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Abstract

The authors analyze the popularity of social media as one of digital economy tools among users of the Republic of Tatarstan. It contains the comparative analysis on age categories of users and activity of respondents. The research purpose is analysis of social media and behavioral characteristics of their users for determination of weak spots of use of social networking sites for studying of the services market as a channel for obtaining tourist information and their elimination. The most popular social networking services are identified according to the number of hits. There are also defined key positions, on which potential clients plan their vacation and which have the greatest credibility. The conclusions on the increasing role of SMM in the service sector were drawn on the basis of respondent responses. The age categories of users and the most reliable information channels are determined. They are regarded by marketing specialists as effective distribution channels of products and, in particular, of any services, including tourist ones. Rapid information dissemination and its real tracking requires from suppliers more accelerated strategy in provision of information for clients and decrease in time for order processing, when there is shift of accent from advertizing and direct marketing to marketing of directions and sales in the Internet.

Keywords
(separated by '-')

Behavioral model - Digitalization - Marketing - Services market - Social media - Targeting



Social Media Marketing as a Digital Economy Tool of the Services Market for the Population of the Republic of Tatarstan

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Abstract. The authors analyze the popularity of social media as one of digital economy tools among users of the Republic of Tatarstan. It contains the comparative analysis on age categories of users and activity of respondents. The research purpose is analysis of social media and behavioral characteristics of their users for determination of weak spots of use of social networking sites for studying of the services market as a channel for obtaining tourist information and their elimination. The most popular social networking services are identified according to the number of hits. There are also defined key positions, on which potential clients plan their vacation and which have the greatest credibility. The conclusions on the increasing role of SMM in the service sector were drawn on the basis of respondent responses. The age categories of users and the most reliable information channels are determined. They are regarded by marketing specialists as effective distribution channels of products and, in particular, of any services, including tourist ones. Rapid information dissemination and its real tracking requires from suppliers more accelerated strategy in provision of information for clients and decrease in time for order processing, when there is shift of accent from advertizing and direct marketing to marketing of directions and sales in the Internet.

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1 Introduction

Currently social media occupy a significant place in life of the majority of people. According to the statistics, 93% of Russians, who use the Internet, look through social media about three hours a day. It has been a long time since social media are not just a platform for communication. For users it is an additional source of information, a place of exchange of views, entertainment, work and inspiration. For some people it is their image.

Social media in Tatarstan have high integration in life of inhabitants of the Republic. The most popular social networking sites in Tatarstan are: VKontakte, Facebook, Instagram, Odnoklassniki. According to the tag “Tatarstan”, there are about 2 million posts in Instagram, and 4 million with the tag Kazan. By the request “Kazan tours”, there are about 338 communities in the social networking service VKontakte, and in the largest communities the number of subscribers reaches 40 thousand.

The contribution of Tim O’Reilly “Web 2.0” [4], describing the existing information space, can be considered as the starting point of the present development stage of the Internet where social networking sites occupy an extremely important niche. According to the Forbes magazine, equal distribution of social media with widespread replacement of television by the Internet became one of twenty two main trends of the first decade of the twenty first century [2].

2 Materials and Methods

The analysis of social networking services provides more accurate and wide information on the target audience. 80% of the Russian Internet audience daily use social media. Social media generate targeted traffic under satisfaction of information needs of users and formation of credibility to a brand [13]. Formation of the portrait of the brand audience, reviews and estimates of users of SMM help to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of work for its further improvement.

3 Results

One of the most popular social media site in Russia is VKontakte (Fig. 1). It was launched on October 10, 2006. This website is an analogy with Facebook, a social networking service for students and graduates of the Russian higher education institutions. According to the data as of August 2017, the average daily audience of the portal makes more than 82.5 million visitors. The total amount of users, registered in the site, is more than 460 million. According to the SimilarWeb service, VKontakte ranked 7th in popularity in the world in September 2017 [7].

