Research of social media channels as a digital analytical and planning technology of advertising campaigns

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Abstract. In Russia social media, in particular instant messengers, have advanced rapidly in recent years. The most popular ones are WhatsApp, Viber, Skype, Telegram. The purpose of this article is to systematize factors of market positioning of social media channels as a digital analytical and planning technology of advertising campaigns. A systematic approach and comparative analysis were used to study this problem. The authors attempted to develop a methodological approach towards analyzing and planning of advertising campaigns in social media based on the analysis of the factors characterizing quantitative parameters of the Internet platform development and its target audience distribution. The proposed approach was tested by the authors for determining the development features of Telegram messenger, analyzing its target audience (users with higher education engaged in science, technique, information technology, etc.) and its promotional product (posts in the form of a native format, etc.). The analysis concluded that Telegram platform is suitable for analyzing and planning of promotion campaigns in any business field.

1. Introduction

Telegram, as an advertising campaign planning tool, is a relatively young online platform. In July 2017, it started as a channel catalog with the ability to track reposts; currently it is positioned as a tool for analyzing and planning of advertising campaigns with a monthly attendance of more than 600 thousand people. It should be noted that in 2018 the number of active service users increased sixfold (compared with 2017), and in December 2018 alone, they viewed more than 2.5 million pages.

A high popularity of the application, in our opinion, is due to the applied encryption technology, which guarantees users’ anonymity and restricts access to personal data. According to the results of the Project Group study, focused on the analysis of using Telegram by the central government, the messenger is convenient for information dissemination: access to any Telegram channel can be purchased for a certain amount of money and the customer remains anonymous.

A potential Telegram’s advantage is its user-friendly interface and the targeted nature of advertising, while a high conversion percentage is ensured by placing information on relevant channels and focusing on a potentially interested consumer. Therefore, manufacturers are actively using the application for
business purposes, and channel owners make a profit of advertising placement, which contributes to the steady growth of the messenger’s popularity.
Finally, popular channels owners profit successfully by selling them. A promoted channel with a large number of subscribers can cost several hundred thousand rubles.
Currently, the number of Telegram users is growing, and along with the growth of the target audience, political and business structures are starting to view it as an effective PR mechanism, an advertising and propaganda tool.

2. Research methodology
Cabinet research methods were used in the analysis: analysis of scientific and methodological literature on the topic under study, generalization and classification of the investigation, overview of the existing foreign and Russian experience in the field of marketing [1, 2] and Internet advertising. A systematic approach and comparative analysis were used for examining this problem.
This study is a continuation of the authors’ previous researches [3, 4, 5, 6] on the development issues and features of social media in the digital marketing technology system. The purpose of this article is to investigate the results of using social media for both analyzing and planning of advertising campaigns [7, 8].
In contrast to previously published works (Arshad, 2018 [9]; Cavaliere, 2018 [10]; Jain, Subhash, 1999 [11]; Moskaleva et al, 2018 [12]; Neumann, 2018 [13]), devoted to digital technologies development, the authors attempted to work out a methodological approach to analyzing and planning of advertising campaigns in social media based on the analysis of factors, characterizing quantitative parameters of the Internet platform development and its target audience distribution.
The proposed approach was tested by the authors when determining developmental characteristics of Telegram messenger, analyzing its target audience (users with higher education engaged in science, technique, information technology, etc.) and an advertising product (posts in the form of a native format, etc.) [14].

