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Travel-Blogs and Content Features for Blogs about Travel

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Abstract

Tourism and travel are one of the most popular topics for blog readers on the Internet. Some people watch travelers because they are unable to travel to distant countries on their own, while others, on the contrary, choose a place to travel based on reviews from bloggers and their recommendations.

Travel blogs have become a real mainstream in journalism and the blogging sphere, and the development of social networks only contributes to the further spread of blogs and bloggers. However, the content that bloggers create does not always become popular. The main types of content that travel bloggers use are videos, hash tags, and text comments. The most popular type of content for the travel category is videos, however, the dynamic development of the blogging sphere, the blocking of some social networks on the territory of the Russian Federation forces travel bloggers to constantly change content and adapt to the current situation in the world.

In this research, the authors analyze the concept of a Travel-blog and its difference from travel journalism, provide a detailed analysis of the platforms on which travelers publish their content, as well as the features of creating content for travel blogs.

Keywords: travel, tourism, blog, content, tour, travel blog, blogger, social networks.

1. Introduction

The modern world is highly communicative and very mobile. After the Covid-19 pandemic, many travelers switched to remote work and now, in order to make a decision about a trip, sometimes it's enough just to see an interesting video about traveling on a social network. It is this phenomenon that drives the development of travel blogs, because it is this category of blogs that attracts the most subscribers every day. Potential tourists now choose a vacation spot not in the offices of travel agencies, but on their smart phone. To influence the decision to purchase a particular tour, a travel agency needs to present bright pictures, memorable traveler stories, reviews and other content that can be broadcast on a social network. However, in the current circumstances, it is important to be able to quickly adapt to the needs of the audience and provide them with the necessary and interesting content in a timely manner (Bosangit et al., 2015; Karabacak, Genç, 2019).

Another indicative fact according to the number of different blogs is that there are no academic requirements for travel blogging. In fact, there is no university that produces bloggers, however, there are universities that produce journalists. However, in travel blogs and travel journalism there are fundamental differences in the approach to creating content and generating materials for the audience (Banyai, Glover, 2010: 269; Mikryukov, Sarkisova, 2020: 97).

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2. Materials and methods

The research materials included scientific publications devoted to travel journalism as the fundamental basis for the development of travel blogs, social media and the specifics of creating content for social networks of various types, as well as Internet sites. The research methodology is based on fundamental research in the field of journalism as a basic phenomenon, as well as theories of information literacy and development trends in modern society. The work used methods of collecting and analyzing information, theoretical analysis, synthesis, generalization.

3. Discussion

Recently, the number of studies related to the analysis of travel blogs and travel journalism has increased significantly. There are a number of objective reasons for this: firstly, travel blogs are gradually replacing travel journalism, and secondly, the dynamics of changes taking place in social networks are such that bloggers need to adapt and adopt content in a short time.

Experts highlight the theory that sharing travel experiences through social networks can work as an independent process of social communication and contribute to the creation of a separate value of the travel destination (Xu et al., 2022: 580).

According to research from GfK, CINT and SSI, the right content on YouTube motivates people to take action.