The second popular social networking website in Russia is Odnoklassniki. At the same time, it is the first social media site in the popularity rating of Armenia, the fourth – in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan and the twenty fourth – in the universal rating. As well as VKontakte, Odnoklassniki has a prototype. It is an American social networking service “Classmates”, which mission is to unite schoolmates from the entire planet. This service is more “domestic” and many companies avoid it. Because of superficial opportunities, settings of advertizing campaigns and acquisition of statistical data are not in great demand for product promotion [11].

The leader among the world social networking services is Facebook. It ranks third in Russia: its audience is twice smaller than VKontakte. Since 2006 the service is available for all Internet users of 16 years worldwide.

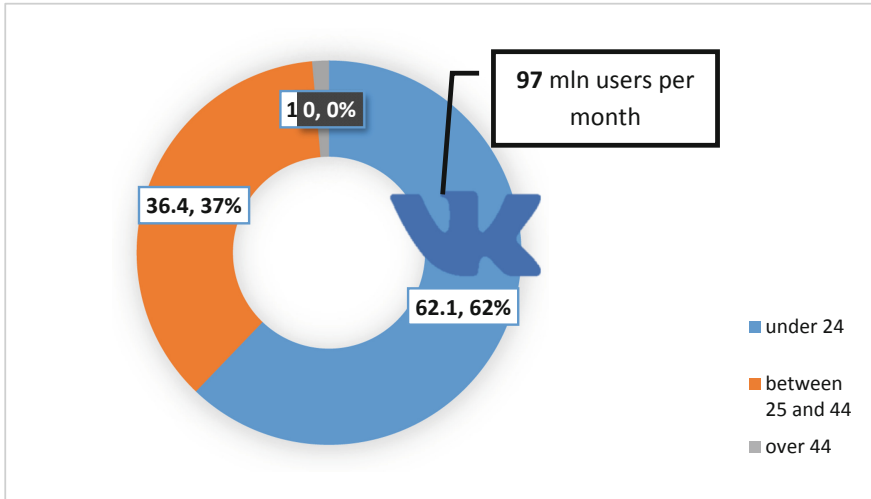


Fig. 1. The age of users of the social media service VKontakte (Source: compiled by the authors)

Facebook ranks among top - 5 the most visited web sites of the world. As of April, 2017, the monthly audience of the social media service makes nearly two billion people. As of June 2017, there were more than 2 billion users, who visited the website at least once per month, and who were traced by the system with the help of the Like button and the cookie technology. In March 2017, the daily active audience made 720 million people. The mobile application Facebook for smartphones is monthly used by 1,03 billion people. Every day users leave 6 billion “likes” and comments in the site and publish about 300 million photos (Fig. 2).

Currently, it is one of the key tools of a SMM specialist [1]. It should be noted that the Russian-speaking segment of Facebook strongly differs from the universal one. It is caused by the development mechanics, behavioral features of the audience, and nuances of social and demographic characteristics of users. The focus of interest of Facebook users also strongly differs from the interests of users of VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, therefore it is more difficult to hold their attention. It resulted in more expensive, but well-designed advertising campaigns [8].

In recent years, the visualization trend is the leading one in SMM. It is considered that photo and video content enjoys bigger popularity than text, and is more effective [5]. The best platform for implementation of such campaigns is Instagram, a social media service, which is based on exchange of photos and videos, which ranks fourth in Russia (Fig. 3). By December 2010, one million users were registered in the social networking service. By June 2011, this figure increased up to five million. In two months the number of users was 10 million, and by March 2012, the amount of users reached nearly 30 million. In April 2014, more than 200 million people were registered in Instagram.

