

## Featured Translated Research Outside the Anglosphere

Lyudmila A. Kruglova\* and Galina G. Shchepilova

# Russian TV channels and social media in the transformation of the media field

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**Abstract:** The article presents the results of an analysis of the work of six Russian TV channels (Channel One, Russia 1, NTV, STS, TNT, Friday!) with social media: VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Telegram, RuTube, YouTube, and in particular the performance of Telegram accounts of the selected channels. The year 2022 brought about the biggest change in Russians' digital habits, which cannot even be compared with the transformation of pandemic times. Two-thirds of the time Russians spent online in 2022 was spent on the largest types of activity: 21 % on social networks, 18 % on video and 15 % on messengers. The researchers attribute the redistribution of the audience share between social networks and messengers not to a decrease in one activity and growth of the other, but to a spillover between the platforms and hybrid formats. The blocking of some social networks in Russia has led to an outflow of users from these platforms. This has also been one of the growth drivers for the hybrid Telegram, which also serves as a social network. Telegram's growth peaks are related to Russians' logical need for news sources during a period of turbulence. A significant portion of the time users spend on the site is spent reading Telegram feeds. Despite the evidence of the growing influence of social media in Russia, traditional television remains the number one media in terms of accumulated reach. Based on an analysis of the Telegram accounts of six Russian TV channels over four random weeks in 2022 and 2023, an attempt was made to identify the changing digital content strategies of the TV channels in the face of turbulence. A sample of TV channels was selected based on average annual ratings as

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**\*Corresponding author: Lyudmila A. Kruglova**, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russian Federation, E-mail: [abiljo@mail.ru](mailto:abiljo@mail.ru). <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5022-4772>

**Galina G. Shchepilova**, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russian Federation, E-mail: [shgg@yandex.ru](mailto:shgg@yandex.ru). <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0339-1188>

well as thematic segmentation. Formally, all six TV channels are now “equalized in rights” and are among the publicly available channels of the first and second multi-plexes. The following parameters were analysed in each of the weeks: number of posts, comments, views, and likes. On the basis of all audience and channel activities, the Engagement Rate, a coefficient of user involvement in the published content (posts), was determined. In addition, on the basis of the entire array of material, the most popular publications were identified and the forms of presentation were analysed. The specific objectives of the study were to identify content strategies, monitor and record the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the activities of the selected television channels on the rapidly growing Telegram platform, and determine the audience response. Based on the results of the study, it is possible to identify an audience demand for news agenda, on the one hand, and for distracting content – rather than entertainment – in a period of turbulence, on the other hand. Television channels are forced to reinvent themselves in the changed social media space that they struggled to explore a few years ago. It seems that the Big Three channels are only trying to find their content strategies in Telegram, trying to copy the content strategies of other and previous social media, with NTV being the most successful. The “news” content Telegram is best suited for youth entertainment channels – TNT, STS, Friday! They successfully adapt interactive forms developed on other networks and use content created for other networks.

**Keywords:** social media; TV channels in social networks; content features; user activity

## 1 Introduction

In Russia, at the beginning of 2023, 88.2 % of the population utilizes digital technologies. According to the *Global Digital 2023*<sup>1–9</sup> report. Russia ranks 45th worldwide for internet penetration. *Mediascope*<sup>2</sup> indicates that Russia’s total monthly internet audience reached 98.6 million people. Virtually all users access the Internet daily. Among younger age groups, the internet audience is nearly 100 % of the population. Audience engagement is remarkably high: Russians aged 12–24 spend almost 6 h online daily. The average Russian spends 3 h and 46 min online daily. There has been an increase in the time older groups spend on the Internet compared to the previous year. Almost two-thirds of the time Russians spent online in 2022 was spent on the

1 Meltwater. 2023. Global Digital 2023. <https://www.meltwater.com/en/global-digital-trends> (accessed March 15, 2023).

2 Mediascope. 2023. Internet users in 2022. <https://mediascope.net/news/1567182/> (accessed March 15, 2023).

largest types of activity: 21 % on social networks (despite blocking two popular social platforms among Russians in 2022), 18 % on videos, and 15 % on messengers.

