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Research of tools influencing the engagement of potential customers in social media as one of the ways to improve the effectiveness of SMM in organisations through the example of the Instagram community @mebel_rummix

KEYWORDS

social media;
social media marketing;
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SMM strategy;
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ABSTRACT

Over the past ten years, an increasing number of organisations have gone beyond "personal pages" and viewed social media as a promising channel of communication with customers, partners, and employees. The attractiveness of social media marketing is primarily due to its accessibility for small and medium-sized businesses, which makes it possible to compete with large companies in informing a potential audience about goods and services. However, business promotion in social media is not always successful due to the low reach and level of audience involvement.

It is assumed that over the history of social media, a set of engagement management tools has been formed that can be structured, described, and proposed for use as a method for improving the effectiveness of social media marketing organisations.

Empirical and theoretical research methods were used to test the suggested hypothesis: 1) analysis of literature and Internet sources; 2) synthesis of the received information; 3) an experiment to evaluate the results of the practical application of several engagement management tools at the same time.

Based on the research data, a classification of engagement management tools is proposed for the first time, including six groups: analytical, visual, content, technical, advertising, and reputational. The effectiveness of using analytical, visual, content, and advertising tools has been experimentally proven and confirmed by statistics from the social media analytics services Popsters and LiveDune through the example of the @mebel_rummix community. The main result of the research is a **generalisation of existing engagement management tools in practice into a single controlled methodological approach** to improve the effectiveness of social media marketing organisations.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media cover a huge number of people and are synonymous with thematic portals and search engines on the Internet: in social media, people meet, communicate, read news, books, and articles, find useful information, watch movies, listen to music, and buy goods and services [2]. Since the main marketing task of any company is to be where its consumers are, it is natural that such a powerful resource could not be ignored by organisations [19, p. 51]. Besides, SMM (social media marketing) is cost-effective, and this makes it accessible to start-up entrepreneurs and small businesses [24].

The main difference between social media and other online resources according to O'Reilly, Ananda et al. is a fundamentally new form of Internet communication, which implies the exchange of user content in a multilateral communication mode [20, p. 171]. The feature of adding and changing content by the simultaneous efforts of many users makes social media a unique resource in terms of the ability to interact with audiences (customers, partners, and employees of the company) in a single space-time field, and also provides ample opportunities for involving reference groups in the company's promotion activities.

Although social media are widely used in promoting companies, scientific research in this area is scarce. Organisations have to develop and implement SMM strategies based on intuition [20]. Stelzner in the report on his annual Social Media Examiner study says that 91% of SMM specialists from the USA, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, South Africa, and other countries are constantly searching for an answer to the question of how to increase engagement in social media, while 89% want to have information about the best SMM strategies and doubt the correctness of their decisions [24, pp. 6, 45]. Trial and error are the main reason why 80% of companies' social media pages are useless [8].

Well-established statistical indicators of the effectiveness of communities in social media are reach and engagement [13]. If the reach rate* is relatively simple from the point of view of management and depends on the number of subscribers, then engagement is a complex criterion associated with the users' subjective assessment, expressed in the number of audience responses to publications (likes**, reposts***, comments, messages, and information saves) [16].

A significant contribution to the study of social media audience engagement was made by Pentina *et al.* [21; 22]. Researchers compared complex motivational combinations and behaviour of luxury brand buyers in social media and concluded that it was very important to create special inspirational content, taking into account the audience's behavioural characteristics, as well as

* Reach is the number of unique users who viewed the post or account. Source: LiveDune. (n.d.). *Dictionary of SMM Terms and Livedune Terms*. Retrieved July 15, 2020, from <https://livedune.ru/blog/terminology>

** Like is a button for approving what a person likes in social media on the Internet. Usually it is in the form of a heart or a thumb up. Source: Mingaev, M. (2019). *Answer to Users' Questions*. Retrieved July 25, 2020, from https://yandex.ru/q/question/society/chto_takoe_laik_817b2c07

*** Repost is a quick way to share an article or other note in social media. Such a function makes it possible to instantly copy information and publish it on one's page or send it to friends. By reposting, one shares information in its original form and leaves a link to the source. Source: Komarkova, I. (2020). *Answer to Users' Questions*. Retrieved July 23, 2020, from https://yandex.ru/q/question/computers/chto_takoe_repost_i_kak_ego_sdelat_c86a306f/

to attract active users – opinion leaders in SMM promotion; it is also necessary to work especially with them. However, these are not all of the existing engagement management tools.

