Digital Marketing of Social Networks as a Factor for Sustainable Business Development During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the transformation of digital marketing tools used by social networks Instagram and VKontakte to support business during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital marketing today focuses on interacting with customers and business partners in the Internet environment and is a set of marketing strategies adapted to working on the channels that appeared on the Internet. In order to keep business in the B2B and B2C markets during the pandemic, companies started an active process of digitalization [1]: small companies created their communities in social networks (48%) and started online sales, while large companies accelerated the integration of their own applications. According to AppDynamics, 65% of offline retail have implemented the deferred IT projects [2]. The authors think that changes during the pandemic affected not only the companies' digital marketing, but also the marketing tools of the social networks themselves.

Keywords: The Covid-19 Pandemic, Sustainable Business Development, Digital Marketing, Social Networks

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought major changes to the marketing activities of all companies. According to Wunderman Thompson, customers of B2B companies made up to 44% of sales offline through sales representatives before the COVID-crisis, while after the quarantine this type of sales accounted to 16% only [3].

In 2020, 3 main channels of content distribution were used: social networks - 89%; email - 87%; corporate site / blog - 86% [4].

The number of social media users has increased by more than 13% over the past year. By the beginning of 2021, almost half a billion new users had registered on social networks. On average, over 1.3 million new accounts were created every day during 2020, which means about 15.5 new users per second [1]. Moreover, users registered in one social network began to register in others (Table 1):

In the 3rd quarter of 2020, a study of social media users aged 16 to 65 was conducted on the global Internet

TABLE 1. Social networks audiences duplication*

	Others	FB	YouTube	Instagram	Reddit	Snapchat	Twitter	Tik-Tok	Pintrest
Facebook	98,9		92,3	74,8	17,7	29,6	53,8	35,8	35,2
YouTube	98,7	81,4		72,9	17,6	28,9	52	34,6	34,3
Instagram	99,8	85,5	94,5		20,6	35,3	60,7	40,5	39,6
Reddit	100	84,1	94,7	85,5		56,8	76,1	56,5	64,3
Snapchat	99,9	85,3	94,4	89	34,4		68,3	57,9	53,8
Twitter	99,8	86,9	95,3	85,7	25,9	38,2		42,5	42,3
Tik-Tok	99,7	85	93,3	84,2	28,2	47,7	62,5		47
Pintrest	99,8	85,5	94,6	84,1	32,9	45,3	63,7	48,1	

* Compiled by the authors based on [1]

in order to identify the reasons for using social media today [5] (Table 2):

TABLE 2. The reason for using social networks*

Answer options	% answers
Staying up-to-date with the news and events	36,5
Viewing entertaining/ funny content	35
Spending free time	34,4
Knowing what friends do	33
Sharing photos and videos	27,9
Searching for products to buy	27,5
Communicating	26,8
Keeping up with friends (many friends are on social networks)	25,1
Sharing your opinion	23,4
Meeting new people	21,3
Work-related communication	20,3

*Compiled by the authors based on [5]

This is also confirmed by another study conducted by Mediascope [6]. The purpose of this article is to analyze the changes in digital marketing tools offered by social networks Instagram and Vkontakte to maintain sustainable business development during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To analyze the effectiveness of social networks, we will form a table with the main comparative indicators (Table 3).

TABLE 5. Innovations of social networks Instagram and VKontakte in 2020-2021

Innovation Area	«Instagram»	«VKontakte»
Messenger	Creating a group video chat inside Direct limited to 50 participants; "Co-watching" function; text with fire effect, confetti, hearts and gift box effects; changing the chat background; desktop version	Renaming, synchronizing contacts from the phone book, the ability to change the background in chats, send files up to 2 GB, audio and video conferences up to 128 people (including in the desktop version of the site), voice message recognition technology
COVID-19	Sticker: "Stay Home", "Thank you for your help", sending to an official state resource with verified information when trying to find information about COVID-19	Special emoji statuses, coronavirus section in the main menu, offline online (events, concerts, excursions, etc.)
Business	"Small Business Support" sticker; "Resources for business" section; shopping tags; improved account statistics; "FAQ" appearance; "Ordering food"	Store 2.0, multimarket, monetization of VK Donut communities
Interface	"Guide"; updating the work with comments; live broadcast with several participants (speakers) on a split screen; using subtitles; notifications about new posts / publications on IGTV, live broadcasts and stories. In stories: 8 new fonts, text animation, background effects; sections with pandemic stickers	VK Mini Apps, subscription to VKontakte services, "Clips"
Marketing	The trend for showing workspaces at home, changing the concept of commercials that do not sell calls to action, live broadcasts, involvement in user profiles related to cooking, sports programs, as well as educational content	Online internship, VK Work, educational projects and the "VK Fellowship" scholarship program
SMM	Data from Partners: 8 available targets for tracking conversions, inability to track user activities outside the social network; delayed Facebook Creator Studio posting	Intersection of audiences by interests, community subscribers, etc., audio targeting, doubling the budget (until June 30), auto-promotion of goods, contextual targeting, targeted advertising in clips, promotion of IOS and Android mobile applications