Despite the rapid and all-encompassing growth of the Internet, traditional television in Russia remains the number one media in accumulated coverage: almost everyone watches TV at least once a month. Russians over 4 watched television channels for about 4 h a day in 2022. Among the population of large cities aged 4–44, channels I and II of multiplexes are in the lead, excluding the Big Three (Channel One, Russia 1, and NTV): they account for slightly more than a third of the viewing time. Russians spend 27 % of their time on channels outside multiplexes, 26 and 13 % on non-linear viewing and the Big Three channels. It is quite natural that in 2022, Russians began to watch more news (12 % of the viewing time) and socio-political programs (15 %).<sup>3</sup> Despite the various changes that are taking place in the Russian media field, TV channels continue to interact with social media.

After *Meta\** (marked \* here and hereafter as organizations recognized as extremist in Russia – L.K., G.S.) was designated an extremist organization and its *Facebook\** and *Instagram\** sites were blocked in Russia, VKontakte became the largest social network in the country in 2022. Statistics show that 80 % of the population visited the platform at least once a month, while 40 % used it daily. Then there are *TikTok* and *OK*. The VKontakte's audience grew by 13 % in 2022, *OK* users increased by 1 %, and *TikTok* lost 1 % of the population (due to severe restrictions on Russians from the service). In addition to the gigantic reduction in audience reach – up to 80 % – the time spent on blocked social networks has also changed – to less than 5 min.<sup>4</sup> *Facebook\** and *Instagram\** accounts have been blocked, and many Russian television channels have deleted or frozen their accounts with a reasonably large audience reach.

Regarding form, video is one of the most significant online activities, with over 80 % coming from *YouTube*. This video hosting is one of the most popular resources on the Russian Internet, regarding coverage and consumption time – 15 % of the total time spent. Other video services differ in purpose and audience and are concentrated in niche markets (on-demand cinemas, linear TV services, content aggregators, and other platforms). After the turbulence cycle began, video hosting companies removed the Big Three's highly active and popular *YouTube* channels. The broadcasts of the Russian Federation's social-political channels can still be seen on *YouTube* and other channels, but their audience is still incommensurable compared to the one that was. Experts called *RuTube* one alternative to the *YouTube* video hosting platform in

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3 Mediascope. 2023. Media consumption in 2022. <https://mediascope.net/news/1575873/> (accessed March 15, 2023).

4 Mediascope. 2023. Internet audience in 2022. <https://mediascope.net/news/1567182/> (accessed March 15, 2023).

Russia. According to an analysis by *Similarweb*, in May 2022, 50.4 million people visited the *RuTube* website.<sup>5</sup> Notably, in January 2022, *RuTube*'s attendance was only 7.7 million people per month, meaning that in just 5 months, *RuTube*'s traffic increased 6.5 times. From April to June 2022, *RuTube*'s website traffic decreased by 28.3 million users per month. Based on February 2023 results, *RuTube*'s monthly audience was 40.5 million users. However, *RuTube* does not set itself the task of replacing *YouTube* in Russia, even against the sounding proposals for developing and supporting national video hosting and Western blocking. One main objective of *RuTube* is to become an engaging platform for bloggers.<sup>6</sup>

The five largest sites in 2022, according to the number of visitors, are Yandex, Google, YouTube, WhatsApp, and V Kontakte (calculated by daily traffic). Blocked social networks have reduced their positions and occupied the lowest positions in the 2022 rating. It is impossible to ignore the platform that shows the growth of the audience – Zen. It combines Yandex, News and Yandex. Zen transferred to VK holding.<sup>7</sup>

The researchers attribute the redistribution of the audience share between social networks and messengers not to a decrease in one activity and growth of the other, but to a spillover between the platforms and hybrid formats. The blocking of some social networks in Russia has led to an outflow of users from these platforms. This has also been one of the growth drivers for the hybrid *Telegram*, which also serves as a social network. *Telegram*'s growth peaks are related to Russians' logical need for news sources during a period of turbulence. In the spring of 2022, most bloggers began to create *Telegram* channels and tried to transfer their audience to them from platforms blocked in Russia. Due to its hybrid format, *Telegram*'s dynamics differ from those of other messengers. The usage time of the platform is now almost 40 min, much higher than that of *WhatsApp* (owned by *Meta\**. – L.K., G.S.) and many other social networks. A significant portion of the time users spend on the site is spent reading *Telegram* feeds.<sup>8</sup> A combination of factors has allowed user interest in *Telegram* to grow. At the beginning of 2022, the hybrid messenger in Russia was used by 25.5 million people daily, and in the first few weeks of 2023, the number of users reached 48.8 million.

