Analysis of Social Media Management Software and Identification of Potential Functions for a New SMMS Tool

Abstract

Author(s)	Type of publication	Published
Ragimov, Ruslan	Bachelor's thesis	Spring 2019
	Number of pages	
	35 pages, 30 pages of appendices	

Title of publication
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Name of Degree
Bachelor of Business Administration

Abstract
In the last decade, the interest towards social media has been growing consistently both globally and in Russia. The popularity of social networks, constant introduction of new platforms and channels, and fast change of trends require a simple yet effective management solution from companies targeting various audiences through numerous networks. The market of social media management software (SMMS) is developing and growing, and therefore there is a need to implement market research in order to create a valuable solution.
The main aim of this thesis was to evaluate the current market of social media management software and to identify services functions for a new tool. It seems that digital solutions of that specialty are less developed in Russia, therefore this thesis looks into both global and country-specific markets of social media management platforms. Different methods were used in order to achieve the results: literature review, data analysis and eight interviews with industry specialists.
The result of the study shows that neither global nor Russian SMMS solutions are sufficient for social media marketing managers today. The global tools do not support Russian social networks, while Russian solutions are limited in functions. The new SMMS product has to combine communication, content creation, social monitoring, influencer management, targeting, and segmentation tools.
Social media marketing forecast, as well as the ideas for further research, are presented at the end of the study.

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

For many people it is hard to imagine a typical day without using the Internet and mobile phones. In fact, a survey of residents of 31 countries showed that 96% of people reach their phones in the first hour after waking up. Thirty-seven percent of World's Internet users (around 2.8 billion people) use at least one social network. (Tuten & Solomon 2017, 4-15.)

The information does not reach people directly – we receive it through a variety of media outlets, different people, etc. Social media is the new mean of communication, connection, collaboration and information flow, and it plays an important role in the lives of a significant amount of people. (Tuten & Solomon 2017, 4-15.)

As you can see from the figure below, the interest towards social media has been growing consistently in the last decade (Statista 2019a). This cannot stay unnoticed by the businesses worldwide.
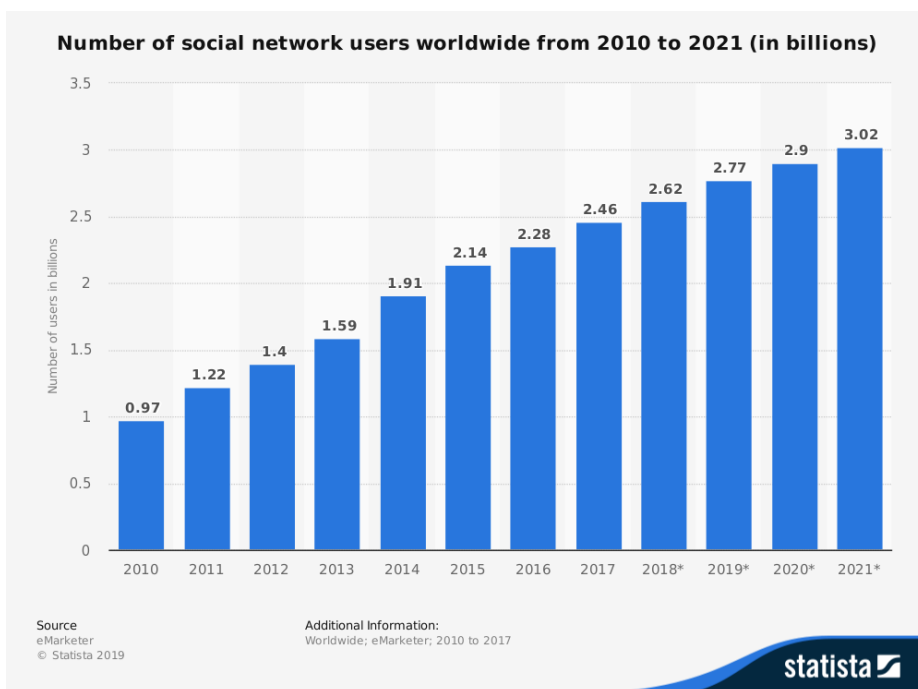
Figure 1 Number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2021 (Statista 2019a)

Ninety-five percent of adults using social networks are likely to follow a brand via those networks. With different tools and platforms companies can target specific audiences, increase brand awareness and directly communicate with their clients. Additionally, social media marketing (SMM) is cost efficient, and this is why 97% of marketeers use it. (Smith 2018.)