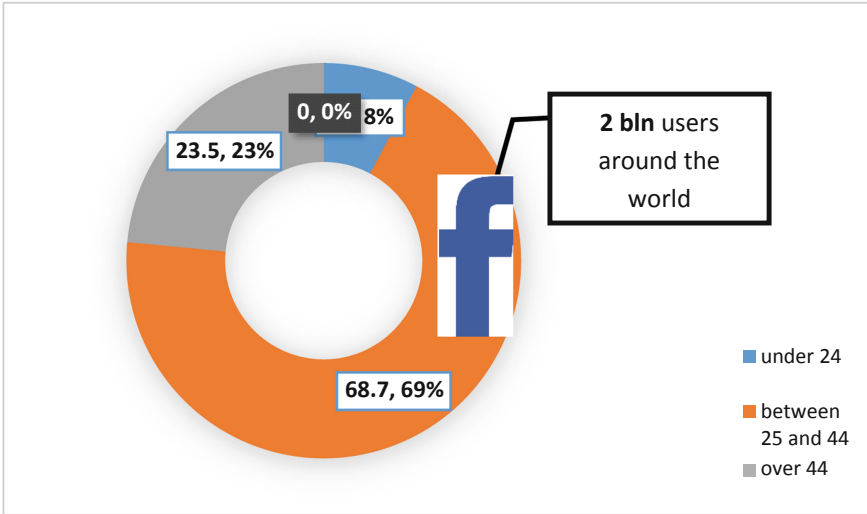


Fig. 2. The age of Facebook users (Source: compiled by the authors)

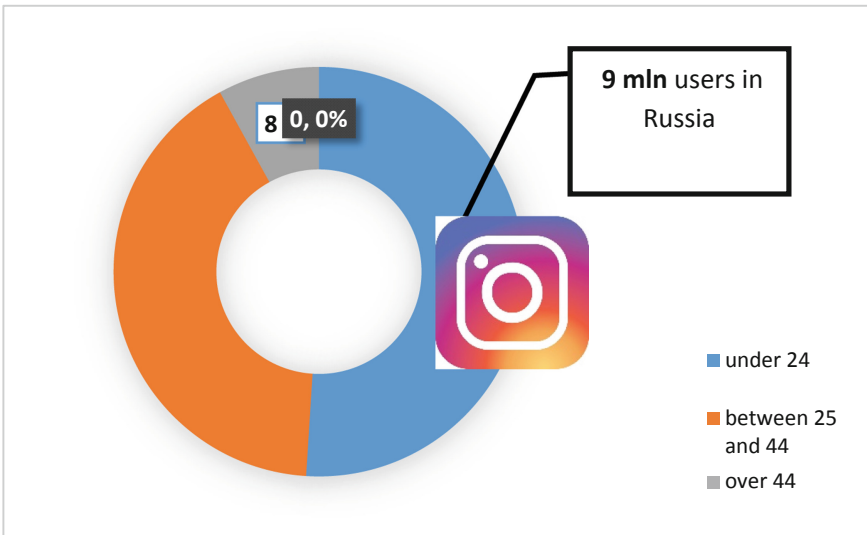


Fig. 3. The age of Instagram users (Source: compiled by the authors)

In July 2011, the Instagram team announced 100 million loaded photos. By November 2013, users loaded 16 billion photos. Currently, Instagram belongs to the Facebook corporation.

SMM-experts conducted the research, in which they allocated the gender ratio of social media users in Russia. In Fig. 4, it is shown that the biggest share of users of social networking services is women.

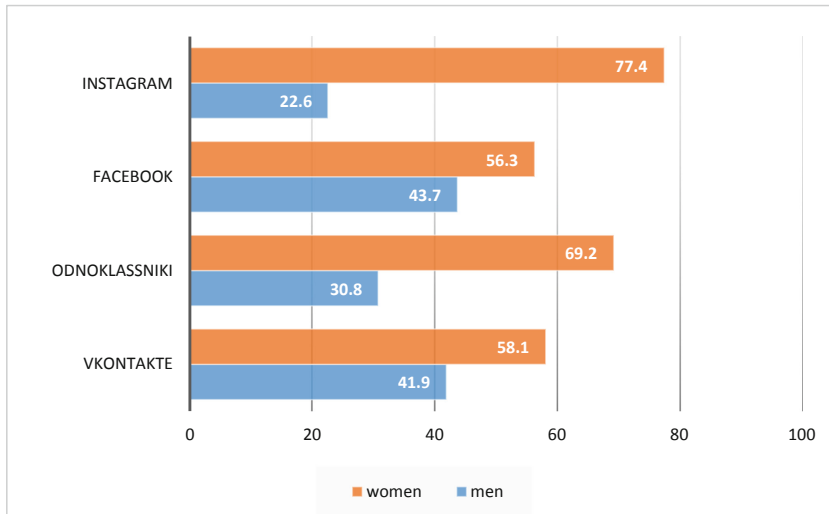


Fig. 4. The gender ratio of social media users in Russia (Source: compiled by the authors)

The World Tourism Organization UNWTO recognizes an important role of social media in tourism. More than a third of the international travelers gain access to social media sites by means of smartphones – they publish content in blogs, on pages in social media, recommend these or those places to visit, leave comments about locations while they are travelling [9].