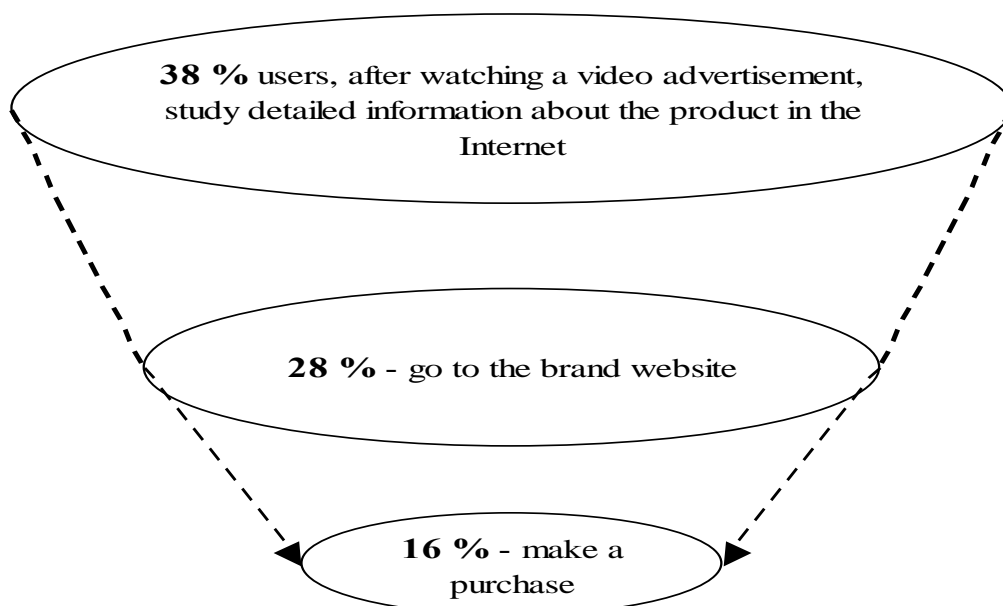


Fig. 1. Brand awareness funnel depending on published content on YouTube (Medianation, 2024)

As can be seen from the above Figure 1, YouTube is one of the effective channels of communication between the user and the company since after watching the video one third of users go to the company's website and study information about the product.

Travel blogs are one of the important categories of content published on YouTube. Russian-speaking travel bloggers publish a wide variety of content from classic travel reports, to austerity travel or trips to abandoned places.

Modern realities, such as the recent Covid-19 pandemic, which significantly affected the quality of content that users are willing to consume, as well as the imposed sanctions and blocking of some social networks in the Russian Federation and the inability to monetize income from YouTube – forced bloggers to reconsider their content and adapt to demands of modern audiences.

According to the authors, it is advisable to conduct a study that will make it possible to determine the fundamental differences between a travel blogger and a travel journalist, as well as to understand what kind of content modern users need, identify its structure and features of creation.

4. Results

Modern life has long been taking place in two parallel worlds – real and virtual. It is not surprising that travel has become one of the most popular areas for virtual reporting, because it is

the most popular and viewed type of content. Every network user can visit remote corners of their homeland, see amazing natural phenomena, and travel bloggers help develop this direction. A travel blogger is a traveler (more rarely, a group of travelers) who collects data (videos, photos, texts) to create content about trips and travel, and receives income from various sources for publishing it on the Internet. Essentially, a travel blogger is a traveler who receives money for his travel recommendations. However, today, with the development of the Internet and the growing popularity of social networks, it is not enough to simply give advice and write a travel note; it is important to share emotions, tell the nuances of travel, reveal life hacks, etc.

Differences between travel blog and travel journalism

Let's try to figure out the fundamental difference between a travel blogger and a travel journalist. A travel blogger is a person who creates content based on his travels. A travel blogger conveys to the audience information about own travels and own experiences gained on a particular trip. The content that a travel blogger produces is highly personalized and aimed at the audience of a specific blog. For example, if a blogger talks about how to save as much as possible while traveling, then this is unlikely to be of interest to people who are used to vacationing on an all-inclusive basis.

On the contrary, a travel journalist aims to reach the widest possible audience. The content published by a travel journalist is informational in nature. Essentially, the task of a travel journalist is to provide the reader with facts, for example, about the country's inhabitants, culture, language, customs, etc. (O'Conner, 2008: 51).

The methods that bloggers and journalists use for their work also differ. Journalists, as a rule, use academic methods of presenting information, searching for reliable facts and proving them. Bloggers, on the contrary, actively broadcast feelings and emotions, less often check the authenticity of information and do not adhere to textbook approaches to writing or expressing thoughts.

So, a travel blogger is not always a travel journalist, and vice versa, a travel journalist is not always a travel blogger. Let's look at the fundamental differences between these categories:

1. *Education.* As a rule, a travel journalist has an academic education – philological, historical or linguistic degree. A travel blogger can have any education or none at all.

2. *Experience in journalism.* Of course, a travel journalist has experience working in the media, and not necessarily related to travel. The blogger does not have such experience. Usually, bloggers become people who have learned to shoot beautiful videos, feel great in front of the camera, conduct a confident monologue, etc.

