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REGIONAL MEDIA IN SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MESSENGERS

Atajanov Khurmet Abdimuratovich
Berdakh Karakalpak State University. Nukus. Uzbekistan.

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ABSTRACT

In an era of rapidly developing information exchange, meeting the needs of the audience through comprehensive coverage of events taking place in society is considered one of the priority tasks for the media. In such a period, clear, balanced, and comprehensive analysis becomes relevant when covering regional news. Therefore, the author paid special attention to the features and importance of the use of social networks and messengers by local media in the regional media environment. In the article prepared by the author, the possibilities of using communication channels by local media in Karakalpakstan are studied in a regional context and the main mistakes are shown. In particular, the classification of communication channels operating in Karakalpakstan, their capabilities, and the aspects that are currently being focused on when establishing communication with the audience were analyzed. The methods and collaborations used by communication channels to influence the audience and cover local events were carefully analyzed using local and foreign experience as examples. Conclusions were drawn about the achievements and shortcomings of existing communication channels in Karakalpakstan, as well as what should be considered in terms of their content strategy.

KEY WORDS: *Regional media, social networks, Telegram channel, communication channels, television channels.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most advanced trends in journalism today is the use of cross-media technologies that allow media content to be distributed simultaneously across various technical platforms. Thus, many researchers argue that “the audience is moving to the segment of new media platforms” [1. p. 73]. In other words, audiences prefer to access media content through social networks and messengers. Renowned Belarusian scientist A. Gradushko stated that: “The smartphone has become the main channel for obtaining mass information for modern Internet users” [p. 75].

In addition, a number of media analysts have expressed a number of scientific opinions on the importance of social networks and messengers in the distribution of content in the modern media environment. “In the modern hybrid media landscape, creators of alternative news actively oppose the classical mass media” [4. p. 861. “In an era of large-scale media competition, the careful distribution of information and media materials and the search for new formats and technologies are becoming particularly important” [5. p. 327].

Indeed, today's era can be described as one in which media competition has reached its peak. This is because the rapid flow of news forces traditional media not only to compete with online media, but also to compete with citizen journalists through social networks and messengers, while readers have the opportunity to receive news from various communication channels and sources in a timely and simple manner. Thus, the media, along with the demands of the audience, had to find answers to questions about which devices and platforms readers prefer to receive information from. Based on these requirements, we need to pay attention to the question of which platforms the media in Uzbekistan use to distribute most of their content and which platform has the largest audience. According to Wunder Digital, in 2023, " the audience of the most popular social networks in Uzbekistan was 8 million users on Instagram and 2.2 million on Facebook,“ said Pavel Durov, founder of Telegram, who visited Uzbekistan and, answering questions from journalists, stated that ”70% of Uzbekistan's 37 million population uses Telegram" [6].

According to data from the TGSTAT platform, there are currently 5,600 news and Telegram channels operated by the media in Uzbekistan [8].

In addition, there are several reasons why many media outlets in Karakalpakstan use Telegram as a source for distributing news.

First, the low level of restrictions on entering the digital environment allows any user to open a Telegram channel, create their own news, and distribute it, which does not require journalistic knowledge. Although the channels are not full-fledged media outlets, they allow for the creation of unique original content.

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Second, the formats and genres of content creation and presentation, as well as the methods of communication with Telegram channel users, have their own characteristics.

Thirdly, Telegram channels based on news, in particular, do not tolerate unnecessary costs when creating content. When creating content for Telegram, it is enough to be skilled at writing good text. This is because the messenger's algorithm prefers text and photo formats.

Thus, all these factors demonstrate that Telegram channels play a key role in shaping the regional news flow. As a result, scientists have formed a number of scientific opinions about the characteristics of the Telegram messenger, a platform capable of disseminating news on a par with the mass media.

V.N. Dorokhin considers Telegram channels to be innovative digital media. In his opinion, the modern media market has completely transitioned to a digital format, which can be illustrated by the decline in print media circulation and the concentration of most social media users on dialogue platforms (websites, forums, image boards, social networks, messengers) [3. p. 104].

Research Materials and Methods

The research materials selected were content of various forms prepared on the basis of the content strategy of local communication channels. Diagrams were used to analyze the collected materials and draw conclusions.

