

## Study of Posting Activities of Russian Users on Social Media

ELENA N. FOKINA<sup>1</sup>, ELENA A. RODIONOVA<sup>2</sup> & MARINA V. VINOGRADOVA<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tyumen Industrial University, Russian Federation

<sup>2</sup>Saint Petersburg State University, Russian Federation

<sup>3</sup>Russian State Social University, Russian Federation

Content marketing on social media depends on trends in consumer behaviors. A changing focus and emphasis on audience activities on social media are a key optimization problem in social media marketing (SMM). A solution to this problem lies in a field of ongoing empirical studies of posting frequency. In the review of the literature, authors highlight the role of social media as a promising channel for a direct interaction of companies/brands with consumers. Based on theoretical generalizations, authors present a generation sequence of an SMM content strategy. The article also includes an analysis of posting activities of users from Russia on well-known social media. A cost-benefit analysis of posting activities rests upon some factors: socio-demographic characteristics of users, a content format, time and day of the week parameters, etc. Data come from such sources as aggregated statistics of social media and selective interviewing. An analysis of activities for users from Russia has shown that VKontakte is the most popular platform; Instagram is the second, while Facebook is the third. Odnoklassniki and Twitter are less preferred. VKontakte users respond best to short posts. On Facebook, entries with medium-sized texts have got the highest number of responds. On Instagram, long posts work better. The photo format is a leader in all of the social media. The video format has a middle position, while a text is the most inefficient type of content. There is strong differentiation in response time depending on a target audience. Findings have made it possible to present recommendations for optimization of content marketing.

**Keywords:** Social media, posting activity, feedback, the attention of users, content marketing, target audience

In the present-day world, qualitative changes have taken place in interactions between business and consumers. The rapid expansion of social media has had a significant impact on corporate marketing. The Internet development and expansion of its functions qualitatively change the methods that help to establish business contacts with potential customers, making them more accessible. Promotion of brands, products, and services on social media has become a separate focus called social media marketing (SMM).

*We are social* annually publishes statistical *Global Digital Report* with the data collected on social media around the world. According to the latest data, in 2018, some Internet users reached 4.021 billion people, which is 7 percent more than in 2017. Note that in 2018, the total audience on social media was 3.196 billion people with a 13% increase over the year (*We are social*). Such rapid growth of the audience derives from the

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Correspondence to: Elena N. Fokina, Department of Business Informatics and Mathematics, Tyumen Industrial University, 38 Volodarskogo Str., Tyumen, 625000, Russian Federation.

fact that social media has gone beyond entertaining. Today's social networks have not only become platforms for communication and entertainment but also work and schooling. Older people have been increasingly using them too. In 2017, for instance, Facebook audience aged 65+ had a 20% increase (Gerasikova & Sinitsyna, 2018). These features have generated a special format of Internet entrepreneurship (Samašonok *et al.*, 2016).

There is a rapid growth in rates in Russia too. According to *We are social and Hootsuite* (2018), in 2018, 15 percent more users began to turn to social media. In total, Russian social media users are 47% of the total national population. Moreover, about 60% of them use global social platforms for a search for goods and services. Findings from sociological studies say that, on average, each user spends 2-6 hours a day on social media. Therefore, the *attention* of social media users is getting to be a supreme value.

New Internet technology is promising to make it possible to solve problems of regional development (Ragulina *et al.*, 2018). Researchers have found that B2B companies that establish relationships with consumers on social media receive significant benefits (Litau, 2018a-2018b). Compared to the least socially involved companies, the ten most involved brands have shown a 31% increase in revenues. At the same time, decision-makers will 10% more likely to choose the brand known to consumers and themselves (LinkedIn Pulse, 2014). 76% of B2B IT marketers use social media to promote their products (MarketingProfs, 2015). At the same time, 63% of companies that are developing faster than their competitors are introducing SMM automation (Iconrive, 2015). According to findings from the social media review report (Social media marketing effectiveness, 2014), 92% marketers think that using social media, they have covered a wider audience, while 80% have noticed positive results in traffic.