3. *Permanent job.* A travel journalist often has a permanent job in some media. The main work task of a travel journalist is to prepare high-quality materials about travel for publication in one or another journal, for example, "Around the World" or "National Geographic". In addition, the content that a travel journalist creates usually goes through editorial corrections and remarks and only then a decision is made about its publication. Another important criterion for a travel journalist is the frequency of materials' submission stated in the calendar plan. A travel blogger is the complete opposite of a travel journalist, there is no connection to a specific work place (although some combine freelancing and blogging), there are no deadlines or plans for the amount of content, and there is no editorial team that makes decisions about the materials' release, except for the social network policy in which the blog is maintained. Of course, in order to monetize your blog as much as possible and earn money, you need to set your own plans and deadlines, and monitor the audience's reaction.

4. *Information presentation.* A travel journalist, having an academic education, usually builds material according to certain standards (short story, description, culmination, denouement, etc.), which fully corresponds to the chosen genre (diary, essay, show, notes, etc.). A travel blogger writes without observing the laws of the genre and the principles of text composition.

5. *Information filtering.* A travel journalist is subject to the norms and rules that are accepted in the media for which he creates content. A blogger has only own personal opinion and can talk about whatever he wants, since the Internet is a zone of free thoughts' expression. A journalist will never cite unproven facts; he will certainly refer to an existing study or publication, but a blogger will be quite satisfied with even the opinion of a local resident (Pokazanieva, 2015).

On the contrary, one of the key differences between a blogger and a journalist is the manner of presenting and filtering information. It is the "live" communication that a blogger gives to his audience that forms loyalty, trust and empathy for him personally. However, there are times when it is precisely this virtual freedom that leads to carelessness, factual or grammatical errors that are

noticed and noted by users. A journalist has no right to make such mistakes, and editors will not pass a report containing gross violations.

It is important to understand that the tasks and methods that bloggers and journalists use are quite different, however, they have the same key goal – to get maximum audience coverage by preparing useful and high-quality content.

Modern travel-blogs

As noted earlier, some social networks are currently prohibited in Russia, so the main platforms on which bloggers publish their content include the following: *YouTube*; *Telegram*; *VKontakte*; *Odnoklassniki*; *Dzen*.

It is important to note that the listed sites have significant differences in target audiences. For example, *VKontakte* is actively used by young people, but *Dzen* and *Odnoklassniki* are read by people of the older generation - 35 years old and above. *YouTube* and *Telegram* have a more universal structure and, accordingly, a different target audience. Due to the above, the authors, in their study, focused on studying the content of these sites.

Today, the *YouTube* audience in Russia has reached 95 million users, although it is not a full-fledged social network, rather a video hosting service. The average daily audience reach (DAU) of *YouTube* in Russia (as of October 2023) exceeds 53.3 million people. Every day, Russians spend about 100 minutes watching videos on YouTube. YouTube became the most popular application used by Russians during Christmas holiday season in 2024. One of the popular trends viewed by users on YouTube is travel blogs (PPC world, 2024).