In 2017, the authors of this article conducted a comprehensive study to analyze Russian television channels' behavior and editorial policy on new technological

5 Inclint. 2023. RuTube statistics 2022. <https://inclint.ru/rutube-stats/> (accessed March 25, 2023).

6 RIA Novosti. 2023. RuTube doesn't aim to replace YouTube in Russia. <https://ria.ru/20230314/rutube-1857711747.html> (accessed March 15, 2023).

7 TASS. 2023. Yandex Zen's monthly audience reached 70 million in 2022. <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/16673633> (accessed March 25, 2023).

8 Mediascope. 2023. Internet audience in 2022. <https://mediascope.net/news/1567182/> (accessed March 15, 2023).

platforms: official portals, social networks, video hosting sites, and messengers. The channels were analyzed according to the following parameters: the functions and navigation of the official website, the availability of applications, understanding the specifics of various technological platforms, activity in various social networks and messengers, the uniqueness and variety of forms of content on the website and social networks, the number of subscribers on social networks, the activity and forms of audience reaction, the use of interactive functions. In 2017, the authors concluded that Russian “television channels, for the most part, do not understand the specifics of social networks well enough. Television channels continue to build communication with the audience according to the analog principle – from the broadcaster to the masses. Quite rarely, channels try to attract online audiences to co-create using the interactive function of social networks. The audience of social channels on television often lives their own lives, taking advantage of the fact that TV channels do not moderate social media comments. The SMM services of television channels most likely operate on a residual basis, simply duplicating content – mostly in video format – to all social platforms” (Shchepilova and Kruglova 2018: 13). This research emerged as a logical continuation within the framework of a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of the audiovisual environment conducted by the Department of Television and Radio Broadcasting of the Faculty of Journalism at Moscow State University. This research set itself the following goals and objectives: to understand how Russian television channels are using social media in the new reality, to analyze how Russian television is mastering new platforms, including *Telegram*, and whether Russian television is utilizing their capabilities, and to assess the level of audience response to the work of television channels in social media, particularly in *Telegram*.

## 2 Literature review

Over the past decade and a half, many scientific publications have appeared on the media presence in social media and on social media marketing (SMM) technology. Foreign researchers were the first to talk about this actively. Several significant works by foreign authors emphasized the importance and significance of social media for the development of the media sphere as a whole (Newman 2009; Shirky 2008; Stefanone et al. 2010; Westerman et al. 2013). It is impossible not to mention essential concepts related to understanding the role of the audience in the media economy, which includes the analysis of the “economics of the audience (audience economics)” by Napoli (2003, 2011), “niche theory” by Dimmick (2003), and research on the influence of audience and technological factors on strategic and operational media management (Chan-Olmsted 2005; Wirtz 2011).

In recent years, Russian authors have also been working on this topic (Baranova 2016; D'yachenko 2014). Most pay attention to online media (Muronets 2015) or the press (Shchepilova 2018). The peculiarities of interaction between TV channels and social networks is, in our opinion, an insufficiently studied topic, given the rapidly changing media field. To understand the processes of transformation of the Russian media space, the study conducted by E.D. Pershina in 2016 is interesting. She analyzed the choice of Russian news media platforms for creating groups on social networks. The result of the study showed that at that time, TV channels were the most active of all media outlets in creating groups on social networks (Pershina 2017). It is impossible not to mention the comprehensive study in 2006–20 by E.D. Shatskaya (Vankova) (Shatskaya 2019a; Van'kova 2017). The researcher examines and summarizes the strategic decisions of the top three Russian TV channels of those years related to their presences on the Internet. The directions of the development of strategic management within the framework of Russian media management in general, as well as the influence of various types of content (news, entertainment, serial) on the strategy of the TV channel, are revealed. The author concludes, about the study period, that “the strategy of creating and adapting the content of TV broadcasters on the Internet depends not on the thematic focus of the channel but on the genre of the program. Regarding the difference between the groups of general interest and entertainment TV channels, it can be said that on the Internet, the first group has a predominant placement of short forms of content, as the content library consists mainly of news and information and TV programs, which can be easily broken down into stories and fragments. Serial and film content, predominant among entertainment broadcasters, is unsuitable for breaking into short forms. In other issues related to content creation and packaging, the development strategies of broadcasters are similar among themselves” (Shatskaya 2019b).