Therefore, studies of the posting activity on social media have become particularly relevant. A marketer should be able to choose the most appropriate option among many platforms and optimize content to attract a larger audience, taking into account the content, as well as other important factors, such as perfect posting time, a post size, etc.

Thus, the purpose of the article is to explore posting activities on social media. Based on the specified goal, we shall solve a number of the following specific academic tasks: (i) describe development trends on social media, (ii) make processes of marketing promotion in social media clearer, (iii) describe the method to choose posting time and a platform to achieve the highest effect, and (iv) develop proposals for content production optimization.

## Literature Review

Publication activities on social media are a focus of theoretical and practice-based research. Limba *et al.* (2018) have reviewed an analysis of the development and application of qualitative criteria in Internet marketing. Valedinskaya *et al.* (2017) have discussed specifics of cost-effective marketing on social media and its strategy development. They note that recently social media marketing has not only become very popular, but also one of the most efficient strategies for the attraction of the audience, traffic increase, and sales promotion. Voronkin (2014) shares this opinion as he presented an overview of problems in the development and analysis of social media. He states that social media has become one of the most visited platforms in the global information network.

Valedinskaya concludes that a cost-effective marketing strategy on social media has some typical characteristics. Therefore, it must meet certain requirements. First, it is important to understand that to achieve a wider audience and turn into a reputable company

in a niche; it is necessary to provide a wide range of content that users will be interested in. The second important point is that posting frequency is one of the key components of advertising on social media. Experts do not recommend overloading the audience with the information.

Aldarova (2017) discusses social media as a tool in today's marketing. She states that a marketing strategy is an element of an overall (corporate) strategy of a company. According to Aldarova, any content includes an informationally significant charge of a platform, i.e., text, graphics, multimedia. The qualitative content becomes a key factor for user attraction, increases the interest of the audience, and helps to establish long-term relationships with consumers. Subjects of posts on social media should meet requests of an average target user. A format of communication should also depend on the interests of the majority of the audience (Iðoraitė, 2015). It also makes sense to schedule marketing activities according to a schedule of posts and events.

Evsujkov and Rayman (218) point out that it is crucial to identify a target audience. As far as social media channels potentially provide companies with access to their consumers, it is necessary to separate their target audience and focus on it. Each Internet resource has its segment of the audience. For instance, in Russia, older people use Odnoklassniki, while Facebook is a choice of advanced professionals, and VKontakte attracts people of any age and interests.

For the successful promotion of business, goods or services on social media, it is important to define whether a platform is appropriate: define a target audience, analyze the platforms it prefers. A search for a suitable platform can depend on various aspects and criteria, i.e., geolocation directly near a company, among users with related offers, by hashtags, among competitors that have already had their audience.

Gerasikova and Sinitsyna (2018) and Khalilov (2013) examines in detail the step-by-step development of a marketing strategy on social networks. One of the key stages is making a portrait of a target audience (geography, socio-demographic characteristics, interests, and hobbies). To do this, a marketer needs to get answers to some questions, including the location of potential customers, their socio-demographic characteristics, etc.

Having determined a target audience, we need to identify its concentration point, i.e., social media that its uses and local communities within them. Khalilov (2013) identifies a number of approaches for this: (i) analysis of open statistics of platforms, (ii) analysis of subjects discussed on a platform, (iii) making a socio-demographic portrait of a target audience, and (iv) special-purpose functions of social platforms to obtain information on potential audience by specified criteria.

As a rule, the development of a content editorial calendar goes next. Gerasikova and Sinitsyna (2018) and Khalilov (2013) highlight the following elements of a content strategy: key topics of posts, posting frequency, post stylistics, posting time, the ratio between promotional materials and neutral content. The materials that a company will post make a basis of media promotion. Therefore, one needs to develop the content strategy in advance, going from interests of a target audience.

Similar to any other business process, Internet marketing needs control, updates, and optimization. Using selected metrics, one can understand consumers' preferences and what they ignore, and calculate the cost of contacting selecting them depending on specified purposes. This might include the size of the audience, some referrals to the main website, total traffic, etc. To understand which sources have the highest effect, observe the conversion of visitors by hashtags, targeted advertising, user account details, etc.