3. Results obtained
A study of various sources on the use of Telegram messenger for planning advertising campaigns allowed the authors to conclude that currently there are no methodological approaches satisfactory for such studies. The available statistics, as well as the polls conducted on Telegram messenger development, do not provide a holistic picture for making managerial decisions regarding planning an advertising campaign by using this online platform [15].
In that context, the authors attempted to systematize the factors of Telegram messenger market positioning in order to use it as an advertising platform for business promotion. Moreover, the authors systematized market-positioning factors in two groups (Fig. 1).
The first group gives an idea of Telegram’s development trends. It includes the following criteria: distribution geography, distribution of channels on subject matters, number of channel subscribers, channel citation index, number of channel links to media sites and social networks. The indicators of the second factor group of Telegram messenger market positioning give an idea about its target audience according to gender, age, occupation, interests, objectives of using, number of contacts, number of channels read by users, share of other Internet services usage, frequency of commercials on various platform channels.
Let us consider these factors in more detail.
Initially, Telegram focused on the Russian market (63 thousand channels at the end of 2018), and now the Russian-language segment remains the main priority, but geography of the channel penetration in other countries is expanding (Fig. 2).
Currently, users from 6 countries communicate in Telegram messenger, whereof 62% are Russians, 25% are citizens of Iran, 7% are from Uzbekistan, 4% are Ukrainians, and citizens of Kazakhstan and Belarus –1% each. On average, 600 thousand people visited the channel per month, using 100312 channels; in Russia 856 channels link to Telegram.

Analyzing Russian Telegram users by region, we can conclude that a large share is constituted by residents of Moscow (36%) and St. Petersburg (15%); large cities range from 1.5% to 2.7%. The share of Telegram users in the central part of Russia accounts for almost 50% of the total.

During 2018, the number of Telegram channels increased and by the end of the year, almost 40 thousand new Russian-language channels were indexed.

In 2018, interests of Telegram users changed (Fig. 3). Despite the fact that almost every major entertainment public in the social network Vkontakte has a Telegram channel, according to criteria number of channels the author’s blogs regained the first place (at the end of 2017 humorous channels were on top for a short time), and the second place belongs to business issues; music channels have risen in ranking by several times. Cryptocurrencies are currently not as popular as they were at the end of 2017, so this subject matter is in the sixth place on Telegram. Moreover, Technology category channels, which took the leading position a year and a half ago, are now not included in the top 10, giving way to Health and Sports channels as well as to Art and Photo channels.
Let us consider the most popular channels of Telegram platform by the number of subscribers (Fig. 4). Mash channel is at the top with 470.1 thousand subscribers, in second place is KB with 376.5 thousand users, and third place is taken by MDK.

**Figure 4.** The number of Telegram subscribers in 2018 by channels, thousand people.

Compared to 2017, the number of subscribers in 2018 increased in the following way: Mash channel – more than 3.5 times, Futlyar ot Violoncheli channel increased the number of subscribers fivefold, Dvach and MDK channels doubled the number.

In 2018, specialists of Telegram platform changed the formula for citation index calculating because this figure did not reflect reality due to a large-scale purchase of commercials at low-quality channels. At present, it is possible to realistically assess the most influential and popular Telegram channels inside the messenger at year’s end (Fig. 5).

**Figure 5.** Telegram channels by citation index.
The figure illustrates that the citation number of Nezygar channel ranks first, Mash channel is in 2nd place, and Futlyar ot Violoncheli is in 3rd place. The last two channels have significantly increased the number of subscribers by the end of 2018.

Let us estimate the rating on number of channel links to media sites in Telegram in 2018 (Table 1). Medusa is at the top with its own six popular channels (they account for 80% of the entire link mass). The five most mentioned media also includ TJournal, vc.ru, Kommersant and RBC. If to sort the top channels descending, it is as follows: 1st place is taken by Medusa, RBC is in 2nd place and Vc.ru is the 3rd one.