Since 1995, the Internet market is on the rise. At the same time, tourist products occupy one of leading places on the sales volume through the Internet.

This tendency is sustainable in Europe. The number of tourists, who prefer to book in advance only flight and a hotel, increases. Other elements of the program are made on the spot, according to their tastes, a schedule and plans [13].

Consumers of products of the tourist market feel the need for live information: detailed descriptions, photos, videos, reviews. Advertising catalogues, core journals and newspapers, television and radio is not capable to fill this need. For this reason, social media are important for the tourist sphere. Besides, tourists appreciate their time and instead of spending several hours in a travel agency, they choose tours by themselves according to their own parameters on aggregator websites, tourist portals or social media.

Currently, there are two main ways of use of the Internet by tourist firms:

- Advertisement of tourist services and the firm image on its own or someone else's webpage;
- Sale of tourist services through web pages (Internet-store) [14].

There are specialized social media for the tourism sphere. In the Russian market they are:

- Foursquare - a social networking site with geolocation function, which is mostly designed for work with mobile devices. On the basis of his geolocation, an author

checks-in` and submits a review about this place. For each check-in, the user gets points and achieves ranks.

- Tourister - a community of experienced travelers and guides in a format of diaries. Here it is possible to fill in a travel map, to keep your own blog, to get advice from tourism experts. Besides, the service users participate in cashback-programs. The monthly audience is 220 000 people.
- Enjourney combines all functions of a social networking service and a platform for blogging. There is no limitation on loading photos and videos. Here is a good atmosphere for communication, ratings of community members, and an opportunity to create your own route map.
- TourOut is one the first social media services in tourism. It enables to communicate, to upload photo reports and travel maps, to conduct thematic forums. Its feature is that except social loading it bears possibilities of aggregator websites. The audience is more than 500 000 people per month.
- Turbina.ru is one the largest Russian-language tourist community, which feature is a big amount of professional photographers and travelers among its members. The audience is more than 400 000 visitors per month [11].

4 Discussion

The international metasearch service momondo.ru conducted the research and found out that for the last five years online services for tourists and social networking sites became one of the most popular sources of information for travelers from Russia. Judging by the research results, for Russians publications in the content feed of social networking services are more important than advice from staff of travel agencies. The news feed, which is formed by social networking services by certain algorithms, became the most effective motivator and inspirer for 51% of young tourists between 18 and 22 years old. The need for social media also increases among people of the senior age group. This year the number of tourists of this age category, which plan their trips according to publications in social media, has doubled in comparison with 2014. It makes 34%. At the same time, interest in tourist information in social media grows more slowly among respondents of the middle age (36–55 years). In comparison with 2015 the difference made 7%, while only of 33% of the interviewed tourists of this age category choose social media as the source of information [10].

5 Conclusions

The top list of the most popular sources of information for travelers was made in the course of the research. Consequently, stories of friends (48%) are in the first place, the second place is shared by tourist websites (41%) and social media (40%), TV and radio (24%) and travel agencies (22%) – the most unpopular channels for obtaining information on travelling (Fig. 5).

In comparison with 2016, a bigger amount of users began to rely on blogs and travel applications while planning their vacation. At the same time, the number of fans of applications has grown from 8% to 16% within five years. Following the results of the poll, the amount of fans of travel blogs makes 16% (a 3 per cent increase). Young people between 18 and 22 years old (30%) prefer blogs, respondents of 23–35 years old and 36–55 years old look for information in mobile applications.