In a 2019 study on the work of 27 Russian TV channels on the *YouTube* platform, the authors conclude that “the main mistake that channels make is completely ignoring the *YouTube* audience. They do not take into account the potential of equal communication with *YouTube* viewers, which is the main engine of the channel's development” (Kruglova and Konoval'tseva 2020: 355). A little later, in 2020, K.V. Chobanyan reviewed the strategies of the interaction of the world's information TV channels with social networks (Chobanyan 2020) and concluded that the world's “news TV channels are abandoning video as their main specialization on digital platforms and mainly use traditional production formats to create a digital news product” (Chobanyan 2020: 35). The researcher also notes that channels use social platforms for different purposes: *YouTube* duplicates the content of traditional television, which means that *YouTube* serves as a kind of storage; *Facebook*\* channels attract traffic to the company's website; *Instagram*\* is still a platform without a clear content strategy used to strengthen the brand

rather than to spread the news. Moreover, “the quality of some video materials offered by round-the-clock news channels often does not meet traditional professional standards” (Chobanyan 2020: 35).

There were also works that considered not only global, foreign, and federal TV channels but also regional ones. In 2016, researchers L.A. Vasilyeva and A.D. Gavrilov analyzed interaction challenges between television/radio broadcasters and social media platforms using the case study of GTRK ‘Chuvashia.’ After careful monitoring and content analysis, it was noted that “news is published selectively, usually without driving video accompaniment, but with hyperlinks. The posts look sparse. It is worth noting that the Internet editor of the GTRK Chuvashia website is responsible for promoting TV products on social networks. It can be assumed that the employee cannot cope with the volume of work. Therefore, the posts are monotonous and duplicate information from the official website. Social network users are not active in these groups” (Vasil’eva and Gavrilov 2016). When analyzing the behavior of Crimean TV channels on *Facebook*\* social networks (the analysis was conducted in 2017 when this network was not yet banned in Russia. – L.K., G.S.) and VKontakte (Shchepilova 2017), the study’s author noted similar problems – the repetition of news content without reformatting it to fit the style of social networks, infrequent posts, and the failure to use all the opportunities provided by social media. A detailed study of the activities of six Russian television channels on *TikTok* in 2021 (before the blocking of Russian users by the site itself) showed that “the emergence of a social network, the main content of which is short videos, has posed new challenges for television. In an attempt to give them a decent answer, television should take into account and take full advantage of its specific properties” (Buditskaya 2022: 138). Analyzing the features of media communication on the *Telegram* platform in 2020, other researchers came to the following conclusion: “... for the channel to be popular with the audience, it is necessary to have an understanding of who makes up the core of subscribers, which topics they are interested in, and which language they are used to communicating on the Internet” (Zuykina and Sokolova 2022: 73). Another relatively recent study is devoted to analyzing the role of the leading socio-political *Telegram* channels in the construction of global media events during the pandemic (Rubina 2020). Analysis in 2022 of the three leading *Telegram* channels (and these are not the channels of traditional media), which received a sharp increase in popularity after the start of their work, showed that “messenger users prefer factual and neutral content” (Oleshkevich 2022: 82). The results of research conducted over the years on the activities of television channels in social media and the specifics of the platforms themselves are essential for understanding digital laws and media evolution. Equally important is the fixation of rapid, drastic changes related to external causes. So far, no research has been found in the Russian scientific discourse on the problems of the interaction of Russian TV channels with social media during periods of socio-political instability.

### 3 Research design

A sample of TV channels was selected based on average annual ratings as well as thematic segmentation. It includes six TV channels – Channel One, Russia 1, NTV, CTC, TNT, and “Friday!”. The first three channels – the Big Three – formed their audiences even before digitalization, working in analog broadcasting in the meter band range. The following three TV channels are the highest-rated in the entertainment television segment. Their audience formed and accumulated before digitalization in the context of decimeter signal propagation, which undoubtedly affected the audience coverage characteristics significantly lower than meter-range channels. Formally, all the six TV channels are now “equalized in rights” and are among the publicly available channels of the first and second multiplexes.

The most significant social platforms were selected – *Telegram*, *Vkontakte*, *Odnoklassniki*, *RuTube*, and *YouTube*. The main focus of the analysis was on the following issues: how many subscribers could attract and retain TV channels on their official accounts. For a more detailed analysis, the *Telegram* platform was chosen as the most interesting from the point of view of development and relatively new in the conditions of transformation of the media field and turbulence. *Telegram*’s audience has been growing by more than 40 % yearly (since its launch in 2013).<sup>9</sup> Today, *Telegram* is no longer just a messenger. Due to the large number of media channels, this is a full-fledged media platform. Television channels try to understand the game’s rules and take their place. The authors set themselves the task of identifying what content, how often TV channels are offered in their *Telegram* accounts, and how actively the audience perceives it. We correlated the number of subscribers to the official account with their audience activity. The content of four random weeks of 2022 and 2023 was analyzed: (1) from March 14 to March 20, 2022; (2) from August 15 to August 21, 2022; (3) from October 24 to October 30, 2022; (4) from January 9 to January 15, 2023.