| № п/п | Mass media | Site             | Number of views of publications with a link to a media site | Number of publications with a link to a media site | Number of channels with at least one link to a media site |
|-------|-------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Medusa      | medusa.io        | 286677786                                                | 29175                                             | 3506                                                  |
| 2     | TJournal    | tjournal.ru      | 103433963                                                | 16333                                             | 2101                                                  |
| 3     | VC          | vc.ru            | 82231848                                                 | 22676                                             | 2719                                                  |
| 4     | Kommersant  | kommersant.ru    | 71412407                                                 | 29437                                             | 2663                                                  |
| 5     | RBC         | rbc.ru           | 68948175                                                 | 36355                                             | 2915                                                  |
| 6     | Dozhd       | tvrain.ru        | 67983505                                                 | 10253                                             | 963                                                   |
| 7     | RIA News    | ria.ru           | 55539747                                                 | 18240                                             | 2276                                                  |
| 8     | TASS        | tass.ru          | 35555541                                                 | 14982                                             | 2082                                                  |
| 9     | Znak        | znak.com         | 34561384                                                 | 46591                                             | 1168                                                  |
| 10    | Life        | life.ru          | 33587035                                                 | 12170                                             | 858                                                   |
| 11    | Lenta.ru    | lenta.ru         | 33151456                                                 | 44711                                             | 2121                                                  |
| 12    | Fontanka    | fontanka.ru      | 32880892                                                 | 73898                                             | 718                                                   |
| 13    | Nozh        | knife.media      | 30463505                                                 | 5892                                              | 960                                                   |
| 14    | Snob        | snob.ru          | 29208256                                                 | 4245                                              | 845                                                   |
| 15    | Mediazona   | zona.media       | 28620544                                                 | 9234                                              | 929                                                   |
| 16    | Vedomosti   | vedomosti.ru     | 28558058                                                 | 9773                                              | 1605                                                  |
| 17    | BBC         | bbc.com          | 26920512                                                 | 9453                                              | 1763                                                  |
| 18    | RTVI        | rtvi.com         | 22438291                                                 | 5711                                              | 482                                                   |
| 19    | Interfax    | interfax.ru      | 22281463                                                 | 10652                                             | 1315                                                  |
| 20    | Rossiyskaya Gazeta | rg.ru      | 21475200                                                 | 7911                                              | 1090                                                  |

Figure 6 shows the services most often mentioned by Telegram. YouTube is at the top with more than half a million posts in almost 17 thousand channels (30% of the entire Russian-language Telegram). Social network VKontakte ranks second; 3rd place is taken by social network Twitter; Instagram is in 4th place and Facebook is the fifth one.
In order to correctly promote business in Telegram, it is necessary to study the target audience and their needs. Entrepreneurs, executives, freelancers, and Internet marketing specialist are popular users of Telegram.

Let us consider the Telegram’s audience based on a survey conducted by @aboutSMM channel. Currently, men constitute the majority of the messenger users (57%). Telegram’s target audience, depending on gender and age, is shown in Fig. 7. The figure depicts that 48% of women aged from 18 to 24 are users of the platform, and 40% constitute men aged from 25 to 34. Men and women aged from 45 to 64 and schoolchildren aged from 12 to 17 use Telegram the least. Therefore, we can conclude that the active audience of Telegram messenger is in the age range from 18 to 34 years.

Figure 6. Services mentioned in Telegram in 2018, thousand units.

Figure 7. Distribution of Telegram target audience according to gender and age, %.
The most active users of Telegram are “experienced specialists” (35%), “students” (25%) and “young specialists” (17%), a small proportion of Telegram users constitute schoolchildren and unemployed population (5% each). The rest of the audience is made up of mid- and top-level executives; 57% of users have higher education, which proves a high quality of the target audience.

Figure 8. Distribution of Telegram target audience according to occupation, %.

Figure 9 shows interests of Telegram users. Almost half of the messenger users (47%) are interested in information technology, 42% are interested in science and technology, 41% – watch movies and TV shows (Fig. 9). 39% of Telegram users enjoy reading news on large media channels and 35% are interested in reading books. The proportion of Telegram users subscribed to entertainment channels amounts to 29%.

Figure 9. Distribution of Telegram target audience according to interests, %.

The largest share of Telegram target audience use the messenger via Androids (60%), about 40% of users get access to the platform via iPhones, and 2% of the audience use Windows platform.