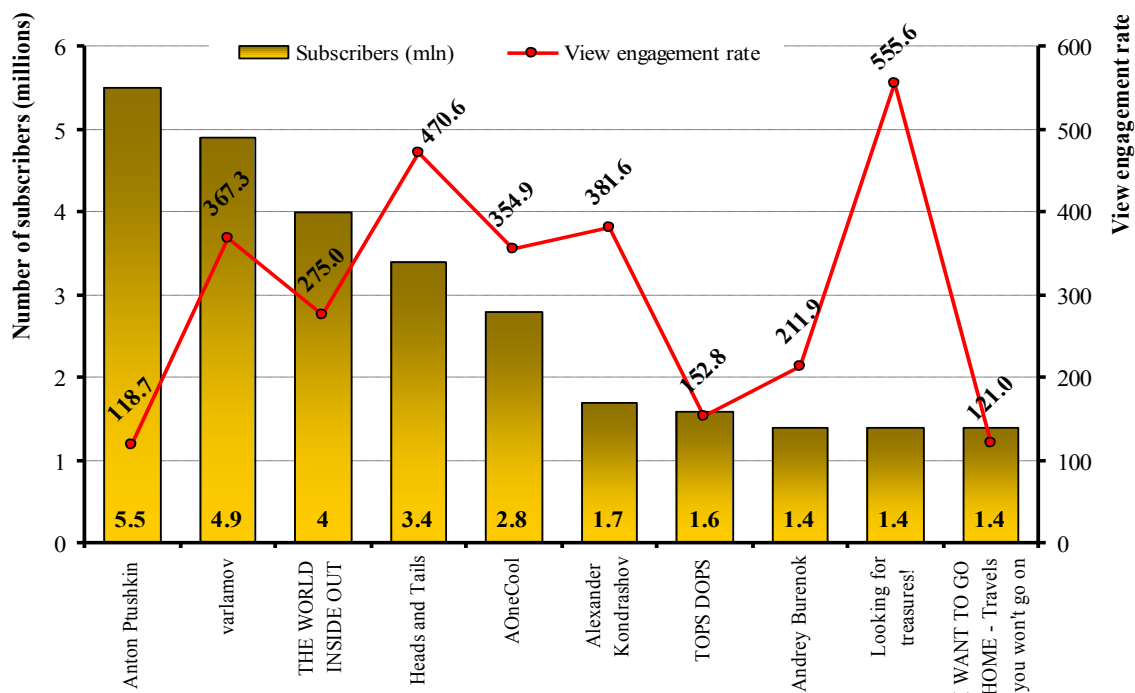


Fig. 2. Travel blogs on YouTube (WhatStat, 2024)

The authors analyzed popular travel blogs that post their content on *YouTube*. The analysis was carried out by the number of subscribers, as well as the engagement rate by views. It is worth noting that the number of subscribers does not always guarantee a high level of engagement and views of video content. For example, a blogger with 5.5 million subscribers has lower engagement than a blogger with 1.4 million subscribers.

Content for a video blog is subject to cinematic genres, and, as a rule, consists of 5 elements: introduction, summary of the main topic, arguments that the blogger proves or refutes, conclusion and a call to subscribe to the channel. All these elements are interconnected by screensavers, interruptions and inserts from popular videos or films. Almost any video in a travel blog is subject to these requirements.

For genre characteristics, video blogs can be classified as follows:

1. Travel-blog is a journey through the eyes of the author. Essentially, the author makes a film where the main emphasis is on the places the author has been to, the events he has visited, the sights he has seen, etc.
2. A documentary film is an original film that reflects the real picture of what is happening at the travel destination. In reportage films, as a rule, the author does not express his position, which creates the neutrality of the video and attracts a large number of views.
3. A report is a prepared and carefully planned thematic report that is dedicated to some event (for example, a festival or the opening of a museum, etc.). As a rule, reporting videos work well with professional journalists who know how to structure a video, how to convey the necessary information, and what facts should be cited as evidence.
4. Essays are short videos that are viewed through the prism of the authors' vision of certain facts and events of the trip.
5. Travel shows are a popular genre of entertainment journalism. A series of videos united by one idea (for example, how to travel with 100 dollars in your pocket or where to find national cuisine).