The following parameters were analysed in each of the weeks: number of posts, comments, views, and likes. The *Engagement Rate* was calculated based on comprehensive audience engagement metrics and channel performance data, representing the coefficient that measures user interaction with published content (posts). At the same time, the *ERpost* is the mathematical average of the user engagement coefficient of all publications for the analyzed period.  $ERpost = (\text{the number of likes for the entire period} + \text{the number of reposts for the entire period} + \text{the number of comments for the entire period}) / \text{number of subscribers} / \text{number of publications for the entire period}$ . In

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<sup>9</sup> Mediascope. 2023. Media consumption in 2022. <https://mediascope.net/news/1575873/> (accessed March 15, 2023).



addition, on the basis of the entire array of material, the most popular publications were identified and the forms of presentation were analysed.

The specific objectives of the study were to identify content strategies, monitor and record the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the activities of the selected television channels on the rapidly growing *Telegram* platform, and determine the audience response.

## 4 Results

All TV channels, except for the Big Three, actively engage with social media in their interactions with *YouTube* due to imposed restrictions. In the spring of 2022, *Google* limited the *YouTube* channels of Russian state-owned TV companies, including Channel One, VGTRK, and NTV. Programs from Channel One, Russia 1, Vesti (News), and others remain accessible on alternative *YouTube* channels like *Boomerang* and *Glavniye Novosti* (Main News). In August 2022, NTV launched a new *YouTube* channel, but its subscriber base has stayed relatively small. Meanwhile, NTV has a significant following on *RuTube*, boasting over 110,000 subscribers. Other channels on *RuTube* are less active, with subscriber counts ranging from a few hundred (e.g., STS) to tens of thousands (e.g., Channel One, Russia 1, TNT). Analyzing the *RuTube* platform presents challenges due to its lack of metric data. NTV is the most active publisher on *RuTube*, posting over 40 short videos daily. Russia 1 uploads one to two videos daily, while Channel One shares four to five. TNT and Friday! typically publish no more than one post per day, and no posts are found from STS on the channel's official account.

As shown in Table 1, STS has the highest total coverage. When evaluating individual platforms, each has its unique strengths. However, STS is the most popular TV channel analyzed on both *YouTube* and Odnoklassniki. TNT regards VKontakte as the best network for connecting with its audience; therefore, most of its resources are focused on this platform. NTV leads on *RuTube* and *Telegram*, but this channel shows the lowest metrics regarding total coverage. Russia 1 also demonstrates relatively modest coverage on social media despite VGTRK's effective centralized strategy from 2020 to 2022. Channel One's metrics are similarly low. In other words, the Big Three channels face significant challenges in attracting social media audiences compared to entertainment channels (Table 2).

The study's results indicate that the NTV channel is the most active among the analyzed channels in terms of posting frequency. Notably, NTV is more aggressive, posting more frequently on other social media platforms (VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, *RuTube*) than the other selected channels. On *Telegram*, NTV publishes approximately 49 posts per day. In comparison, Russia 1 publishes 30 posts, while Channel

**Table 1:** TV channels and number of social media followers in November 2022.

| TV channels | Vkontakte        | Telegram       | Odnoklassniki    | RuTube         | YouTube           | Total coverage    |
|-------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Channel one | 2,121,095        | 66,077         | 930,000          | 23,182         | –                 | 3,140,354         |
| Russia 1    | 1,147,734        | 35,930         | 694,000          | 47,200         | –                 | 1,924,864         |
| NTV         | 537,901          | <b>160,939</b> | 893,000          | <b>110,427</b> | 1,240 (new)       | 1,703,507         |
| TNT         | <b>5,989,680</b> | 76,609         | 703,000          | 10,900         | 312,000           | 7,092,189         |
| STS         | 3,412,412        | 10,660         | <b>1,200,000</b> | 724            | <b>11,000,000</b> | <b>15,623,796</b> |
| Friday!     | 1,427,025        | 92,259         | 152,000          | 3,000          | 4,580,000         | 6,254,284         |

Source: Monitoring of TV channels' social media accounts, November 2022. The bold values highlight the highest figures – the number of subscribers for the social networks named in the top horizontal row. For example, among the analyzed television channels, the TNT channel has the largest number of subscribers on VKontakte.