The growing popularity of social media, constant introduction of new platforms and channels, and fast change of trends made the author of this thesis realize that companies targeting various audiences through numerous networks require a simple yet effective management solution. The market of social media management software (SMMS) is developing and growing, therefore there is a need to implement market research and identify services functions valuable for a new enterprise.

1.1 Thesis Objectives, Question and Limitations

The main aim of this thesis is to evaluate the current market of social media management software and to identify services functions for a new solution. The author believes that the digital tools of that specialty are less developed in Russia, therefore this thesis looks into both global and country-specific markets of social media management platforms.

The main research question is:

What services functions for a social media management solution are in demand on the Russian market?

The sub-question is:

How is the Russian social media management software market different from the global one?

There are several limitations to this research. First of all, the topic of social media management software is wide, which is why this thesis will only cover complex multi-tool systems instead of single-function programs. Second of all, it is unlikely that competing companies in the current social media management market would publicly share any sensitive information (sales numbers, bugs and errors, difficulties, etc.), and therefore the results could lack some important data. Due to that limitation, the author has decided to interview SMM professionals who represent the majority of social media management software users, and take their opinions into account.

1.2 Thesis Methodology

The thesis starts with a literature review. It consists of the analysis of existing written and electronic resources on the topic of social media, its importance and use in business. It also opens up the topic of digital solutions for SMM. This method helps to understand the core basics of social media marketing, which is essential for carrying out a valuable study on the topic. The literature review also serves as a starting point for identifying services functions for a future business.

The literature review is followed by a market research consisting of the analysis of the global and country-specific (Russia) markets of social media management software. The solutions are compared and the results of that comparison serve as a base for the identification of the services functions for a tool designed for a Russian client.

The final research method is 8 interviews with SMM industry specialists from Russia. The interviews are implemented in accordance with the research ethics and are semi-structured: in addition giving their feedback to the topics prepared by the author, the interviewees are encouraged to share their opinions on any other topic which could be relevant to the research.

Each of the eight interview transcripts is presented in the appendices 1-8 respectively, and each appendix includes a short summary in English and full answers in Russian of each interviewee. The results presented in Chapter 4.4 refer to all the appendices 1-8, as all of the interviews results were analyzed together to get a complete overview of all SMMS tool functions.

Overall, the aim of all the methods used in this study was to identify the possible services functions for a new digital solution for the Russian SMMS market.

1.3   Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 presents the first findings of the literature review and covers the topics of social media and its use in business. Chapter 3 introduces social media management software and presents the analysis of global and Russian solutions. Chapter 4 presents the empirical research, while Chapter 5 reveals the interview findings. The final Chapter 6 is the conclusion which introduces the answers to the research questions.

2   SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

> *"Social Media Marketing is the utilization of social media technologies, channels and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organizations' stakeholders" (Tuten & Solomon 2017, 15).*

Social Media Marketing is a part of digital marketing along with email marketing and search engine marketing. It is described by Key (2017, 30) as the global word-of-mouth platform where companies can communicate their messages directly to the consumers and receive instant feedback. It is a tool companies use to promote themselves, their products, share their ideas and support their brand image.

As depicted in the figure below, according to Statista, social media marketing is the fourth most effective digital marketing technique (Statista 2018b).
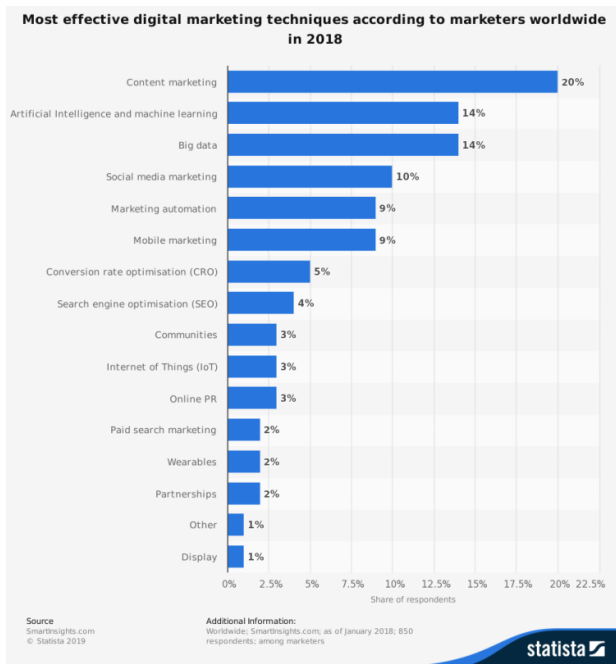
Figure 2 Most effective digital marketing techniques according to marketers worldwide in 2018 (Statista 2018b)

Additionally, content marketing is a "strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action" (Content Marketing Institute 2012). As the content could be distributed via social media, this technique is relevant for SMM as well, and therefore it is safe to say that social media marketing is one of the top techniques when it comes to digital practices used by marketeers worldwide.