Content analysis was used to analyze the content published in communication channels. Comparative analysis methods were used to evaluate the general characteristics of content on various communication channels.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During our analysis, along with statistical data from Telegram channels (number of subscribers, subscriber growth, number of posts), we also analyzed content strategy.

Telegram channels that distribute news in Karakalpakstan can be divided into two types.

1. Telegram channel as a feed of links to the main website. The main tool for distributing content in this way is the website, and Telegram is a means of promoting this content.

This method was widely used on news sites several years ago. The main goal is to encourage the user to go to the main website via the provided link. However, it is rarely used by local media outlets nowadays. Some media outlets provide short videos on their Telegram channel, allowing users to watch the full videos via links.

Table 1 Audience metrics for Telegram channels in Karakalpakstan. Processing date: June 18, 2024–July 18, 2024

Telegram channel and address	Number of subscribers	Total number of posts	The highest number of posts in a single day	Number of views per post
Print media				
«Қарақалпақстан жаслары», https://t.me/qaraqalpaqstan_jaslari_gazetasi	170	213	9	178
«Jetkinshek» https://t.me/jetkinshek1932	1895	5631	13	310
«Тараққиёт кўзгуси». https://t.me/amunewsuz	4543	23623	34	2600
«Шымбай ҳаўазы» https://t.me/shimbay_hawazi_uz	300	61	3	421
Audiovisual media				
«Қарақалпақстан» телеканалы. https://t.me/qaraqalpaqstan_telekanali	1513	4322	18	464
«Jaslar TV» https://t.me/jaslar_tv_online	191	416	-	120
Telegram channels				
Karakalpakstan Information Agency https://t.me/kknews_uz	6500	47 070	91	778

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https://t.me/Kar24Uz	29162	32398	32	10143
https://t.me/KARAKALPAK24	98300	26845	21	48059
https://t.me/ne-janaliq	123415	23328	32	45923
https://t.me/kruzuz	30438	6352	12	13834
https://t.me/Hoja_uz	11309	11606	6	6435

To analyze Karakalpakstan's Telegram channels, we mainly used data from the TGStat platform.
2. A Telegram channel is an independent news platform that does not contain links to media websites. In this case, unique, adapted content can consist of text, photos, videos, audio, stickers, and so on. There are no links to the main website in the post. Such posts are usually highly engaging.

The table above analyzes the strategy for distributing news through print, television, and digital media in Karakalpakstan. For each category, the media outlets with the largest number of subscribers were selected. The goal was to analyze the quantity and quality indicators of Telegram channels.

Among print media, the number of subscribers to the Telegram channel “Taraqqiyot ko'zgusi” https://t.me/amunewsuz in July 2024 was 4,542. Over the course of a month, 172 subscribers joined the channel. It should be noted that although the Telegram channel began its work on the basis of the amunews.uz website created by “Taraqqiyot ko'zgusi,” it can be considered a Telegram channel operating independently of the newspaper. This is because the posts on the Telegram channel are not limited to materials published in the newspaper. News happening in the Amudarya region will be posted promptly.

For each post on the Telegram channel https://t.me/amunewsuz, a brief summary was written, in which you can find the answer to the question of what is happening, and the main text was posted on the website. However, some posts are published only on the Telegram channel. Examples of posts: “Another visit to the family of a young reader,” “A concert program called ‘Happy Childhood’ was organized at the Kaldirgoch children's summer camp,” "A festival of spirituality was held under the motto 'If we are united, we are one people, one homeland!

Next is the Telegram channel of the Jetkinshek newspaper https://t.me/jetkinshek1932. The channel has 1,894 subscribers, and over the past month, the number of subscribers has decreased by 1.4%. On average, 13 posts are published daily. There are no links to the newspaper's website on the channel.

A year ago, the number of subscribers to the Telegram channel of the Jetkinshek newspaper exceeded five thousand. At that time, the newspaper's website was completely redesigned, and a mobile version was developed. The Telegram channel mainly publishes posts in the style of text+photo+video. At the same time, children are given interesting puzzles, crosswords, and rebuses.