Ananda *et al.* distinguish three main categories of SMM tools: *Representation*, *Engagement*, and *Listening-in*, which, according to the context, can be translated as image, involvement, and tracking [20]. The image includes the presentation of the company in social media (profile, information about the company and its products); engagement is marketing activities in social media aimed at interacting with customers, and tracking refers to research and analysis of the obtained data. The authors provide only a general understanding of the tools, which requires further detailing and development of a procedure for application in practice.

Thus, the engagement rate is of particular scientific interest from the point of view of clarifying the set of tools from the SMM arsenal that influence its positive change. Social media's ten-year history has accumulated industry experience in promoting companies, but this experience is fragmented and requires structuring. The purpose of the article is to identify existing engagement management tools in social media and test their effectiveness in practice.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS

Engagement as a criterion for effective promotion in social media

Kaladzhyan [8] identifies two components of the ineffectiveness of SMM organisations: low reach of the target audience and a low degree of involvement.

The authors consider that a brief and precise definition of engagement in social media is given in the blog of the University of Internet Professions "Netology" [3]:

Engagement is the sum of subscribers' interactions with one's posts. Interactions include likes, comments, and reposts.

The notion of engagement is closely related to such features of social media as [1, p. 25]:

- 1) self-presentation through personal pages;
- 2) continuous communication through internal messages and comments;
- 3) bringing people together in communities.

The features indicated in paragraphs No. 2, 3 imply the involvement of the audience in the process of creating messages (content*). In this way, producers of the content of the messages enter into relations with consumers of these messages, who themselves are involved in its further production, when each reader/subscriber of the blog can perform the functions of an author, acting as a commentator, reporter, photojournalist, and/or editor of this service [15]. The more people are involved in community life (put likes, write comments, repost, and save information), the more successful it is.

The importance of engagement lies in the algorithms of social media, which do not benefit from showing posts to all subscribers of the community.

* Content is absolutely any information-significant or meaningful content of an information resource or website. Source: Kolykhalova, O. (2016). *Answer to Users' Questions*. Retrieved June 19, 2020, from <https://otvet.mail.ru/question/66420018>

The average audience reach statistics by a publication does not exceed 20% of all subscribers [10]. However, the more responses a post has (likes, comments, reposts, and saves), the more likely it is that the network will "pick up" it in the feed and show it to a larger number of users.

Based on all of the above, **one of the main goals of SMM is to create a high level of audience engagement.**

Analysis of SMM tools for managing the engagement level and their classification

In the authors' view, in the matter of identifying a set of engagement management tools, it is reasonable to rely on the opinion of specialists of large analytics and marketing services in the digital sphere, as well as specialists of training centres and online courses of digital professions and digital agencies, whose practical activities form the patterns that should form the basis of the SMM methodology.

Below is a description of tools for increasing the engagement level from seven sources for further generalisation and classification (Table 1):

Table 1

Brief description of tools for increasing the engagement level

Sub-item number	Name of the source	Tools for increasing the engagement level
1	Supa service is designed to create videos and design images for social media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using the "smart feed" algorithm – since the news feed in social media gives greater reach to those posts that have more activities (likes, reposts, comments), it is necessary to provoke activity with questions, surveys, and communication; • working with "brand lawyers" – people who actively share their opinions about the brand (product/service) [11].
2	ActiveTraffic service is designed for analytics, bulk post creation and editing; contains a setting that allows keeping the reach and placement rate within the specified limits in the Vkontakte and MyTarget advertising accounts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analytical work – studying the behaviour of social media users at a certain time helps to increase loyalty – it is necessary to make up a schedule that displays the hours of greatest activity, and plan publications according to it; • active communication and feedback – prompt responses and likes to positive and negative comments increase audience loyalty; • work on the content quality – easy submission of content with an appeal to the reader or viewer will have more weight; it is necessary to keep in mind the quality of work with content: infographics, convenient fonts, and high-quality images will not go unnoticed; • focus on personal brand – the audience is much more loyal to the company if it literally has a face; business account owners do not need to hide behind names and logos – direct contact with the consumer will attract the audience; • relevance and following trends – the use of newsbreaks and memes* within the community always causes a positive reaction from subscribers, but it is necessary to use this tool wisely, without crossing certain boundaries [5].