2.1 Social Media

Before analyzing social media management tools, it is important to understand what social media is, and what types of networks are popular among the users today.

As mentioned above, social media is the new online mean of communication, a platform for co-creation and collaboration among integrated networks of people, enterprises and communities. In 1970s-1980s the first social media prototypes were developed and introduced in some American universities. They were later followed by the appearance of MySpace, blogs, instant-messengers and other platforms in the 1900s-2000s. (Tuten & Solomon 2017, 4-15.)

Today Social Media is used worldwide by people regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. They not only communicate with each other and share parts of their lives, they contribute to the platforms by posting their own content, commenting on others' profiles, etc. They also follow brands and companies, celebrities and influencers, which makes them feel closers to their role models. After only being reachable through newspapers, magazines, TV or radio, businesses can now communicate directly to their potential clients through social media.

As was mentioned in the introduction in Figure 1, according to Statista (2019b), the number of social network users worldwide has been consistently growing in the past decade. However, as this thesis focuses on the Russian market of the social media management services, it is important to understand how the number of users has changed in that region.

According to the figure below, the number of social networks users in Russia has grown by 30% since 2013, which leads to an increase in SMM opportunities for brands in Russia.
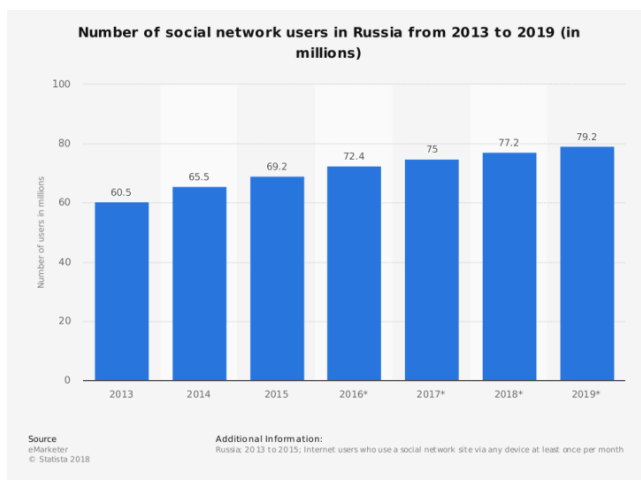
Figure 3 Number of social network users in Russia from 2013 to 2019 (in millions) (Statista 2019b)

Brands mainly use social media for marketing purposes to promote themselves and their products through their own channels as well as through the channels of the talents involved in the campaigns. The appearance of targeted advertisements and in-app shopping on some platforms has further increased the possibilities in social media marketing.

To further understand the phenomenon of social media and its importance, it is necessary to examine the different types of those media.

According to Warren Jolly (2019), the CEO of adQuadrant, the types of social media channels used for marketing activities are:

- Social Networking: Facebook, LinkedIn
- Microblogging: Twitter
- Photo Sharing: Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest
- Video Sharing: YouTube, Vimeo.

The figure below shows the leading social media platforms in Russia.

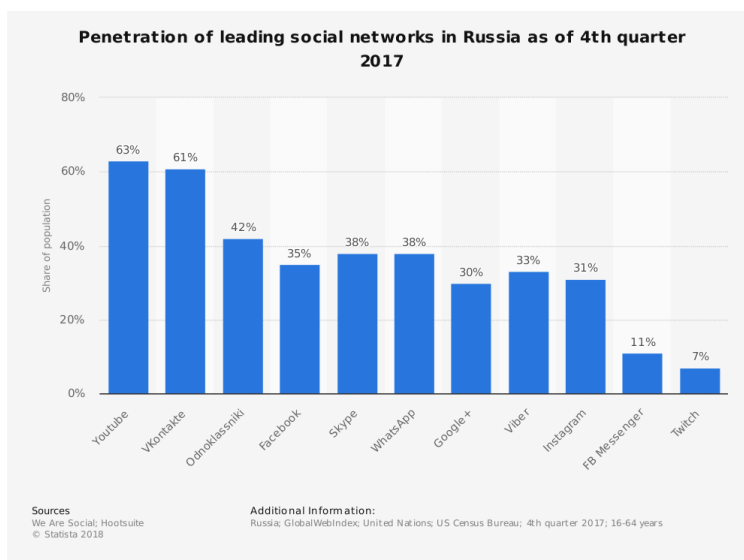Figure 4 Leading active social networks in Russia as of 4th quarter 2017 (Statista 2018a)

Overall, when it comes to content marketing on Social Media, the leading channels in Russia are Youtube, Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, and Facebook. Platforms like Snapchat, Pinterest and Vimeo did not make it to the list at all, and LinkedIn has been blocked by Russia's communications regulator Roskomnadzor since November 2016.