The Telegram channel https://t.me/qaraqalpaqstan_jaslari_gazetasi of the newspaper Karakalpakstan Zhashlary (Youth of Karakalpakstan) began operating not long ago, so the number of channel users has not yet reached 200. For example, between July 12 and 17, 2024, 15 posts were published, of which only two provided links to the newspaper's main website. It is important to note that audio copies of two good articles published in the newspaper will be posted on the Telegram channel. The number of views of audio articles with video or text posts was also higher, with 440 users viewing them.

Karakalpakstan TV channels are very passive not only on Telegram, but also on YouTube, which is the main platform for most TV channels. As for the Telegram channels of TV channels, the Karakalpakstan TV channel Telegram channel https://t.me/каракалпакстан_телеканал has 1,513 users. The average number of video views is 464. It should be noted that it is difficult to say that the TV channel fully uses the Telegram channel as a distribution channel, since posts for the Telegram channel are posted in the form of video clips. The Karakalpakstan TV channel's news program “Khabar” is also posted there. Assuming that the average size of the videos is over 200 MB, it will take a long time to view them, as Telegram takes some time to open large files, and the time required increases several times over on mobile internet.

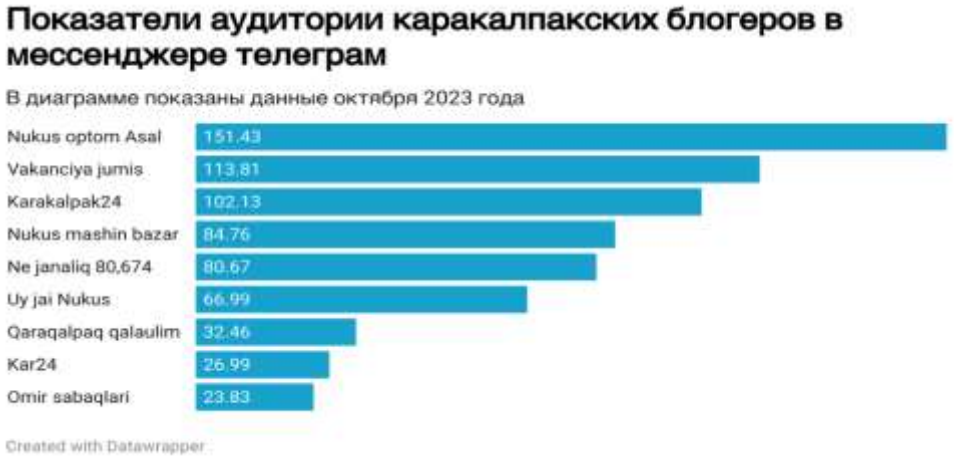
The JaslarTV Telegram channel https://t.me/jaslar_tv_online also broadcasts video clips from the Qaraqalpaqstan online news program.

The Telegram channel of the aforementioned TV channel also does not have a link to the TV channel's website, as neither of the two TV channels has a channel on YouTube, so it is not possible to watch other programs provided by the TV channel online or interactively. The Karakalpakstan TV channel has a YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/megalineuz, but only old programs are available there.

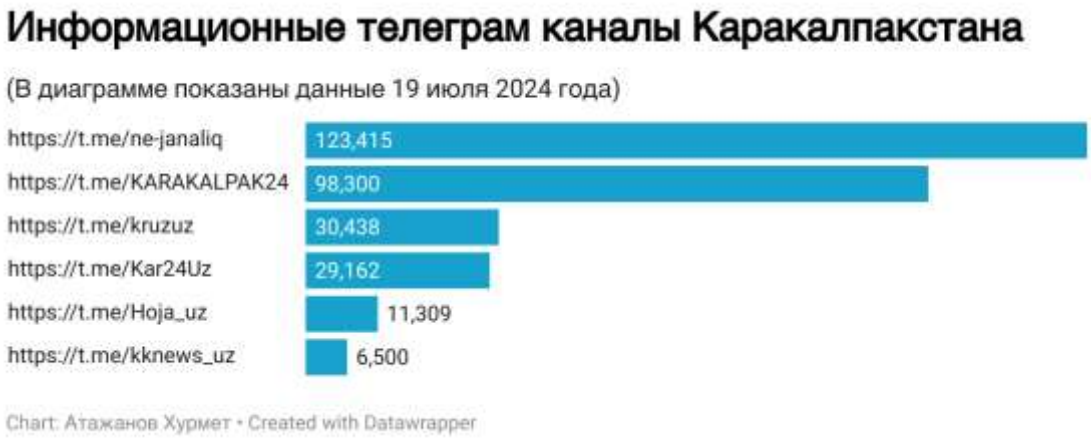
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When it comes to television channels, Karakalpakstan's television channels are still unable to keep up with the times on online platforms. It seems that television channels use Telegram channels only as a report. There is no specific strategy for the development of Telegram channels.