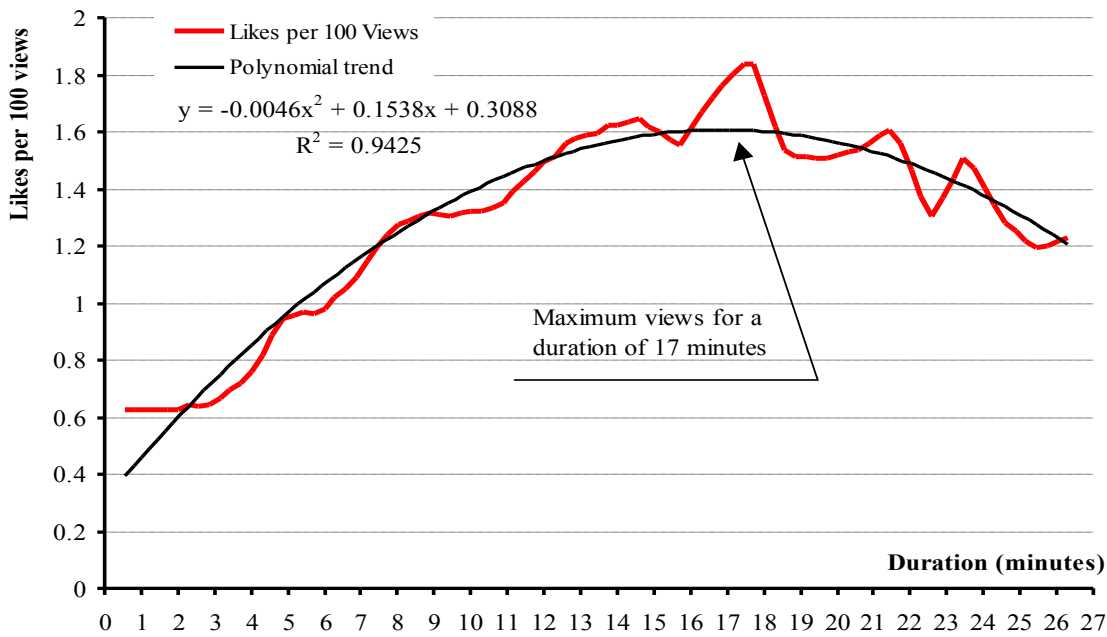


Fig.3. Dependence of likes per 100 views on length in minutes (Utify, 2020)

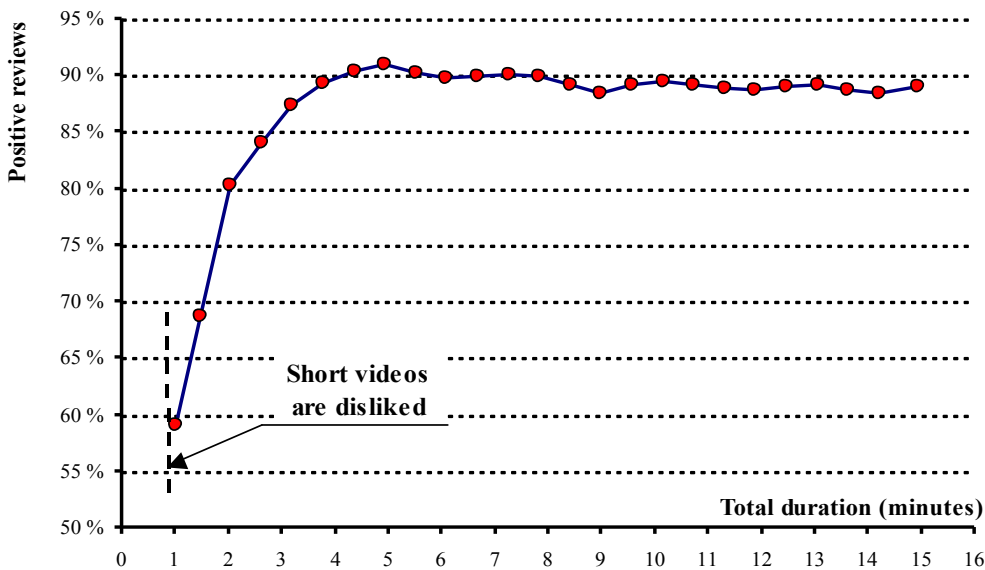


Fig. 4. Briggsby Statistics on the Correlation of Dislikes and *YouTube* Video Length (Utify, 2020)

If we talk about the duration of the video, then on YouTube you can find videos about travel from 5 minutes to several hours. If you look at statistics, you will notice that YouTube videos 15-20 minutes long are the most popular in terms of viewing (Utify, 2020). In addition, videos with a length of 10 to 17 minutes receive more likes, in contrast to videos of up to 5 minutes and over 20-25 minutes. Audience engagement tends to decrease when watching videos longer than 20 minutes.

An interesting fact is that the so-called Short-videos, up to 1 minute long, which are filmed in a vertical format to make it convenient to watch from a smartphone screen, demonstrate the highest engagement of participants in terms of views, but they also hold the record for dislikes. It is worth noting that such videos are mainly of an advertising nature or do not have a logical ending.

To summarize the analysis of the content that is necessary for promoting travel video blogs, we can say the following: to increase blog recognition, increase coverage and views, it is better to publish short videos that are most often watched, and if you want to create good content that will attract a large number of likes and comments, then you should shoot a video from 10 to 17 minutes long, and you need to understand that artificially “delaying” the time of the video has the opposite effect.