It is important to consider that 2 out of 3 top platforms are Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki, the Facebook-style social networking sites developed for and popular in Russian-speaking countries. Therefore, when it comes to SMM in this region, it will differ from the rest of the world, and the social media management solutions should be catered to the needs of the Russian market, not to the global practices.

2.2 Social Media in Business

In addition to being used as a direct marketing platform, businesses use social media for other purposes.

According to Christina Newberry (2017) at Hootsuite, there are the following benefits enterprises can gain through social media:

- Humanize the brand

Nowadays, it is important for potential customers to see the human side of the company: people behind the brand and the way they are treated, brand values and the way they support it.

- Brand as a thought leader

Social Media offers brands a platform to share their niche knowledge in the industry.

- Social listening

People express their thoughts and opinions on brands and their products daily. Going through comments and mentions left by the consumers helps businesses understand their strengths, weaknesses and clients better.

- Market and competitor research

Social media is a platform that connects everyone, and it could be used by brands to learn about new trends in their industry and the activities of their competitors.

- Customer service and support

People expect brands to react to their comments on social media and engage in a dialogue. Social media is a platform that lets companies instantly react to problems and clients' concerns.

- Learning more about the customers

Monitoring social media and interacting with potential clients helps brands learn more about their audience and tailor their strategy accordingly.

- Sentiment analysis

Not only the number of comments and mentions of the brand is important. Businesses use social media to see how customers actually feel about them and therefore manage their reputation.

To sum up, social media is a powerful tool for brands not only for promoting themselves, but also for analyzing the market, the competitors and the customers, interacting with followers and tracking their sentiment, showing the people behind the brand, supporting the brand's reputation, and using the platform to show company's voice and knowledge.

Effective use of social media is complex due to the vast number of those media and the amount of people involved. The interested parties include the brand managers, the social media marketing department of the company or the outsourced SMM agency (including freelancers), the talent participating in campaigns, business partners, etc. Therefore, a number of digital social media management solutions were developed to help enterprises stay on track with their SMM strategy. The market of such solutions is highly driven by the American and European companies which cater to the needs of the western consumer. However, as it is seen from this research, the dominating social media channels in Russia are different from the rest of the world, and therefore there is a need for a platform which fulfills all the specific needs of the Russian market.

3 SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Social media management software (SMMS) enables companies to manage several social media account in one place. These platform allow automated and postponed posting, social listening, analytics, real-time reports, etc. In some cases, managers of the accounts are able to communicate directly on these platforms to discuss their goals, strategy and content. (Finances Online 2019.)

SMMS combines the functions of various social media marketing tools. These tools are developed to automate social media marketing activities and make the job of the managers more time- and cost-effective.

3.1 Types of Social Media Marketing Tools

RazorSocial (2019) suggests nine social media tool categories. Those include:

1. Social Media Analytics

These tools are used to analyze the engagement, growth, outcomes of campaigns, and they are important to measure the success of different initiatives. Tools used for that purpose include Google Analytics, Hotjar and others.

2. Social Advertising

These tools are used to manage ads campaigns on various platforms, run reports and optimize those campaigns. Tools used for that purpose include Qwaya, AdExpresso and others.

3. Social Media Monitoring

These tools are used for social listening; comments, mentions and keyword monitoring; sentiment analysis; influencer tracking; reports. Tools used for that purpose include Brand24 and others.

4. Social Influence Management

These tools are used to find the influencers relevant for brand's industry and audience, and to engage with them. These solutions include suitable influencers lists, information and statistic on their outreach on the platform, reports on the engagement, etc. Tools used for that purpose include GroupHigh, Influential and others.

5. Social Commerce

These tools are used to enable purchases directly through social channels. Tools used for that purpose include BigCommerce and others.

6. Content Marketing

These tools are used for optimizing content promotion on different channels, suggesting the content types suitable for various platforms. Tools used for that purpose include BuzzSumo and others.