Gonxhe (2016) studies social media and their impact on a marketing strategy. He agrees that today's marketing on social media is one of the most effective ways for the promotion of a company and its products in a market. He provides insight into the impact of social media. He concludes that a well-thought-out social media marketing strategy might have a big impact on a level of information distribution, which, according to the general theory, will reduce the uncertainty of a consumer choice (Kuzmin, 2015). This also promotes customers' loyalty, improving interactions with them.

Ahmed et al. (2013) have studied specifics of user search queries. Recent studies show that 90% of customers begin their search for a solution to whatever issue with an online query. 60 percent of buyers have already decided on a purchase before contacting a supplier (Adamson et al., 2012). Results of their research also show that social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and Orkut, are in high demand and usage among users. AdEspresso has explored advertising on Facebook (We analyzed, 2018). Their findings show five available key trends: increased text length, shortened descriptions of links, the upsurge of the brands that provide a link to specific landing pages, more active use of *Call to Action* by brands, more types of ads. Their findings will be helpful in the development of recommendations for content production optimization.

## Materials and Methods

As part of this work, we have explored the posting activity on various social media. A purpose was an assessment of posting cost efficiency depending on various factors and development of recommendations for Internet marketing optimization. The study included several directions:

- (i) assessment and grouping of users on various social media by socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, place of residence, the platform used, visit frequency and purpose) by interviewing,
- (ii) analysis of a popularity level of various social media,
- (iii) analysis of posting dynamics of social media users by the appeal of a content format, time of day, the day of the week of posting using aggregated data derived from social media.

The sample of survey respondents included 505 participants from Russia, users of social media. Among the surveyed audience of social media, the largest group was male, 60.9%. Age distribution was as follows: 55.6% were persons aged 18-24. 27.9% were young people aged 25-30. 13.1% were aged 31+. 3.4% were underaged. More than half of the users (62.8%) lived in cities with a population of 700+ thousand people. 25.1% were from towns and settlements, 12.1% of respondents were residents of Moscow and St. Petersburg (Russia). We analyzed results using techniques of descriptive statistics.

Aggregated data about social media come from the history of users' posts and some responses (feedback) to these posts. Sprout Social (2018) is one of the software solutions for an assessment of user activity on social media. Sprout is integrated with various social media platforms through their APIs, which makes it possible for the application to receive messages on behalf of customers. Data processing by a given algorithm allows users to find time slots for their posts that are the most appropriate for their channels.

Popsters (2018) is an alternative solution for Russian-speaking users. It has collected and processed data with several parameters. For each analytical sample, the service automatically summarizes all the indicators (number of likes for analyzed entries, reposts, comments, views, dislikes, number of posts) displaying data as a comparison table.

Behaviors of an audience at different times of a day and days of the week vary. The post dynamics by day of the week shows the relative activity of average posts posted on a certain day of the week. It does not display some posted entries by day of the week but shows the average activity of entries posted on different days of the week about the entries posted on other days. Data are calculated as a percentage based on the entire information for the analyzed period. To calculate the relative activity by day of the week, the service takes into account all of the posts posted on a given day of the week, summarizes all the activities by day, calculates the average number of involvements on these days and their relative percentage.

Posting dynamics by posting time shows the relative activity of average posts posted at any time. It shows the average activity of the posts posted at different hours of a day compared to entries posted in other periods.

## Results

### Target Use of Social Media

An analysis of the user activity on social media in Russia shows that VKontakte is the most popular platform with 96.6% of respondents using it. Instagram is the second with 65.1%, and Facebook is the third with 40.8%. Odnoklassniki (24.4%) and Twitter (13.7%) are less popular. By social media visiting frequency, results were as follows: regular visits during a day - 72.1%, two to three times a day - 21%, once a day and less - 6.9%. Table 1 includes findings from multiple interviews to identify objectives for the use of social media