However, a universal tendency is that social media – an important part of any trip. “If you did not post anything – you were not there”, – a popular slogan in the Internet. According to Mark Sharron, the President of TripAdvisor for Business, such involvement of social media into the travelling processes is called «a phenomenon of an independent traveler, who is always online» [3]. In his opinion, it is a chance for all representatives of the tourism and hospitality sphere for sharp rise, as it became much simpler to influence on potential clients.

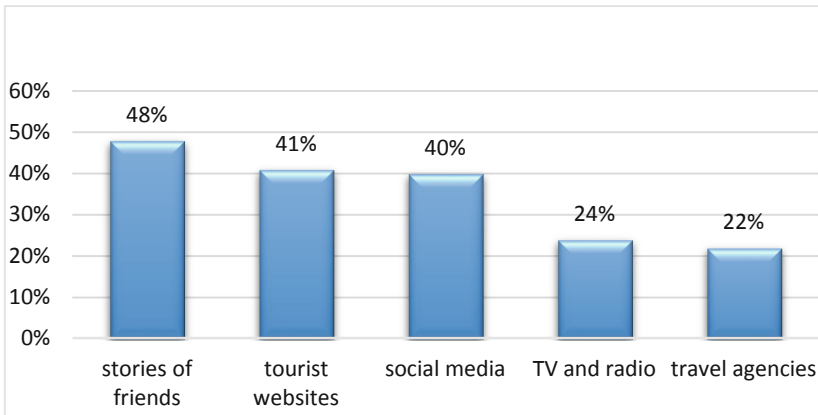


Fig. 5. The most popular sources of information for travelers (Source: compiled by the authors)

The portal TripBarometer1 conducted the research, devoted to the phenomenon of an independent traveler, who is always online. These studies showed how strongly the content, which was created by other users, influences the processes of planning a trip and booking. Comments on the website are of great importance for 65% of Russian tourists, who find inspiration while planning a trip in the Internet. Then follow ratings, which influence on the choice of 64% of compatriots [10].

The author conducted the survey research among potential clients of the travel agencies, who live in the territory of the Republic of Tatarstan. The age of the main part of respondents is 20–25 years old (78,6%). At the same time all the respondents in equal shares travel less than once a year, once a year and every six months (Fig. 6).

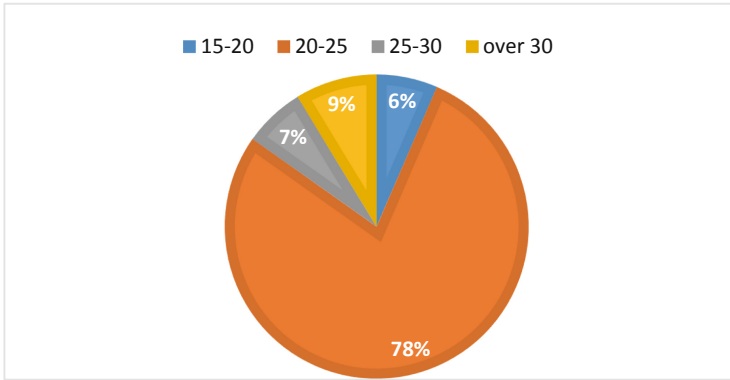


Fig. 6. The age of the respondents (Source: compiled by the authors)

According to the poll, the travel geography of the respondents extends to the territory of the Republic of Tatarstan and Russian destinations (47,8% and 63% respectively). Asia is visited by 28% of the respondents, Europe – 21%, Turkey – 17,4% (Fig. 7).

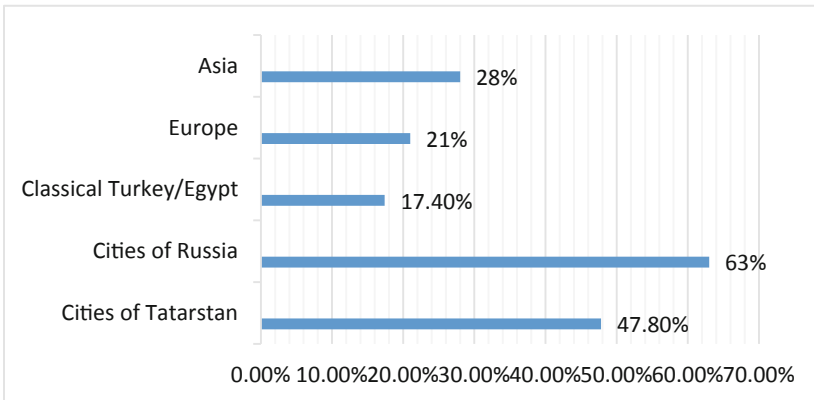


Fig. 7. The most popular regions according to the survey results (Source: compiled by the authors)