7. Content Curation

These tools are used for effectively storing and filtering existing content, they are also effective when it comes to working with big amounts of files and data.

In addition to the categories mentioned above, Brandon Harville (2019) at Omniposter suggest two other tool types:

8. Target Audience Identification and Segmentation

These tools are used for discovering social media users that fit brand's target audience, track their activities and learn more about their behavior. Tools used for that purpose include Audiense, Socedo and others.

9. Content creation

These tools are used for creating unique content, including both texts and visuals, for different social media channels. They allow catering the content to specific formats to make it effective on different platforms. Tools used for that purpose include BuzzSumo, Canva, Animoto and others.

Additionally, when SMM activities are managed by a team and/or are outsourced, it is important for everyone involved to have a clear set of goals and be able to communicate with each other. Therefore, various project management and/or customer relationship management (CRM) tools are used for these purposes. Those tools include Trello, Slack, Jira and others.

3.2 Social Media Management Software Analysis

Social media management software combines the functions of single-use social media tools mentioned above. In order to identify services functions for a new solution it is essential to analyze the existing software.

As this work concerns specifically the Russian market, the analysis looks at both global and country-specific solutions separately.

3.2.1   Social Media Management Software Globally

Media outlets and tech companies, like Forbes (Forbes Agency Council 2017), Finances Online (Gilbert 2019), Techradar (Marshall, Drake & Turner 2019), Social Media Today (Oh 2019) and WordStream (Cunha 2019), all mention the following SMMS as the most popular solutions globally:

- Hootsuite
- SproutSocial
- Buffer
- Agorapulse.

Most of the solutions mentioned above have similar functions. Therefore, to avoid being repetitive, the analysis focuses on the comparison of those solutions rather than simply listing their features.

Hootsuite is one of the oldest and most used SMMS solutions on the market. It supports more than 20 social media platforms, allows multiple posting and scheduling, enables content curation and has some basic team management features. It also includes monitoring, analytics, security and ads management, and offers insights and industry statistics. It has 250 partner apps incorporated in the platform, which opens up more opportunities for content creation, CRM and other aspects of the SMM spectrum. (Hootsuite 2019.)

However, it does not support any social engagement, and all the communications with consumers should be done manually. (Hootsuite 2019.)

Sproutsocial is similar to Hootsuite, and even though it supports a smaller number of social networks, it does offer some additional functions. For example, it provides statistics on specific posts, and it has a social inbox which allows easy communication with consumers from different platforms all in one place. (SproutSocial 2019.)

Buffer is similar to the previous two platforms, however, it has limited team features and limited social inbox, as well as a smaller number of social media platforms it supports (Buffer 2019).

Agorapulse combines all the functions of the previous 3 solutions, and it has a variety of additional useful features like content segmentation and filtering, and content approval from clients. It also includes some powerful tools to work with and analyze the target audience. (Agorapulse 2019.)

3.2.2 Opportunities, Limitations and Trends in the Global SMMS Market

As seen from the chapter 3.2.1, all of the platforms support most of the tools categories mentioned in the beginning of the chapter 3.1. The same functions are developed differently on different platforms, and therefore users always have to choose what is more important to them and what, on the other hand, they are willing to sacrifice. For example, SproutSocial is a better solution for communicating with followers, while Agorapulse is recommended for target audience identification and segmentation.

None of the platforms support social influence management, and therefore users have to utilize addition tools for that purpose, which will cost a company time and money. Additionally, none of the solutions are available in Russian language, neither do they offer integrations with Russian social media platforms. Therefore, these SMMS examples are not suitable for the market in question.

3.2.3 Social Media Management Software in Russia

Russian companies mainly use different tools for specific purposes. Those include: analytical tools, content creation tools, automated posting tools, audience targeting tools, social advertisement tools, monitoring tools and reporting tools. (Sukhovskii 2019.)

When it comes to more complex solutions, industry specialists like Rusbase (Kiyashko 2017), Netology (Rai 2014) and Teplitsa Socialnikh Technologii (Alekseev 2014) have all mentioned the following as the top SMMS tools:

- SMMPlanner
- Amplifr
- PublBox
- Awario.

Most of the SMMS solution have similar functions. Therefore, to avoid being repetitive, the analysis focuses on the comparison of those solutions rather than simply listing their features.

SMMPlanner supports a number of social media and networks, including Telegram and Viber. This platform only offers automated scheduled posting and some simple content creation tools. (SMMPlanner 2019.)