*Compiled by the authors

TABLE 3. Social media performance indicators*

	VKontakte	Instagram	Facebook	Weight
Average monthly number of daily unique users	10	6	8	0,2
High ROI	7	10	8	0,1
Payable audience	5	7	10	0,8
Coverage of all ages / sexes	8	6	10	0,7
Coverage of all output devices	8	10	5	0,5
Geographic coverage	9	8	6	0,6
Page view depth	10	7	8	0,4
Interface / functionality	10	8	7	1
Market experience	8	7	10	0,3
AppStore user rating	6	10	5	0,9

*Compiled by the authors

Thus, the most competitive social network among those analyzed is VKontakte (Table 4).

TABLE 4. Overall assessment of social networks*

Social network	VKontakte	Instagram	Facebook
Overall assessment	16,2	15,8	15,4

*Compiled by the authors

It is worth noting that Facebook and Instagram have approximately the same strengths. At the same time, in order to use VKontakte in advertising and marketing activities, you need to expect that the audience will view more pages and you should not neglect the functions and coverage of this social network. We will analyze the marketing tools that appeared on social networks Instagram and VKontakte used to support the business in the period of 2020-2021 (Table 5).

Thus, it can be noted that there were many changes in the social networks Instagram and VKontakte during the year of the pandemic, but not all of them were favorable for the business

3. ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN ERS DATA SOURCES FOR THE DEM DEVELOPMENT

Social networks Instagram and VKontakte got actively involved in the process of supporting businesses during the pandemic. There was and there is a need for marketing strategies to be changed and reworked so that everything could function as needed in a particular market area [7,8]. Some of the changes in the social network VKontakte for 2020-2021. were directly related only to coronavirus, but most of them are part of the general development strategy of this social network, which it began to follow long before the current situation in the world [8, 9]. Competition created "Clips" [10], which are now actively promoted and used by advertisers to promote their own businesses, the pandemic contributed to the creation and development of the multi-market and mini-applications to which the user gets access to inside the social network. For each business area, there is an opportunity to develop within social networks using digital marketing, and businesses should not neglect this opportunity [8].

During the pandemic, there appeared the main requirements for the content marketing posted by companies in their accounts [10, 11, 12]:
- flexibility and quick change orientation;
- empathy and willingness to provide support;
- product promotion helping to solve a specific consumer problem by using educational content (product user guide video);
- social responsibility (environmental friendliness);
- convenience of using the interaction channel (blogs, social networks, podcasts, videos, cases, streams) adapted for mobile devices;
- face-to-face communication was replaced by live streaming (live media stream). People tend to like personal communication through a video call. Streaming videos have become an effective tool for attracting niche influencers and generating leads.

Targeted advertising has also undergone changes (innovations) [13]:
- there was an overlap of audiences by interests, community subscribers, etc. This function helped to more accurately target those who will see the advertisements, thereby increase their effectiveness;
- there appeared targeting to listeners of certain performers;
- a campaign was introduced to support small and medium-sized businesses to double the budget invested by entrepreneurs in promotion on the VKontakte and Odnoklassniki platforms;
- business support campaigns were developed for the advertisers to receive weekly compensation for launching campaigns from a mobile device and for using auto – promotion of goods (auto-promotion of goods is an advertising tool that acts in two directions at once: attracts a new audience with the best offers of the store and brings back the users who have already viewed the product range).
- there appeared context targeting– a system for tracking user activity in all Mail.ru Group and VKontakte projects: search, joining the communities, product views, etc;
- there was provided an opportunity to promote iOS and Android mobile applications.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic gave a big boost to digital marketing in 2020. Social media became an even bigger centre of attraction for people all over the internet and this is a huge advantage for companies that were able to enter this part of people's lives. The coronacrisis has changed people's

interests and needs for news, household needs (food, groceries), etc. Because of this, in order to keep the business and provide its sustainable development, social networks have begun to introduce new headings and deliver information to the end user in the ways different from those used in 2019. The administration of VKontakte and Instagram is changing the behavior of both ordinary users and businesses that use digital marketing in their activities. Marketing strategies had to be changed and they still have to be changed and reworked in order for everything to function as needed by a business in a particular area of the market.

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