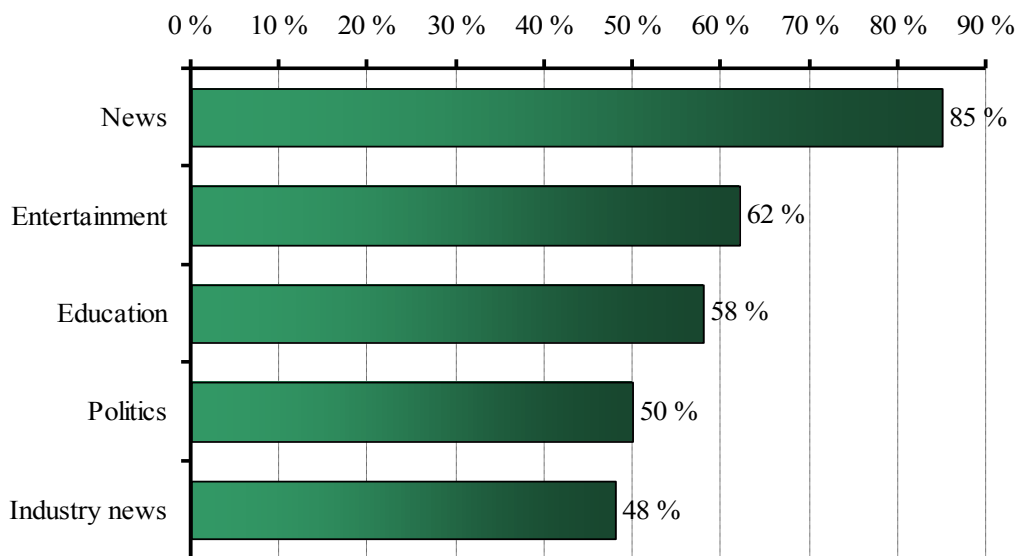


Fig. 5. Channels that users subscribe to (PPC world, 2024)

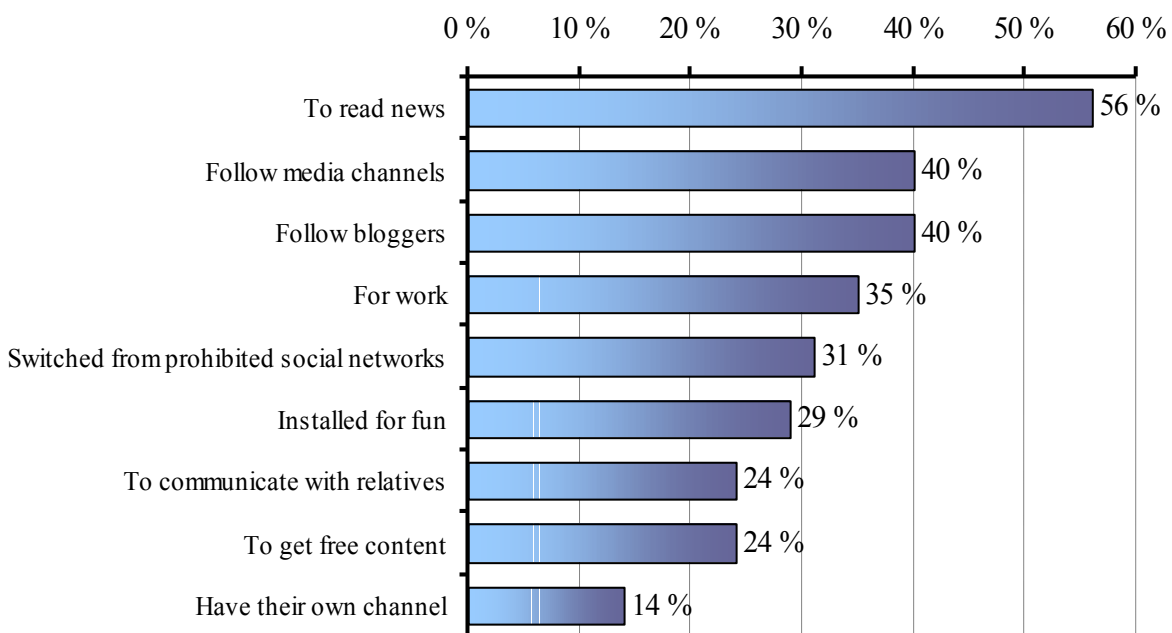


Fig. 6. Top 9 reasons for Telegram installation (PPC world, 2024)

Summarizing the information about text blogs, the most popular social networks for them are Telegram and *Vkontakte*. As noted earlier, Telegram has a wider audience, so let's look at view statistics and the specifics of writing texts for Telegram channels.