**Table 2:** Number of updates and reactions on *Telegram* during the weeks selected for the study.

| TV channels | Week | Number of posts in each of the weeks | Comments in each of the weeks | Views in each of the weeks | Likes in each of the weeks | ERpost, % in each of the weeks |
|-------------|------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Channel one | 1    | 273                                  | –                             | 6,054,339                  | –                          | –                              |
|             | 2    | 167                                  | 226                           | 1,873,998                  | –                          | 0.0021                         |
|             | 3    | 182                                  | 516                           | 2,778,359                  | –                          | 0.0034                         |
|             | 4    | 177                                  | 414                           | 2,127,056                  | –                          | 0.0037                         |
| Russia 1    | 1    | 229                                  | –                             | 2,526,416                  | 39,484                     | 0.4791                         |
|             | 2    | 135                                  | –                             | 1,222,711                  | 15,841                     | 0.326                          |
|             | 3    | 283                                  | –                             | 3,095,448                  | 42,673                     | 0.4206                         |
|             | 4    | 189                                  | –                             | 1,802,391                  | 28,527                     | 0.4194                         |
| NTV         | 1    | 465                                  | 30,098                        | 31,931,061                 | 470,920                    | 0.7101                         |
|             | 2    | 237                                  | 3,855                         | 9,144,056                  | 112,108                    | 0.3225                         |
|             | 3    | 378                                  | 5,796                         | 15,552,336                 | 195,608                    | 0.353                          |
|             | 4    | 278                                  | 5,319                         | 11,497,290                 | 160,740                    | 0.3937                         |
| TNT         | 1    | 38                                   | –                             | 2,818,348                  | 24,963                     | 0.842                          |
|             | 2    | 45                                   | 1,389                         | 224,232                    | 6,548                      | 1.1362                         |
|             | 3    | 13                                   | 1,132                         | 353,453                    | 10,852                     | 1.4862                         |
|             | 4    | 8                                    | –                             | 191,949                    | 7,054                      | 1.1311                         |
| STS         | 1    | 16                                   | 86                            | 34,928                     | 636                        | 0.2909                         |
|             | 2    | 2                                    | –                             | 87,536                     | 1,828                      | 1.1725                         |
|             | 3    | 36                                   | 462                           | 104,715                    | 3,089                      | 0.6671                         |
|             | 4    | 48                                   | 832                           | 249,168                    | 6,225                      | 0.9471                         |
| Friday!     | 1    | 8                                    | –                             | 428,846                    | 4,871                      | 0.3163                         |
|             | 2    | 7                                    | 1,057                         | 581,874                    | 7,769                      | 0.6557                         |
|             | 3    | 5                                    | 426                           | 296,780                    | 4,220                      | 0.5668                         |
|             | 4    | 5                                    | 734                           | 335,773                    | 8,537                      | 0.9643                         |

Source: Monitoring of *Telegram* accounts of TV channels (1) from 14th to 20th March 2022; (2) from 15th to 21st August 2022; (3) from 24 to October 30 2022; (4) from 9th to 15th January 2023.

One posts 29 daily. Entertainment channels that do not focus on news content are significantly less active on *Telegram*; for instance, TNT publishes about 4 posts per day on its channel, and the STS channel publishes a similar amount. The most concise channel on *Telegram*, as well as its other social media platforms, is Friday!, which posts no more than twice a day and occasionally goes quiet. This distribution of activity makes sense. The Big Three channels concentrate on news and likely aim to establish a strong presence in *Telegram*'s information ecosystem. Channel One's *Telegram* channel is titled "Channel One. News," but it mainly reposts news from its website (video accompanied by brief text). Along with the channel's newscast Vesti and the website reposts, Russia 1 also shares text-based news and announcements about programs. There is a separate *Telegram* channel, Vesti, and the Smotrym platform (a unified platform of VGTRK). NTV follows a similar content strategy, employing videos with reporting shots, news, and brief text posts about the news. Notably, entertainment content – such as sensational news about show business, celebrities, travel, and lifestyle – has been moved to the "Watch NTV" *Telegram* channel, which has just over 11,000 subscribers. Additionally, NTV broadcasts on its *Telegram* channels, but the audience for these broadcasts typically consists of only a few dozen users.