Table 1. Objectives for the use of social media

Objective	No. of respondents, persons	Share, %
Communication with friends	411	81.4
News feed review	356	70.5
Review of friends' news	322	63.8
Work	257	50.9
Posting of one's news	218	43.2
Review of video content	176	34.9
Communication with other users	97	19.2
Purchasing goods/services	95	18.8
Other	55	10.9
Use of applications	51	10.1

The analysis has made it possible to identify significant relationships, in particular, by the following parameters:

- (i) Age group and the platforms used: more mature audience more often turns to Facebook and Odnoklassniki, less often – to VKontakte and Instagram,
- (ii) Place of residence and the platforms used: residents in larger settlements more often visit Instagram, while those in smaller settlements – Odnoklassniki,
- (iii) Gender and the platforms used: women prefer Instagram and less often use Facebook,
- (iv) Platform visit frequency and social media: people who use social media once a day or less, mainly prefer Facebook and VKontakte, regular use is typical for Instagram users,
- (v) Age group and platform visit frequency: mainly young people (aged 18-24) regularly turn to social media, less often – people aged 25-30.

Further, we have analyzed statistical data derived from global social media. Figure 1 presents some users by social media in 2017.

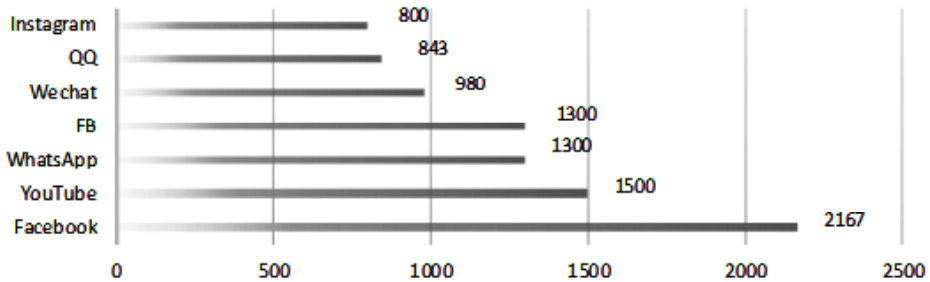


Figure 1. Number of social media users in 2017, bln people

In Russia, WhatsApp is the most appealing application by the audience and some downloads, followed by Viber, VKontakte, and Instagram. As far as WhatsApp is a social messenger, only spot advertising is possible there. Thanks to content visualization, people consider Instagram a favorable platform for advertising products and services. To confirm this, in the course of the study we completed a survey of the audience on this media aged 14-35. 0.5% respondents think that advertising in print media is a good marketing tool, 9.1% prefer TV advertising, and other survey participants (90.4%) think that social media advertising is the most cost-effective. The survey of attitudes to advertising on Instagram has shown that only 12.4% of respondents have a negative attitude towards it, others have neutral and some of them have a positive attitude. Of all the survey participants, 63.3% purchased a product or service upon viewing commercials on Instagram, and 60.5% of them made more than one purchase.

### Posting Activity Dynamics

User activities on various social media differ by various factors: appeal of a content format, time of day, day of the week, news feed algorithm, etc. In the research, based on Popster data, we have analysed activities of Russian-speaking users on social media in 2018 with the following findings.

#### *Days of the week, most efficient for posting*

Monday and Sunday were the most *popular* days of the week for all of the social media. The highest user activity was on Tuesday. During a week, the activity of the audience remained almost the same with a slight drop observed only on Wednesdays.

On VKontakte, the highest activity is on Monday. It gets less by weekends, especially on Saturday. On Facebook, there was also the highest numbers of responds to posts on Monday. On Sunday, the user activity was the same as on weekdays. There were falls on Saturdays. On Instagram, the least posting activity was on weekends. For other media, posting efficiency by day of the week was as follows: on Odnoklassniki, the highest posting efficiency was on Monday, the lowest posting efficiency was on Tuesday. On Twitter, the highest posting efficiency was on Monday and Sunday, and there was a drop on Thursday and Friday. On Telegram, the most activity was on Saturdays.