In 2023, Telegram entered the top three most downloaded applications. The monthly active users (MAU) of Telegram in Russia reached 82.3 million users by October 2023. Over the past two years, this figure increased by 13 %. In Russia in October 2023 the daily active users (DAU) of Telegram reached 56.6 million people. By the end of 2023, almost every second Russian (47 %) used the messenger daily (PPC world, 2024). The majority of users subscribe to news, entertainment or educational channels on Telegram, as can be seen from Figures 5 and Figures 6.

Unlike video content, text content is characterized by such an indicator as the citation index. The Telegram citation index is calculated based on the analysis of all mentions of the channel in other Telegram channels. This indicator makes it possible to quickly assess the volume and quality of advertising mentions of a channel; accordingly, the higher the citation index, the better the channel performs and the more expensive advertising in this channel will cost.

The authors analyzed popular Telegram channels about travel (Figure 7).

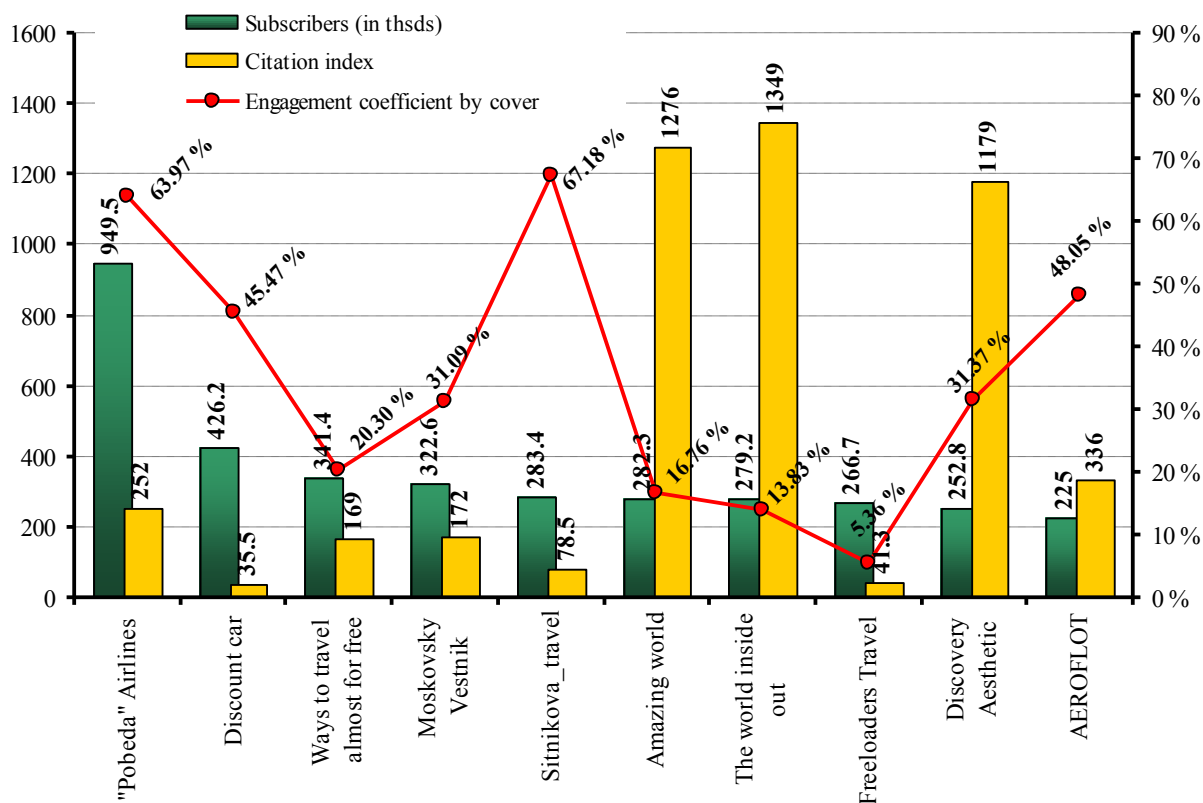


Fig. 7. Telegram-channel rating (TGStat, 2024)