In the course of the survey, it turned out that more than 90% of Telegram users enjoy the messenger to see something they need, 88% – use the platform for correspondence purposes, 45% of users prefer chat rooms (Fig. 10). The number of Telegram messenger’s authors in 2018 reached 16%, and the number of subscribers using bots was 45%.
Any social network or messenger user has a list of contacts (friends). Unlike social networks, Telegram messenger opens chat on adding a contact. Therefore, most users have only 5-10 contacts of their closest friends and partners with whom they often communicate (Fig. 11).

Approximately one third of Telegram messenger users (30%) are subscribed to 10-25 channels, 27% of users – to 5-10 channels, and 24% – to 1-5 channels. Those who are not subscribed to any channel and those who are subscribed to more than 50 channels amount to less than 5% (Fig. 12).
Almost 70% of Telegram audience are either registered in the social network VKontakte or often use it, 56% of them chat in WhatsApp, 30% use Viber, 30% use the social network Facebook, 19% use iMessage via iPhone (Fig. 13).

In Telegram messenger an advertisement is placed as a post or a native format. Therefore, 25% of Telegram users do not see advertising on the messenger channels, 30% see it very rarely and 25% see it only occasionally.
Approximately 17% of users see advertisements very often and 5% see them constantly. Apparently, they are subscribed only to entertainment channels.

Telegram has become a popular messenger and its audience is very diverse. Now the messenger is used not only by entrepreneurs and IT specialists, but also by different categories of users. Currently, there is no fierce competition on this platform; there are no clear leaders in every economic realm. Therefore, nearly any author with minimal skills can develop their channel and get first profit in 2-3 months.

To evaluate Telegram target followers’ feedback we use the ER indicator (engagement rate of followers’), which is calculated as follows:

\[ ER = \frac{\text{the sum of all engagements (likes, reposts, comments)}}{\text{number of subscribers}} \times 100\% \]

However, in the judgment of the authors, the drawback of this indicator is that it does not take into account coverage, involvement on specific days and interaction with individual posts. Therefore, in our opinion, to evaluate Telegram target followers’ feedback, it is necessary to use several subtypes of ER.

1. Reach engagement rate (ERR) = number of engagements / coverage \times 100\%.
   This indicator shows the approximate share of those who have seen community publications and reacted to them in one way or other.
2. Engagement rate per day (ER Day) = number of engagement per day / number of subscribers \times 100\%.
   Daily engagement shows how many times a day the average subscriber showed his/her activity.
3. Engagement rate per post (ER Post) = the amount of involvement per 1 publication / number of subscribers at the date of publication \times 100\%.
   The indicator allows evaluating interest in specific publications, comparing them in terms of effectiveness.
4. View engagement rate (ER View) = number of engagements per 1 publication / number of views \times 100\%.
   This indicator shows the specific share of the target audience who made comments on a specific advertisement viewing.

Social media analytics tool “Popsters” is used for running community analysis in social networks and messengers. It automatically calculates all of the listed above indicators.
Thus, in order to enable effective advertising communications in messengers, many advertising specialists calculate rates of both return on investment and target followers’ feedback, while advertising on several platforms to achieve appropriate goals and decide on the format for each target audience.

4. Conclusion
The study on Telegram’s market positioning factors for analyzing and planning of advertising campaigns for business operations leads the authors to the following conclusions.

The active Telegram messenger audience is in the age range from 18 to 34 years. 57% of users have higher education, which proves the high quality of the audience. 47% of the messenger users are interested in information technology, 42% are interested in science and technology, 41% watch movies and TV shows, 39% read news channels of major media companies, and 35% read books. Almost 70% of the Telegram audience are either registered in the social network VKontakte or often use it, 56% of them chat in WhatsApp, 30% use Viber, 30% use the social network Facebook, 19% use iMessage via iPhone. In Telegram messenger an advertisement is placed as a post or a native format. Therefore, 25% of Telegram users do not see advertising on the messenger channels, 30% see it very rarely and 25% see it only occasionally.

Based on the above stated, we can conclude that Telegram messenger is currently an effective platform for analyzing and planning advertising campaigns in any business field.

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