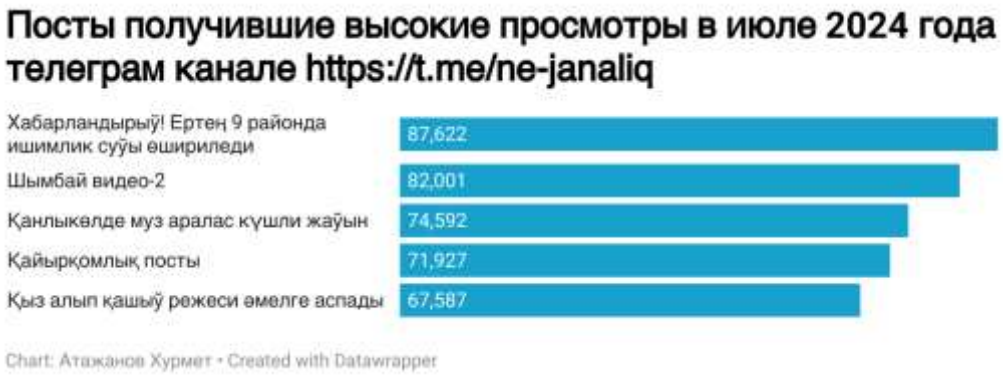
Fourth-year students of the journalism faculty at Berdakh Karakalpak State University, working on several projects during their classes, analyzed Telegram channels with a large audience in Karakalpakstan. The data was compiled for October 2023.



This chart takes audience size into account. In other words, it does not consider the target audience of Telegram channels. Nevertheless, we can see that Telegram channels focused on news also have a large audience.



There is a change compared to the 2023 indicator. Nevertheless, Telegram news channels have maintained their position. Although the Telegram channel https://t.me/ne-janaliq has 123,415 users, the average number of views per post does not exceed 45,923. Over the past six months, the number of channel users has decreased by 3,971.



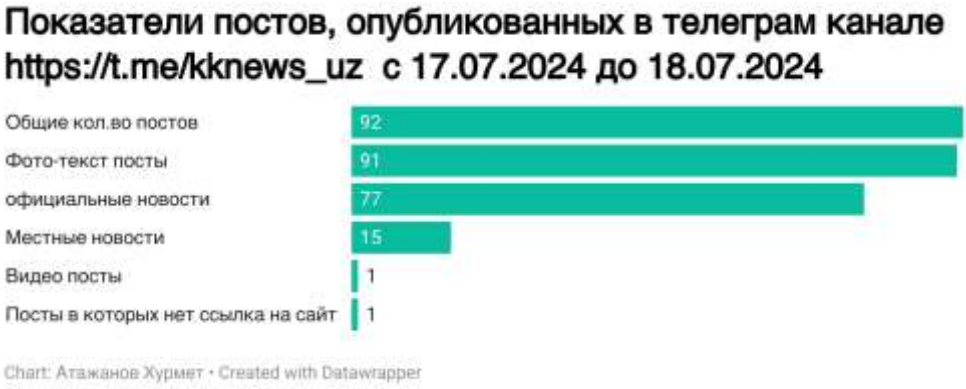
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If you look at the numerous posts, all five are dedicated to events related to our region. Firstly, this is related to the temporary shutdown of drinking water, and secondly, this is a video about how strong winds and frost in the Chimbay district blew off the slate roofs of apartment buildings, causing inconvenience to residents. Thus, it can be noted that the audience first pays more attention to events and phenomena happening around them, and then to news related to health, lifestyle, and various risks.

The Telegram channel https://t.me/KARAKALPAK24 is also a news platform without a main website. The number of subscribers decreased by 98,266 users in a month.