*Meme is a unit of culturally relevant information. A meme is any idea, symbol, manner, or mode of action that is consciously or unconsciously transmitted from person to person through speech, writing, video, rituals, gestures, and so on. Source: Meme. (n.d.). Retrieved August 8, 2020, from <https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mem>

3	CallTouch service is designed for end-to-end analytics (combining data from advertising platforms and CRM systems with data from the company's website), call tracking (tracking the sources of incoming calls to the company), and ad management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • optimal posting time – studying the heat map of the time of public visits and using it to place publications on certain days and hours; • using graphics – it dilutes the text and attracts attention; • communication – subscribers value communication and answers to questions [16].
4	SMMPlanner service is intended for organising planned deferred placement of messages (posts) in social media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conducting sweepstakes, quizzes, and mini-marathons – means subscribing to an account, commenting, and likes (the more expensive the prize, the better the result); • stimulating discussions – asking specific simple questions at the end of the post that stimulate discussion; creating chats for publications at a certain time with a suggestion of a discussion topic; • contests with user content – a contest of any audience activity, the results of which can be placed in the form of photos, videos, audio recordings, and text with the possibility of voting; • interactive content – creating and hosting mini-games (for example, continue the story, write your name one letter at a time in the comments, describe your feelings with "Emoji" icons, etc.); • useful content – posts with recipes, descriptions of the technology of making something. Such content builds loyalty, creates a reputation as an expert, and increases engagement, as the audience retains it; • conducting surveys – using this technique, one can not only increase engagement but also find out the audience's opinion about the company's goods/services [14].
5	"Lead generation" is a centre for integrated training of Internet promotion (lead generation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • surveys that require detailed responses – provoke users to leave their opinions; • a discussion of problematic topics – a discussion of vital questions, current news, pain points – all this encourages people to speak out, which is a reason to start a discussion; • using the mention function – encouraging discussion of a post by inviting other people to join the discussion using the mention function. To do this, enter @[user id] and a message with an offer to join the discussion in the comments to the post. Users who are added to a conversation receive a notification in the responses "tab"; • emotional posts are posts with maximum sincerity and openness of emotions: joy, indignation, anger, pain, gratitude. Such messages evoke a response from the audience; • provocation – the statement of a sharp categorical opinion on an urgent problematic topic; • interactive posts – tests, games, riddles, gifts for activity [9].

6	Weblines Promotion Digital Agency is a digital agency since 2012 (Moscow)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paid promotion of publications – advertising of publications with payment for a social network; • clearing bots – removing bots from an account by manual unsubscribing; • involving techniques: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. calls (like, comment, etc.); 2. short surveys; 3. questions with a long answer; 4. roll calls (for example, who is from Krasnoyarsk – put "+" in the comments); 5. puzzles; 6. surveys-riddles; 7. like-times (contests with a call to put likes) with the condition of receiving a discount or prize; 8. games; 9. raffles [10].
7	CheckROI is online courses for digital professions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identification and study of the target audience – drawing up a portrait of the target audience; finding out preferences, interests, and behaviour description; • determining the correct time and format for publication – the intersection of the parameters "time" (morning/afternoon/evening) and the type of information (entertainment/serious) is determined; • the design of the post – visual design, text, structure; • providing a jump in activity: sweepstakes, contests, publishing user content (photos, videos, audio recordings with text both in a competitive format and for the purpose of telling about one's subscribers) [7].