However, only 37% of the respondents use package tours. Others plan their vacation individually, using several options of obtaining information.

Figure 8 shows that in spite of the fact that the majority of the respondents book hotels, tickets, plan time and entertainments by themselves, the package last minute tours still arouse their interest.

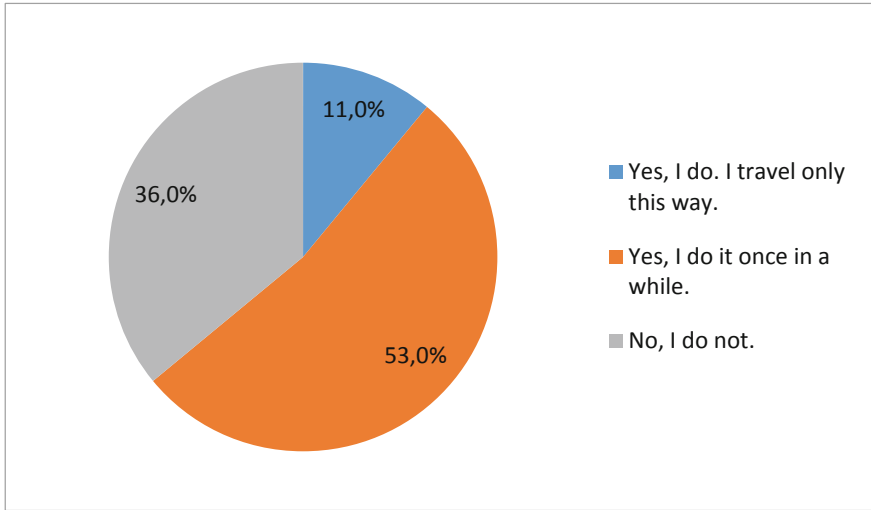


Fig. 8. Do you monitor last minute tours? (Source: compiled by the authors)

Table 1. The rating of the priority communication channels

Communication channel	The amount of respondents, who are satisfied with communication channels, people (%)
Website of a travel agency	11 (23,9)
VKontakte communities	29 (63)
Instagram accounts	16 (34,8)
Telegram channels	6 (13)
e-mailing	2 (4,3)
Actually visit travel agencies	14 (30,4)

Source: compiled by the authors

In the course of the poll, the respondents distinguished several priority channels for obtaining tourist offers (Table 1). The table shows that visiting a travel agency does not hold the leading position, and it is not attractive to 70% of the respondents. It allows drawing a conclusion that integration of the Internet and social media into work of travel agencies in particular and into the tourism industry in general influences the overall involvement of the population into investment of the capital into the industry [6].

According to the statistical service “Wordstat. Yandex”, about 35 273 people per month search for “tours from Kazan” [11]. It confirms the fact that the tourism industry gains popularity in the Internet. In the course of the poll, it was found out that the most preferable way of obtaining information on tours, on opportunities for trips, promotional offers is social media: the first one in the rating is VKontakte, then follows Instagram, the second place is taken by telegram bots, the third one is e-mailing.