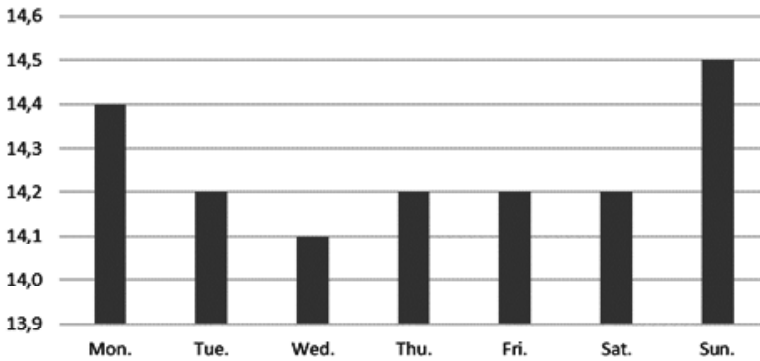


Figure 2. Audience activity by day of the week, %

Summarizing the findings, it is possible to conclude that on the explored social media, posts have the highest number of involvements on Mondays and Sundays. Wednesday is the worst day by this indicator (Figure 2).

### Audience Activity by Day Time

See findings from an analysis of the audience activity on social media by the time of day in Table 2.

Table 2. Audience activity on social media by the time

Social network	Time of day	
	Highest activity	Least activity
Vkontakte	21h-1h	3h-5h
Facebook	15h-17h	0h
Instagram	10h-11h, 20h-21h	0h-7h
Odnoklassniki	9h-12h	23h-7h
Twitter	7h-10h	4h-7h
YouTube	9h-14h	22h-1h
Telegram	3h-10h	19h-23h

Response time highly varies depending on the target audience. Instagram mainly covers a female audience. Its circle of interests includes the beauty industry, fashion, cinema, celebrities, and an active and healthy lifestyle. Most often, users log on Instagram from their mobile devices.

Perfect posting time largely depends on a target audience: young people and students visit social media throughout a day, employed users more often visit them to read the news at lunchtime or the end of a working day. For example, on Facebook, the best time to post the consumer product related content is on Thursday at 2 pm and on Friday at 11 am. While on Instagram, the best time for consumer product related posts is on Saturday at 11 am and 1 pm. The best time for non-commercial posts on Instagram is on Friday at 14h. Other time slots with particularly high involvement are on Tuesday at 3h pm and 9h pm, on Wednesday from 3h pm to 4h pm, on Thursday from 2h pm to 3h pm and on Friday at 10h am. The best time for Instagram posts for educational purposes is on Monday at 8 pm. The best time for Instagram posts for technology-related brands is on Wednesday at 10 am.

In general, for all of the social media, the highest activity was there for the posts posted in the morning, 7h-12h, and in the evening, 16h-23h. The quietest hours were in the night, from about 19h-23h to 0h-7h.

### User Activity by Type of Content

The Popsters system divides all posts into four formats: text, photo, video, and link. This classification is a basis for an analysis of the user activity by content type.

In Vkontakte, posts with photo are the most effective, while posts with link and video are behind the posts with text and photo. Posts with video turned out to be much more effective on Facebook, and posts with links were the worst. Instagram has a minor effect of a content type on involvement. On Odnoklassniki, the post with a text has the highest number of responses, the least - posts with links. At the same time, posts with a photo get more feedback than posts with video. On Twitter, a video format is weak. Engagement is almost equally distributed among other types of content. On Telegram, there is a unique situation. This is the only platform where posts with photo turned out to be the most inefficient format.

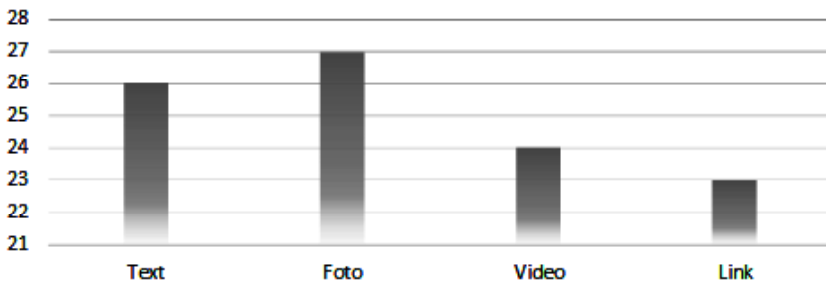


Figure 3. Audience activity by post content type, %

To sum up, we can state that the photo format is leading on social media. Video turned out to be in the middle, and the text was the most ineffective type of content in 2018 (Figure 3).