As can be seen from Figure 7, the number of subscribers does not always guarantee a high citation index and high subscriber involvement. Some channels, for example "The World Inside Out," have a high level of citations, but at the same time its coverage is significantly lower than that of the less cited Discovery Aesthetic. This fact suggests that it is the quality of published content that plays a significant role in the promotion of the channel.

It is worth noting that Telegram also has the ability to publish video content, but this network is not very popular in terms of video views, and most of the videos that are on Telegram are links to YouTube channels.

Speaking about text content, it is important to say that one of the most important statistics that indicate the quality of the text and the channel itself is the reach of one post and the average channel engagement rate. Today, the average engagement rate is around 60 % (VC, 2018). Views and reposts on Telegram are not indicative, since they can be "boosted" relatively easily.

In order to increase the level of subscriber engagement, you need to write and publish high-quality texts. A good text is distinguished by the presence of:

- a short but meaningful title that forces the user to start reading the text;
- main idea formulation of the entire text in the first 3 sentences;
- facts evidence that were stated in the title;
- calls to target action (for example, subscribe to a channel, follow a link, etc.).

Only a small proportion of readers usually read the entire text. Data on sites from the Chartbeat analytics system indicate that most visitors read 60 % of the material, 10 % of visitors do not scroll the text at all, remaining on the first screen of the device. 52.4 % of users on mobile devices and 66.9 % on personal computers view the page to the end (Manjoo, 2013). That is why it is important to attract the reader's attention from the first lines of your publication, so that he understands the idea that the blogger wanted to convey to him, even if he does not read the text to the end.

In travel blogs, this is especially important because the reader usually wants to know evidence of the fact stated in the title. For example, the author included the phrase "I'll tell you how to relax in Italy for 100 Euros" in the title. This headline attracted the attention of the reader and he, going to the channel, wants to find out how he can relax in Italy for only 100 Euros. It is important that the information contained in the text is truthful and the reader receives an answer to his question, otherwise the blogger risks being branded a deceiver and losing subscribers.

Another important part of the content in Telegram channels is photographic materials. For travel bloggers, a high-quality picture is the calling card of the channel and an element that attracts the attention of the audience. The genre of travel photography involves photographing interesting places, landscapes, peoples, customs, etc. during the trip. There are several types of travel photography:

- landscape – when the photo shows static natural landscapes, without the participation of people;
- street photos – photos reflecting the dynamics of city life;
- portraits – photographs of local residents;
- reportage – the author's vision of his journey (Solovyov, Skoblikova, 2017: 580).

The choice of photograph type usually correlates with the content of the text that is planned for publication. For example, when talking about the indigenous peoples of the Far North, it is good to publish their portraits, and in an attempt to describe the dynamism of the metropolis, present street photos.

5. Conclusion

To summarize all of the above, it should be emphasized that the active development of social networks, the popularity of travel journalism and the increase in the number of various travel programs, as well as the state travel policy (for example, tourist cash back or the Student Tourism program) contribute to the active development of such an area as travel blogs. Forming their vision of the world of travel, finding their own style and zest for presenting information, bloggers demonstrate their content to the audience.

Modern travel-journalism, which is gradually including bloggers, combines a wide range of varied content from short notes to documentary videos. To find your audience and create quality content for them, it is important to understand for what purpose a blogger goes on a social network. The key indicator when assessing the quality of a blog is the number of views on YouTube and the number of coverages of a particular post in Telegram.

The right content, well-chosen pictures, competent text, and high-quality video help bloggers reach the top on different platforms. In addition, high-quality content directly affects the volume of reach of bloggers, and, as a result, the number and cost of advertising that can be placed on a blog.

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