If we look at the topics presented in the diagram, we see that the channel published a post titled “Another virus has spread on Telegram,” dedicated to security on social networks. The post discusses the APK virus, which is spreading rapidly on social media. The post was viewed by 61,896 users. This indicates a growing interest among citizens in strengthening their knowledge of privacy and protecting their personal data on social media. The sports post “The Karakalpakstan flag was caught on camera in the stands during the Portugal-France match” tells about the appearance of the Karakalpakstan flag at the Portugal-France match of the European Championship, which is taking place in Germany.



As can be seen from this diagram, the post prepared for the Telegram channel https://t.me/kknews_uz will be a brief introduction and will be published on the website www.kknews.uz. Thus, the Telegram channel can be considered as a pathway to the agency’s website. Official posts on the Telegram channel will link to the website. It is good that official news, presidential visits, and various government meetings and events are translated into the Karakalpak language.

Additionally, original posts prepared by the website’s journalists are published on the Telegram channel. For example, an article titled “Secrets of weaving old ‘jalousie’ [9]” tells about masters of the art of weaving mats, which were once well-developed among our people but have recently been disappearing. The post includes a brief introduction: “The art of weaving silk is a national art inherited from our ancestors, and it has not lost its significance today. The demand for these items, used for decorating yurts, windows, house roofs, awnings, barns, and fortresses, is growing day by day.” A post titled “A farmer who knows the business sees the fruits of his labor” [10] was not accompanied by an introduction, but a link to the website was provided under the headline. Foreign scholars emphasize that internet media headlines require the presence of verbs and keywords, as well as a phrase indicating the place of action. From the perspective of these requirements, “seeing the fruits of the work of a skilled farmer” resembles a

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headline that forms a general impression. Nevertheless, most of the authored materials presented on the website are brief and contain several photographs, allowing readers to quickly read the text.

Compared to Telegram channels in Karakalpakstan, the posts on the Telegram channel https://t.me/kknews_uz contain original texts and also function as a distribution channel. Telegram channels in Karakalpakstan are still in the early stages of development as a separate platform and media. These Telegram channels do not contain links to traditional mass media. In such cases, the high emotionality of the content becomes especially important, which in turn determines the dynamics of information dissemination and the degree of impact. Chatbots can be used as a two-way communication tool with the audience. For example, on the Telegram channel https://t.me/Kar24Uz, 28 posts were published between July 18 and July 19, 2024, none of which included a link to the main website, meaning the posts were original texts adapted exclusively for the messenger.

The level of social media and messenger usage by the media in Karakalpakstan remains low. Newspapers that have Telegram messenger channels operate unstably on the platform, losing their position in news distribution to Telegram channels with large audiences. Editorial offices of regional newspapers do not consider social networks and messengers as a future development direction.

Internet news distribution is mostly limited to the Telegram messenger. However, as a media outlet operating outside this pattern, the website www.kruz.uz can be mentioned. The site has its own Instagram account.
The account https://www.instagram.com/kruz.uz/ has over 70,000 followers. On this account, photo posts and videos taken from other platforms and social networks are presented as stories. However, discussion of news through video stories is not established.

Kun.uz can be called a site that has successfully mastered Instagram in Uzbekistan. Its Instagram account has 5.7 million followers. In particular, events that occurred in our country are broadcast as original video clips based on analysis by the editorial journalist. Such stories form the basis for a broader understanding by learners of what has happened and the formation of a certain opinion about the event.

CONCLUSION

Local traditional mass media perceive social networks and messengers primarily as platforms for news dissemination. It would be beneficial for the media in Karakalpakstan to familiarize themselves with foreign experience working on these platforms. This is because media outlets that successfully operate on social networks and messengers in Uzbekistan and abroad increase their audience and gain opportunities to monetize their content.

Unfortunately, we have identified several factors that prevent local traditional media from effectively using social networks and messengers:

1. In some newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations, there is no proper understanding that social networks and messengers can be used as channels to expand the audience and attract new readers. Editorial staff still consider social networks to be extra, unnecessary work.
2. Journalists of traditional media lack skills in creating original content or optimizing material for social networks.
3. A reluctance to innovate, fear of transforming traditional media, and an inability to break free from outdated thinking.

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