### Content Effectiveness Depending on Text Length

By text (volume) length, social media posts are traditionally divided into three groups: short, up to 160 characters, medium, 160-1,000 characters; and long, 1,000+ characters. On most of the platforms analyzed, in 2018, posts with larger text had the highest number of response (Figure 4).

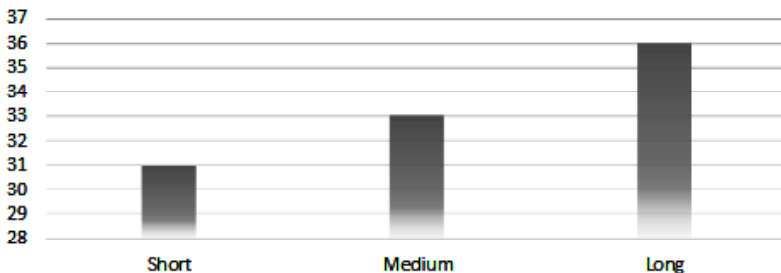


Figure 4. Audience activity by text size per post, %



On VKontakte, the audience responded best to short texts. On Facebook, medium-sized texts had a maximum response. On Instagram, longer texts work more effectively. Odnoklassniki statistics confirmed the trend towards short texts. YouTube and Telegram audiences prefer longer posts.

### Text Size/Day of Week Correlation

On VKontakte, short texts are leaders over the whole week. On Facebook, at the beginning of the week and on Sunday, longer texts get more responds. However, on weekends, short posts, for the first time in a week, won records among the posts of other sizes. On Instagram, throughout the week, involvement distribution over a post length remains the same. On Odnoklassniki, on weekends, an interest in short posts is higher, and long reads show the highest efficiency on Monday. On Telegram, long texts are leaders almost over an entire week, to which the audience responds best on Sunday. There are average size posts on this platform on Thursday.

### Discussion

Findings make it possible to conclude the following. The audience of social media is mostly female aged up to 30. The majority of respondents who took part in the survey are city residents. Most of the users on social media prefer VKontakte, Instagram, and Facebook. Almost all of them use social media at least 2-3 times a day. Half of respondents need such platforms for work. News reviewing and chatting are the most popular objectives for turning to social media. To search for goods and services, people rarely use social media in Russia (only 19% of the audience).

Activities on various social media vary. Going from the data obtained, we can see the following tactics of content distribution on social media.

First, a discussion format works best on VKontakte. It is enough to start a discussion among other discussions, and users themselves will develop it further. It is also efficient to post small notes and announcements (not more than 200 characters) as a microblog. Do not forget that most of VKontakte users more easily perceive visual content. Second, the best content format on Facebook looks like an informative message in a microblog, up to 1,000 characters long. It is important for a post to contain useful information. Third, on Twitter, attractive ads with links to pages with more detailed information are preferable. For instance, there might be announcements of amazing events, new products in an assortment, etc. A format of short practice-based recommendations on products works well on Twitter.

The following recommendations concern a choice of the most favorable posting time. Social media provide the highest efficiency of posts in various periods, moreover, the periods heavily vary by post focus. In general, on Instagram and Facebook, simultaneous posting will be the best solution. When working with some time zones, a choice of perfect posting time gets much more complicated. The more popular a brand/company is, the more time zones one needs to work with. When adjusting to some time zones, some companies post the same several times in a row. However, avoid more than four identical posts a day. Findings assume that too frequent posts make user attention less concentrated. When scheduling posts, it is necessary to focus on a time zone, in which most people of a target audience live.

