs of identifiable schoolchildren, published by a mosque channel, could expose the children to embarrassment among peers — a topic the reporting bloggers themselves treated as genuinely debatable rather than as clear-cut wrongdoing.

Salary and labor rights. @Turtkul24news has run a sustained campaign, including the hashtag series #DidYouKnow and #GoodToKnow, on delayed and incomplete wage payments, explaining employees’ right to file electronic complaints with the Ministry of Justice and reporting on compensation owed for each day of delay.

Table 2 summarizes the audience-reach figures reported for the cases in which comparable data were available.

Date	Source	Material	Blog/channel reach	Comparable print circulation
Aug. 7, 2011	kkreporter.ucoz.org (B. Tleumuratov)	"Kyrgyzstan: The Consequences of Political Deviations..."	758 readers (site, single day)	~3,000 (Erkin Karakalpakstan, circulation)
Aug. 26, 2011	kkreporter.ucoz.org (B. Tleumuratov)	Interview with N. Nagmetova, "Hunarmand" Association	6,774 users (single day)	< 3,000 (Erkin Karakalpakstan, circulation)
Feb. 10, 2022	time/Hoja_uz (G. Qaniyazova)	"Emergency Services Need Help!"	11,295 subscribers (as of Jul. 15, 2022)	n/a
Jan. 2, 2023	time/Hoja_uz (G. Qaniyazova)	"The Ministry That Never Stops"	11,285 subscribers (same day)	n/a
Aug.–Oct. 2023	@Turtkul24news (Instagram)	"Three in One"; "Is There No Law..."	> 31,000 subscribers	n/a

Table 2. Reported blog/channel reach compared with contemporaneous print circulation, selected cases.

4. Discussion

The nine criteria identified in Table 1 correspond closely to the factors long associated with newsworthiness in classical and revised news-value taxonomies — impact, audience interest, and relevance among them — while also reflecting features specific to Karakalpakstan's social and ecological situation, such as the prominence of environmental issues and family-level human-interest stories. This suggests that, even where bloggers operate entirely outside institutional journalism, their selection practice converges on many of the same underlying judgments that have long structured professional news production, while adapting those judgments to local circumstance.

The case evidence also illustrates a shift in where the classical "gate" of gatekeeping theory now sits. In cases such as the Khalq Bank response or the cross-publication between kkreporter.ucoz.org and Erkin Karakalpakstan, Karakalpakstan bloggers act less as gatekeepers who decide what the public may see and more as gatewatchers who monitor, extend, and sometimes correct information that has already entered the public domain — forwarding it, adding context, and prompting institutional replies that might not otherwise have been issued. At the same time, cases such as the ambulance report and the wage-delay campaign show bloggers performing a genuinely participatory function, in the sense described in the participatory-journalism literature, by inviting audience appeals and complaints directly into the reporting process rather than treating readers purely as recipients of finished material.

The two-stage publication pattern described in Section 2 — an initial rapid announcement followed by fuller storytelling coverage — mirrors what has elsewhere been described as an "ambient" mode of news production, in which awareness of an unfolding event circulates continuously and is progressively enriched with detail rather than delivered as a single finished report [13]. This mode appears well matched to Karakalpakstan's geography: because settlements are widely dispersed, the capacity to disseminate an initial alert quickly and update it as facts accumulate plausibly compensates, in part, for distances that have historically delayed the flow of information.

These dynamics carry a double edge that deserves explicit acknowledgment. As Professor Khurshid Dustmuhammad has observed, the same information flow that unites people around shared concerns — as in the wage-delay and Khalq Bank cases — possesses an equally boundless capacity to fragment audiences and societies, and no participant in

the online information space benefits from it to the same degree [14]. Bloggers who reach thousands of subscribers cannot avoid the responsibility that comes with that reach: as Timoshkina argues, a blogger, like any figure who shapes the values of an audience, bears responsibility before that audience and, ultimately, before the wider public that their material reaches [15]. The debatable case of the mosque charity photographs (Section 3.2) illustrates precisely this tension between a legitimate human-interest topic and the potential for unintended harm to the people portrayed in it.

The institutional side of this relationship is also evolving. As Rubtsova notes, the digitalization of communication has pushed state and municipal authorities toward maintaining their own social-media presence specifically so as to provide rapid, direct feedback to citizens [16]; the Khalq Bank case indicates that, in Karakalpakstan too, institutions increasingly treat a critical blog post as a channel that warrants a substantive official reply rather than silence. This points toward the strengthening of a genuine, if still uneven, feedback loop between citizens and the state, mediated by the blogosphere.

Limitations. The study is based on a small, purposively selected corpus of twelve items drawn from four sources and on informal interviews rather than a probability sample, so the findings describe recurring patterns rather than statistically generalizable frequencies. Coding was performed by a single researcher without formal inter-coder reliability testing, which future work could address by applying a reliability coefficient such as Krippendorff's alpha to a larger, randomly sampled corpus. A systematic, quantitative content analysis across a wider set of Karakalpakstan- and Uzbek-language blogs, and comparative work situating Karakalpakstan within the wider Central Asian blogosphere, would be a natural next step.

5. Conclusion

Bloggers in Karakalpakstan, together with journalists, have the potential to create a new planetary-local information environment and to develop paradigms in this field that may differ from those found elsewhere. First, the Aral Sea tragedy has a global character; new facts concerning this issue can therefore significantly transform the region's information space, particularly from an environmental perspective. Second, because settlements in Karakalpakstan are located at considerable distances from one another, the experience and principles of bringing people together virtually or online — refined through the topic-selection practices described above — could themselves become a creative innovation of wider significance for Karakalpakstan's journalism and blogosphere.

In other words, with the development of rapid communication technologies, the long-standing problem of delays in providing Karakalpaks with information has been substantially overcome. As a result, present-day Karakalpakstan has become an integral part of the global information space, and the criteria identified in this study — social impact, audience interest, citizens' rights, environmental concern, and the other factors summarized in Table 1 — offer a first systematic account of how that integration is being accomplished from the ground up.

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