Regarding audience reactions, Channel One disabled comments during the study's first week (March 14 to March 20, 2022). During that same period, Friday! and TNT also turned off comments (January 9 to January 15, 2023). In the second week of the study (August 15 to August 21, 2022), STS disabled the comment feature. Russia 1 disabled comments during all analyzed periods. Meanwhile, Channel One did not allow users to respond to posts at any point during the analyzed periods. These changes to user interactivity settings likely stemmed from the channels' prior negative experiences on other social networks (e.g., on VKontakte, where Channel One or Russia 1 subscribers made inappropriate comments on various posts).

The post with the highest views on Channel One's *Telegram* platform during the first week (from March 14 to 20, 2022) was: *And now for another incident of the week. On Monday, a woman unexpectedly appeared behind the presenter during the live broadcast of the program Vremya (Time)* (45,240 views). In the second week (from August 15 to 21, 2022), the post that gained the most attention was: *Today marks 80 years since the birth of Muslim Magomaev* (12,196 views, 13 comments, ER post 0.0205 %). The most viewed post in the third week (from October 24 to 30, 2022) was: *Former Pentagon chief Ashton Carter has passed away. He led the U.S. military during President Barack Obama's administration* (19,077 views, 15 comments, ER post 0.0237 %). The most notable post in the fourth week (from January 9 to 15, 2023) was: *Loss. People's Artist of the USSR Inna Churikova passed away at 80* (14,433 views, 50 comments, ER post 0.0789 %). For comparison, the most popular posts on Channel One's other social networks (VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, etc.) over the years have

included the “Good morning!” message at the start of the day, accompanied by a positive image.

The most popular post in the first week analyzed from Russia 1’s *Telegram* channel was about the battles with Ukrainian Nazis for the liberation of Mariupol, where the Deputy Commander of the Black Sea Fleet, Captain 1st Rank Andrei Nikolaevich Pali, died (ER post 2.8234 %, views 222,791, likes 1,016, comments disabled). In the second week, the post that attracted the most audience reaction reported that Narva residents did not accept the demolition of the Soviet monument to the T-34 tank, prompting a spontaneous memorial at the site. At night, people gathered there to place flowers, posters depicting the demolished monument, and candles. A sign reading, “August 16, 2022. We remember, and will not forget,” is now visible from the roadway. (ER post 1.078 %, views 7,505, likes 388, comments disabled). The most popular post in the third week analyzed was: *Ramzan Kadyrov said that the response to the shelling of new regions of the Russian Federation by the AFU (Armed Forces of Ukraine) was weak. The head of Chechnya advocated stricter measures “so that they realize that you can’t even think of firing in our direction.” “According to him, the special operation is currently within the territory of Russia, but the ‘more serious and worse’ situation will not happen. Europe doesn’t have the strength. What are they going to do, send their LGBT people to fight us?” he emphasized. “I give you my word ... we will destroy them, no matter how many of them, no matter how many people they send, no matter how many troops they send,” Ramzan Kadyrov promised* (ER post 1.5226 %, 11,195 views, 548 likes, comment disabled). The most viewed post in the fourth week was: *Military doctor Alexander Seikaev died when saving patients under fire. The AFU hit a hospital in the Zaporizhzhia region. Missiles hit the building with children, women, and the elderly* (ER post 1.6198 %, views 10,706, likes 583, comments disabled).

The most active post on the NTV *Telegram* channel during the first week of the study period stated: *“We are seen as scum, as beasts, and as filth. Who can be bought, who can be corrupted, and who can be used as a pawn”* (ER post 2.9848 %, 63,943 views, 4,320 likes, 209 comments). In the second week, the most engaging post reported: *“Zelensky said that negotiations with Russia are possible only if ‘Russian troops leave the illegally occupied territory of Ukraine’”* (ER post 1.1131 %, 35,814 views, 1,584 likes, 105 comments). The most popular post in the third week announced: *“Journalist Mikhail Zygar, recently listed in the Foreign Media Agency Registry by the Ministry of Justice, married his partner Jean-Michel Scherbak (who previously participated in the project “Married to Buzova”) in Portugal”* (ER post 1.3675 %, 46,942 views, 1,966 likes, 109 comments). In the fourth week, the post with the highest audience response reported: *“Fanur Shaihiclamov, the head of the Tatyshlin District in Bashkortostan, stated that a volunteer named Fanis Husainov from Bashkir stole an armored personnel carrier from Ukrainian soldiers and took the injured commander away from the battlefield, which*

resulted in his death while performing military missions” (ER post 1.8598 %, 39,652 views, 2,697 likes, 125 comments).