In the authors' opinion, all the tools for increasing engagement listed in Table 1 can be united into the following six groups, depending on the method and area of impact:

1. **analytical:** analysis of the target audience to identify subscribers' interests for creating content, analysis of the time and the best time intervals for posting publications, analysis of competitors' actions;
2. **visual:** design of categories and posts (style, colour scheme, quality of design of the photo and video materials, infographics), text design and structure;
3. **content (used when creating content and interacting with the audience, except for the visual ones):** questions to the audience, surveys, posts-calls to action (discussion, likes, reposts, saves), provocative posts, emotional posts, useful posts, games, sweepstakes, contests, riddles; mentions of subscribers to attract them to the discussion; the tone of communication (friendly, official, provocative, etc.), feedback;
4. **technical:** clearing one's account from bots;
5. **advertising:** paid promotion of publications through advertising systems of social media;
6. **reputational:** maintaining the company's community on behalf of the owner (suitable for small and medium-sized businesses), working with "brand lawyers" to encourage them to actively take part in community life.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Example of an SMM strategy for the Instagram community of the furniture company "Rummix" – @mebel_rummix

Instagram account (community) help

1. Name: @mebel_rummix (TM Rummix, LLC PC Komandor, Krasnoyarsk).
2. Project start: June 11, 2015
3. Profile: furniture (in the "Product/Service" category): products, promotions, corporate life.

According to the Popsters service's data, there is a low level of audience engagement throughout the entire life of the account: for the period of June 11, 2015 – May 19, 2020 – an average of 13 likes and 1 comment per post (Fig. 1). The average Engagement Rates* per day and per post are also very low, less than one.

Figure 1 "Rummix" – @mebel_rummix account statistics based on Popsters service data

RU	EN
Мебельная фабрика 11.06.2015-19.05.2020	Furniture factory 11.06.2015-19.05.2020
Всего лайков 22,147	Total likes 22,147
Всего комментариев 868	Total comments 868
Всего записей 1650	Total records 1650
Подписчиков 2079	Subscribers 2079
ER day, %; 0.614%	ER day, %; 0.614%
ER post, %; 0.671%	ER post, %; 0.671%
LR, %; 0.646%	LR, %; 0.646%
TR, %; 0.025%	TR, %; 0.025%
Лайков в среднем; 13	Likes on average; 13
Комментариев в среднем; 1	Comments on average; 1
Все расчеты сделаны по вашему часовому поясу	All calculations have been made according to your time zone

* ER (Engagement Rate) is the ratio of the average number of all interactions in posts to the number of subscribers [20]. $ER = (\text{reactions} / \text{posts} / \text{subscribers} \times 100)$. When calculating the ER for an individual post, the user reaction to this post will be taken into account; when calculating the ER for a community, the user reaction to all posts for the specified time period is taken into account. For example, during the selected period, 10 posts were published that received 100 likes and 20 comments. On average, one will get 12 interactions per post: $(100 + 20) / 10 = 12$. The account has 300 subscribers, accordingly, $ER = 12 / 300 \times 100 = 4\%$.

Target audience:

1. Potential and real buyers. B2C audience: married men and women with children aged 25 to 45 years old. Reasons for purchasing furniture: first purchase of housing, change of housing, the appearance of children, interior renovation. **B2B audience:** interior designers.

2. Employees of the holding. Another significant audience is the company's employees. As carriers of information about the company, employees contribute to the formation of a good reputation.

The purposes of account management for the furniture company Rummix:

- creating demand and "heating" the audience;
- finding potential buyers in the selection field;
- collecting leads (potential customers who go to the company's website and turn to Direct);
- formation of the company's image in the medium term and reputation – in the long term;
- solution of HR tasks (interaction with employees of the enterprise, cohesion, formation of corporate culture).

To achieve these goals, the authors worked with the following groups of tools: 1) updating the packaging (design) of the account – **visual tools** – new categories were developed and designed; two-colour marking was used: green for expert content, Burgundy branded for everything else; the content design focuses on photos of people; in the graphic solution, uniformity and simplicity are preferred;

2) development and implementation of a content strategy to increase engagement – **content and analytical tools** – in the content strategy, 65% was given to content aimed at engagement, loyalty, and expert information, and only 35% to commercial content;

3) advertising campaign for individual publications – **advertising tools** – during the project, three publications were promoted through the Instagram advertising system.

To test the chosen strategy, a period of no more than one calendar month was set aside, during which the Engagement Rate Reach* (an indicator that does not depend on the presence of bots among subscribers) should have been returned to normal.

RESULTS

As a result of the work on the project, the following results were obtained.

The 109-person increase in subscribers was primarily due to an advertising campaign on the Facebook advertising network, and this is equal to the increase in subscribers that occurred in the community from mid-December 2019 until mid-May 2020. The engagement index also showed a significant increase. Below are statistical indicators of results based on data from the LiveDune analytics service for the period of May 20, 2020 – June 13, 2020 (Table 2). The engagement rate reach has run to the norm. The engagement rate has almost doubled.

