

New Media and Old Institutions: Presence Analysis of the Russian Cities' Administration in Social Networks

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Theme

Public administration, local government and the NPO sector

Extended abstract of the report

Declining trust in government increases the requirements for communication between managers and residents. Thus, an open dialogue with citizens is one of the components in assessing the openness of government by the Accounts Chamber of the Russia¹. Managers have a need for constant and transparent communication with civil society.

Digital technologies have replaced the usual means of offline communication. According to the marketing agency Web Canape, at the beginning of 2021 the number of social media

¹ Демидов П., Бузов В. Открытость государства в России — 2021. — М.: ЦПУР, 2021. — 147 с.

(further — SM) users in Russia approached 100 mil². Due to the growing popularity, SM have become an important tool for interaction between government and civil society³.

SM is a group of Internet applications, allowing to create and share your own content⁴. For managers, SM provide an opportunity for direct, instant and two-way communication with citizens. The authors emphasize the importance of SM in ensuring transparency of dialogue, increasing loyalty to government, and increasing citizen participation^{5,6,7}.

The use of SM by managers is a widespread research problem among sociologists, political scientists, and PR managers. Most empirical research focuses on the role of SM in shaping the image of a city manager^{8,9,10} and examining the impact of SM on election campaigns^{11,12,13}. Those, most often content analysis is used. However, there is little research showing the actual proportion of SM use in urban management. An example of such a study exists in Canada¹⁴.

² Сергеева Ю. Интернет и соцсети в России в 2021 году — вся статистика // Web Canape, интернет-издание, 12 февраля 2021 [Электронный ресурс]. Режим доступа: <https://www.web-canape.ru/business/internet-i-socseti-v-rossii-v-2021-godu-vsya-statistika/> (дата обращения: 25. 11. 2021)

³ Enli G. Twitter as arena for the authentic outsider: exploring the social media campaigns of Trump and Clinton in the 2016 US presidential election // European journal of communication. — 2017. — Vol. 32 (1). — P. 50-61.

⁴ Zolkepli I. A., Kamarulzaman Y. Social media adoption: The role of media needs and innovation characteristics // Computers in human behavior. — 2015. — Vol. 43. — P. 189-209.

⁵ Bonsón E. et al. Local e-government 2.0: Social media and corporate transparency in municipalities // Government information quarterly. — 2012. — Vol. 29 (2). — P. 123-132.

⁶ Mergel I. Social media in the public sector: A guide to participation, collaboration and transparency in the networked world. — John Wiley & Sons, 2012. — 320 p.

⁷ Зимова Н. С., Фомин Е. В., Смагина А. А. Социальные сети как новый канал взаимодействия общества и власти // Научный результат. Социология и управление. — 2020. — № 6 (2). — С. 159-171.

⁸ Плотникова М. В. Мэр здорового человека: речевой портрет мэра г. Якутска Сарданы Авксентьевой в Сети // Политическая лингвистика. — 2019. — №. 5. — С. 1-9.

⁹ Глебова И. С. Анализ имиджей мэров столиц субъектов Российской Федерации как элемента городского управления // Вестник экономики, права и социологии. — 2013. — №. 3. — С. 188-191.

¹⁰ Филатова О. Г. Главы российских регионов в социальных сетях: аудит публичных коммуникаций // PR и реклама в изменяющемся мире: региональный аспект. — 2020. — №. 23. — С. 6-16.

¹¹ Новикова С. А. Избирательная кампания по выборам мэра Москвы: срез социальных сетей // Вестник Пермского университета. Серия: Политология. — 2013. — №. 4. — С. 201-208.

¹² Dimitrova D. V., Bystrom D. The effects of social media on political participation and candidate image evaluations in the 2012 Iowa caucuses // American Behavioral Scientist. — 2013. — Vol. 57 (11). — P. 1568-1583.

¹³ Criado J. I., Martínez-Fuentes G., Silván A. Social media for political campaigning. The use of Twitter by Spanish mayors in 2011 local elections // Web 2.0 technologies and democratic governance. — Springer, New York, NY, 2012. — P. 219-232.

¹⁴ Sullivan K. V. R. The gendered digital turn: Canadian mayors on social media // Information Polity. — 2021. — Vol. 26 (2). — P. 157-171.

At the same time, interaction in SM challenges bureaucratic norms: the transition from “paper” communication to digital dialogue requires new competencies from managers. In this case, the analysis of the existing specifics of the use of SM by managers is an integral stage in the development of methodological recommendations. Thus, the key research question is formulated as follows: how does the structure of SM used by the administrations of the largest Russian cities differ?

The study was conducted in June 2021 as part of the Master of Public Administration educational program for management teams from the 100 largest cities in Russia, with the exception of Moscow and St. Petersburg. The first large-scale presence analysis of Russian administrations on SM was made possible by the experience of the program. Analytics were offered as training materials, which made it possible to verify the results of the participants. Additionally, 5 expert interviews were conducted with representatives of administrations to confirm the hypotheses.

The research is done on the basis of open data. We analyzed the official accounts of city administrations in six social networks: Instagram (Inst), Vkontakte (Vk), Odnoklassniki (Ok), Facebook (Fb), Telegram (Tg) and Youtube (Yt).

Two parameters were taken into account: the presence of a registered profile on the social network and the number of subscribers. The coverage of each SM was also calculated - the number of subscribers to the population ratio. The coverage indicator has its limitations, since not all subscribers are directly from the city. However, this is the only indicator available in open sources that allows to assess the effectiveness of communication. Coverage allows us to talk about the activity of the administration in SM, since there is a dependence between the quality of the profile and the number of subscribers.

We can draw the following conclusions about the representation of city administrations in SM.

- Administrations can be classified according to the degree of their presence in SM: there are “SMM leaders” with registered accounts in 6 networks (Krasnodar or Magadan), and mono-strategies for working with SM (Vladikavkaz).
- Most of the administrations are represented in 5 out of 6 reviewed social networks. Administrations, which are represented in 5 or 4 social networks, are absent only in Yt

and Tg. This allows us to speculate about the existence of stages of the "digital turn" of city administrations.

- The most popular SM, in which most of the municipalities are represented is Inst. Moreover, administrations represented in one SM have accounts in Inst. This is due to the high growth rates of the popularity of the SM, as well as to the wide and convenient functionality. The least popular SM are Yt and Tg. This may be due to the novelty of the formats for working with content.
- Administrations can be typologized by coverage structure. Some of them are active in several SM and have the same coverage values in them: Magadan has the same coverage in Inst and Ok. Others are developing one SM: Dzerzhinsk has a high proportion of coverage only on Vk. In other words, we state the difference between administrations that are present in social networks and that are active in social networks.
- We see geographic patterns in our SM strategies. For example, the Caucasian cities (Nalchik, Makhachkala) are actively working exclusively with Inst. This may be due to the peculiarities of perception by urban residents. Indeed, Inst is a key social network in the Caucasus. It can be argued that the administrations of these cities are pursuing a relevant communication strategy: they do not spend resources on the development of other, unpopular social networks. Thus, the presence in many SM is not a guarantee of high-quality communication between the authorities and civil society. In order to develop a competent SM presence strategy, it is necessary to take into account the urban context and pay attention to existing resources.