In the entertainment segment, creatively meaningful posts closely aligned with the channel’s content tend to attract the highest engagement. During the first week of the study period, the most active post on TNT was: *IMPORTANT INFORMATION 1. In “Improvisation,” something occurs that has never happened before. 2. The show airs at 10:00 PM* (ER post 4.2683 %, 543,569 views, 3,330 likes, comments disabled). In the second week, TNT’s most popular post was a poll: *The “Once Upon a Time in Russia” cast wants to meet you in person. Write your name, city, and any interesting fact about yourself in the comments, and we will select the most intriguing stories to send personal video greetings* (ER post 1.1814 %, 40,851 views, 921 likes, comments disabled). In the third week, the most engaging post was another poll: *Are you ready? This news will make your day! Your favorite show, “IMPROVISATION,” will return at 10:00 PM on TNT tomorrow. Like and comment if you’re excited!* (ER post 4.2242 %, 46,856 views, 3,293 likes, comments disabled). In the fourth analyzed week, the most popular post was once again a poll: *Are you ready for cuteness on Friday? We’ve uncovered photos of TNT stars with puppies and kittens just for you. Now it’s a poll: – You are a dog person – You are a cat person – The photo with Doroh is not photoshopped* (ER post 2.9388 %, 23,104 views, 2,291 likes, comments disabled).

On STS, the most engaging post during the first week was a question about favorite dishes: *Please share your favorites in the comments. Tune into “SIMPLY Kitchen” tonight at 9:30 on STS* (ER post 0.4642 %, 1,919 views, 47 likes, 25 comments). In the second week, the post that generated the highest engagement was: *The winners of today’s game are @giperskrip/@ None|Евгения/@ lut333. Place a heart if you’re excited for the next game* (ER post 2.8343 %, 5,370 views, 369 likes, 71 comments). The most effective post in the third week featured a simple video: *Pay 1,000 (heart emoji)* (ER post 1.7328 %, 2,987 views, 262 likes, 7 comments).

In the *Telegram* channel for the TV show *Friday!*, the most popular post during the first week of the study featured a meme about Renat Agzamov: *Renat sets trends (just like on VKontakte)* (ER post 0.4301 %, 136,576 views, 828 likes, comments disabled). The standout post in the second week was a meme about the show *Hell Chef*: *About the ratings. The “Hell Chef” premiere attracted one in ten TV viewers aged 14–44. On Wednesday night, make sure to watch Friday! #1 in television (similar to VKontakte)* (ER post 1.0443 %, 71,940 views, 1,819 likes, 189 comments). The highlighted post in the third week was a meme about the show “Ivleeva’s Heart”: *Even numbers have partners, but Nastia does not* (ER post 0.8498 %, 68,411 views, 1,513 likes, 121 comments). In the fourth week, the most engaging post was a photo from the show “Pastry Chef”: *Renat and Olga are like cherries on top of the cake “Smiling,” as today marks the premiere of the new season of “Pastry Chef” at 7 PM @friday* (ER post 1.2128 %, 85,706 views, 2,136 likes, 196 comments).

## 5 Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, it is possible to identify an audience demand for news agenda, on the one hand, and for distracting content – rather than entertainment – in a period of turbulence, on the other hand. Television channels are forced to reinvent themselves in the changed social media space that they struggled to explore a few years ago. It seems that the Big Three channels are only trying to find their content strategies in *Telegram*, trying to copy the content strategies of other and previous social media. So far, NTV has emerged as the most successful, proactively engaging in publication activities, categorizing channels as news and entertainment, and leveraging the platform's capabilities to broadcast its programs. Interestingly, the “news” content *Telegram* is best suited for youth entertainment channels – TNT, STS, Friday! They successfully adapt interactive forms developed on other networks and use content created for other networks. It's important to note that channels do not fully trust their audience on social media, especially during tumultuous times. Having learned from past experiences that were often unfavorable due to inappropriate comments on their posts, TV channels on *Telegram* seek to shield themselves from overt negativity through user restrictions. Over time, these TV channels may become more comfortable using *Telegram*, as this platform closely resembles the broadcast model (one-to-many) and is less likely to encourage direct dialogue with viewers.

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