* ERReach (Engagement Rate Reach) is calculated similar to ER, but as a ratio to the average number of posts' reach [20]: $ERReach = (reactions) / posts / reach \times 100$.

Table 2

Dynamics of @mebel_rummix community indicators. Comparison of two periods: status on May 20, 2020, and on June 13, 2020 (24 days after starting work on the project)

Sub-item number	Indicators	The average value in the Product/Service category (average of 30 days). Data as of June 13, 2020	Account @mebel_rummix as of May 20, 2020 (start of the work on the project)	Status	Goals (until August 20, 2020)	Account @mebel_rummix as of June 13, 2020 (24 days after starting work on the project)	Change/Status
1	Subscribers	6,720	1,981	below normal	2,500	2,090	+109
2	Engagement rate	5.79%	1.5%	below normal	up to the average value	2.97%	+1.47%
3	Engagement rate reach	17.75%	9.5%	below normal	up to the average value	17.89%	+8.39% normal
4	Reach rate	43.41%	14.6%	below normal	up to the average value	16.02%	+1.42%
5	Posts per week	3-4	6-7	above normal	support	7-8	above normal
6	Stories per day	2-3	1-2	below normal	2-3	3-4	above normal
7	Searches of Stories	28.79%	37.9%	above normal	support	34.68%	above normal

DISCUSSION

During 24 days of working on the project, Instagram @mebel_rummix successfully implemented a strategy to increase the engagement of the existing audience of subscribers. More than a **two-fold increase in likes** on average per post and more than a **four-fold increase in comments** on average per post (according to the Popsters service for the period of May 20, 2020 – June 13, 2020) were obtained. The number of subscribers was increased by 109; the total number was 2,090 people (as of June 13, 2020), more than 50% of which were received through an advertising campaign on Facebook. The average cost per subscriber was 46.7 roubles, including VAT, which is within the range of the average cost of a subscriber on Instagram (30–60 roubles).

The results of this work were recorded by the analytical services Popsters and LiveDune.

The obtained results indicate the correctness of the chosen strategy, which consists in:

- changing the packaging design and categories;
- development and implementation of a content plan, including 65% of publications aimed at engaging the audience and increasing loyalty;
- changing the tone of communication (switching to informal "you"), involving subscribers in an active dialogue;

- introduction of the non-commercial categories "Our people abroad" and "Cadres decide everything!", which are of interest to both the company's employees and the external audience;
- changing the form for submitting information about projects: specifying the designer, cost, size, and key benefits;
- placement of expert information on decor and interior design, as well as on furniture care;
- activation of work with Stories: creating separate content, increasing the frequency of outputs to 3–4 per day;
- using special services for video design and processing (Canva, Designer, Kinemaster, Inshot, Pixaloop) for posting;
- conducting an advertising campaign on Instagram and Facebook advertising networks aimed at increasing engagement and the number of subscribers.

CONCLUSIONS

The article examines the existing scientific views of social media engagement. Lack of a unified methodological approach to engagement management is revealed, as well as lack of a description of the set of all tools for increasing engagement. A hypothesis is put forward about the existence of such a set of tools in practice, and the task is to identify and generalise it.

Thus, the tools used in practice to increase engagement were identified and generalised, and their classification into the following groups was proposed, depending on the method and area of impact: **analytical, visual, content, technical, advertising, and reputational**. An experimental test of the effectiveness of some tools was performed through the example of the Instagram community @mebel_rummix.

The results of the implementation of the SMM strategy for @mebel_rummix, which was aimed at increasing audience engagement, are described. The strategy included the following elements: 1) change in the design of the community packaging and categories, 2) creation of a content plan aimed at engaging the audience and filling it with publications that meet the goal; 3) paid promotion of individual posts. The results of these efforts, recorded by the Popsters and LiveDune analytics services, demonstrated the effectiveness of **visual, content, analytical, and advertising engagement management tools** in practice. According to the results of the conducted experiment, the engagement rate reach increased from 9.5% to 17.89% and reached the average value accepted for the "Product/Service" category on Instagram; the engagement rate almost doubled.

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