Based on findings, it is possible to distinguish conditionally perfect time slots for posting on various social media. Most of Instagram users access it from smartphones and are rarely online all day. The perfect posting time there is lunch and an end of a working day. The highest user engagement is on Wednesday. Posting is also effective on Monday and Thursday. Facebook users usually visit the platform from office desktop PCs. Therefore, the perfect posting time there is an end of a working day. The best days of the week for posting are Thursday, Friday, and weekends. On VKontakte, the highest activity is on Monday. It gets less by weekends, especially on Saturday. By the time of day, one can get the highest effect in the evening. On Odnoklassniki, the highest user engagement is also on Monday, but in the morning. Focusing on findings, one needs to take into account the specifics of an audience and an activity/target focus of posts.

It is important to make it clearer that three key parameters play a crucial role in the success of an SMM content strategy. There are involvement, engagement, and conversion. To facilitate an algorithm of interaction with users, one needs to optimize a content plan carefully: its content and further applications. Having focused on an optimized approach, one needs to make sure that the content meets all three parameters.

Thus, we conclude that properly made social media content marketing produces essential benefits for businesses. To move to the establishment of effective SMM, one needs to select a platform carefully (specific social media). For this, there are usual thorough studies of a portrait and activity of a target audience. A choice of the platforms most appropriate for posting should depend on the appeal of social media, a concentration point of a target audience, its engagement and other indicators of the user activity.

## Conclusion

In today's business, content marketing is undeniably important. Thanks to marketing on social media, companies significantly cut expenditures for direct interactions with customers, expand the scope of activities and at the same time get such social media users that are much more loyal towards their brands. In this process, an important issue is a choice of the most appropriate solution for posting among many platforms. The content optimization task (to involve a larger audience not only by content but also taking into account such factors, as the most effective time of posting, post size, etc.) has found its solution in the empirical study of the user activity on social media.

The analysis of the user activity on Russian social media has shown that VKontakte is the most popular platform with 96.6% of respondents using it. Instagram is second with 65.1%. Facebook is third with 40.8%. Mainly young people (aged 18-24) regularly turn to social media, less often – people aged 25-30. In Russia, WhatsApp application is the most popular by the audience and some downloads, followed by Viber, VKontakte, and Instagram.

The user activity on social media might vary by type of the posted content, posting time and other factors. On VKontakte, posts with photos are the most efficient, while those with links and video are behind the posts with text and photos. Entries with video have turned out to be better on Facebook, while posts with links have turned to be the worst. On Instagram, there is a minor, but the typical influence of a content type on engagement. On Odnoklassniki, text posts usually have the highest number of responses, while posts with links have the least one. At the same time, posts with photos have more feedback than posts with video. On VKontakte, the audience responded best to short text posts. On Facebook, entries with medium-sized texts had the highest numbers of responses.

On Instagram, longer texts work better. Response time heavily varies depending on the target audience. For instance, the best posting time on Facebook for consumer brands is on Thursday at 2 pm and on Friday at 11 am. Whereas on Instagram, the best posting time for consumer goods is on Saturday at 11 am and 1 pm.

Thus, content marketers should take into account some parameters of social media and a target audience. The shift in time favorable for posting assumes that in each case, it is necessary to have a separate survey of the posting activity that the target audience has on social media.

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**Elena N. Fokina** (Ph.D., Tyumen State University, 2002) is an Associate professor of the Department of Business Informatics and Mathematics of the Tyumen Industrial University (Tyumen, Russian Federation). Her area of scientific interests is education, mathematical methods of research in the economy, information technology, social aspects of vocational training, social networks.

**Elena A. Rodionova** (Ph.D., Orenburg State Pedagogical University, 2002) is an Associate professor of the Department of Psychology of the Saint Petersburg State University (Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation). Her area of scientific interests is motivational activity, communication, social interaction, digital media research, personal effectiveness, education.

**Marina V. Vinogradova** (Doctor Habilitatus Economic, Russian State University of Tourism and Service, 2013) is a Professor and Director of Research Institute of Advanced Directions and Technologies of the Russian State Social University (Moscow, Russian Federation). Her area of scientific interests is socio-economic development of macro and microsystems, socio-cultural problems, forecasting, planning and monitoring of the development of socio-economic systems, information security, and information systems.