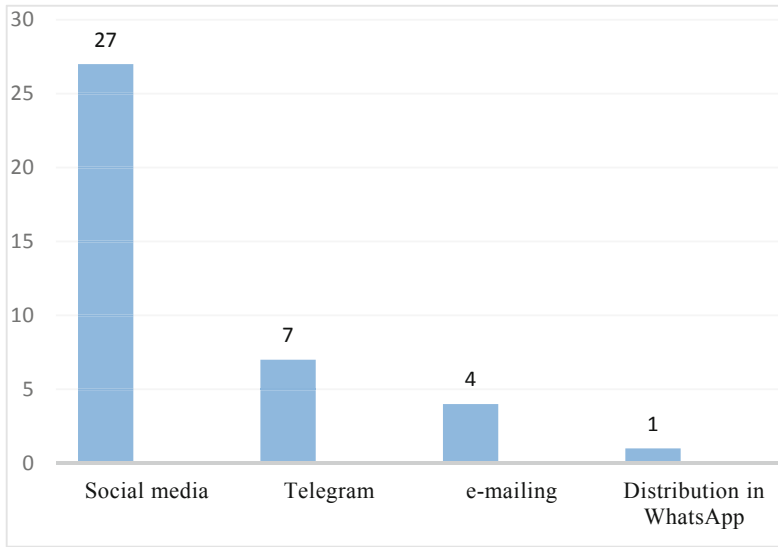


Fig. 9. The priority communication channels for obtaining information (Source: compiled by the authors)

In the course of the research, the author analyzed travel agencies, which are the most popular in social media according to the number of subscribers (Fig. 9). By request “tours Kazan” [11], the social networking service VKontakte gives top 3 communities:

- The travel agency «Four Season» – amount of subscribers: 37 900 people. There are 400 new subscribers each day. On average, 5 posts with offers are published in the community per day. The group has hashtag navigation for simplified use. It also has bright graphic content, and you have a possibility to leave request for an individual tour. The column “Contacts” contains valid numbers, and administrators of the community answer within 4 h. There is also distribution of offers in WhatsApp and Telegram.
- The travel agency «Tuzemets» – amount of subscribers: 34 104 people. The daily audience increase – 100 people. On average, there are published 11 posts with various offers each day. There is also good interaction with the audience and beautiful graphic content. The average response time – 40 min. The column “Contacts” contains valid numbers. Navigation is in the form of the clickable menu.
- The travel agency «Bounty Tours» – amount of subscribers: 27 106 people. The daily audience increase – 6 people. On average, there are published 20 posts with various offers each day. At the time of the research, the administrators of the group held a contest for audience capture. It means that they are familiar with SMM tools and actively implement them in work. There is no community navigation. The average response time – 15 min.

The situation with Instagram is similar: by the same request, the account TA “Bounty tours” has the biggest number of subscribers—26,2 thousand people, the account Pegas tours – 24,9 thousand subscribers. On average, three offers are published in the account “Bounty tours” per day. There is a reference to the chat in WhatsApp and the phone number of the agency. The account Pegas tours is absolutely similar.

These figures show that interactive planning of vacation is relevant both for audience of VKontakte, and for users of Instagram. However, travel agencies put a lot of effort into interaction with clients in the social networking service VKontakte.

Nevertheless, if we turn to the conducted research, 68% of the respondents do not consider social media as a convenient way to search for favorable offers for vacation for several reasons:

Table 2. Refusal of social media as a communication channel with travel agencies

The reason for refusal of social media as a channel of acquisition of travel offers	The amount of respondents, who gave the reason, %
The graphic content of communities distracts from offers	15
It is impossible to follow new offers without independent monitoring of numerous groups	45
Glut of the news feed resulting in loss of needed publications	12
Rare updating of the content	28

Source: compiled by the authors

Social media become one of the most popular channels for promotion of services, including the travel ones (Table 2). The share of social media among interaction tools of representatives of the tourism industry with potential clients rapidly grows from year to year [2]. Currently, 4 social networking services take the leading positions in Tatarstan: VKontakte, Facebook, Instagram and Odnoklassniki. They are united by similar forming algorithms of the news feed and by the diversity of the generated content. The feature of Instagram is its graphic content, which strongly influences on motivation of tourists. Except for classical social media, there are specialized tourist social networking services such as Tourister, Forsquare, TourOut, Enjourney, Turbina.ru, which contribute to development of tourism in the Internet. In the course of the research it was found out that the most popular sources for obtaining information from travel agencies are communities in VKontakte and accounts in Instagram.

AQ3

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