Amplifr is a more complex solution, which in addition to multi-channel scheduling offers reporting, team management, posts approval, industry and competitor analytics, content adaptation and suggestions. Some of the functions, for example text adaptation for different

platforms (e.g. Instagram does not support links, while Facebook – hashtags), or posts suggestions based on the most popular publication in the industry, are unique and were not mentioned by the American and European media outlets or industry specialists. (Amplifr 2019.)

Publbox offers automated posting, content adaptation and suggestions and team management, as well some unique functions like pre-maid social media strategies, content plans and calendars catered for different platforms. (PublBox 2019). Finally, Awario is the first platform to support social engagement and monitoring, opening the opportunity to communicate with followers directly, to search for keywords and mentions and to analyze the overall sentiment of the consumers (Awario 2019).

3.2.4   Opportunities, Limitations and Trends in the Russian SMMS Market

As seen from the chapter 3.2.3, tools developed for the Russian SMMS market are significantly limited compared to those popular globally. SMM specialists have to use a variety of tools to manage all the accounts of the brands, which is inefficient.

Additionally, solutions for the Russian market are not only different when it comes to platforms, but when it comes to functions as well. The local tools are limited in functions compared to the globally renowned examples, however, they have some unique services like text adaptation or posts suggestions.

Both aforementioned facts prove that in order to satisfy a Russian client it is important to consider market-specific details and exceptions.

3.3   Results

Overall, the analysis above shows significant potential for SMMS business in Russia. The solution should include the following categories mentioned previously in this chapter: social media analytics, social media advertising, social monitoring, social commerce, content marketing, content curation, content creation, target audience identification and segmentation, and team management. To be competitive on the global market, the platform should offer social influencer management tools. To stay relative in Russia, it should support Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki, enable content adaptation and give content suggestions based on the publication analysis.

As most of the solutions offer some kinds of content creation tools, there is still the question of who the people using it are. Do the marketing managers of medium-sized businesses or CEOs of small companies create texts and visuals for their brand accounts, or

do they involve external talent and freelancers? If so, could the talent pool be incorporated into the platform along with the influence management service as a competitive advantage?

All these theories and questions are further discussed in the next chapter of this thesis – the analysis of a series of interviews with social media marketing managers from Russia.

4   EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Eight interviews with SMM specialists from Russia were carried out for this research. The interviews were semi-structured: the same topics were discussed with all the interviewees. However, each participant was encouraged to discuss what they think is relevant for the study.

The aim of the interviews was to apprehend the problems the SMM specialists face while doing their jobs, carrying out projects and working with clients. The discussions focused on the areas of social media marketing which could be outsourced, automated, and implemented in the functions of the SMM agency.

4.1   Data Collection and Research Ethics

In accordance with GDPR, the participants were informed of the aim of the interviews and the interviewer. The interviewees participated voluntarily, and they consented to sharing their personal information with the author and their supervisors. However, they refused to openly publish their answers as they are directly connected to their confidential work practices which they prefer to keep private. The participants requested anonymity and, therefore, their last names will not be disclosed in this study. The interviews were recorded with the consent of all participants, the author was the only person with the access to the recordings, and all the recordings were destroyed when the research was finished. The transcripts of the interviews are presented in the appendices of this work, but they are protected by the confidentiality agreement. The interviewees have the right to withdraw their consent at any time, and the information they shared could only be used for the agreed purpose: academic research. (Ethicsguidebook.ac.uk 2018).

Everything said during the interviews are the personal opinions of the participants. The interviewees had access to the final draft to ensure the information collected was presented truthfully and respectfully.

In text, the results are referred to appendices 1-8 of this thesis, rather than the list of reference. The appendices include English summaries and full Russian transcripts of the interviews with Anna, Roman, Aleksei, Alexander, Roman, Anna, Natalia, and Ilya.

4.2   Interviews

The aim of the interviews is to get the social media marketing managers' perspectives on the current situation in the industry and digital solutions they use or would like to use for

social media management. The interviewees were all located in Russia and work for Russian clients and audience.

4.3   Discussion Topics

The analysis of the current global digital social media management solutions shows their non-compliance with the Russian market due to the absence of Russian language localization and support of Russian social networks: Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki.

The analysis of the current Russian social media management solutions shows that they are significantly limited in functions, and therefore there is a need for a complex SMMS program. Additionally, neither global nor Russian solutions offer influencer management or talent databases for the outsourcing of some marketing functions.

The interviews were semi-structured, and the interviewees were given discussion topics rather than were asked questions. The topics were based on the results of the literature review.

The analysis of SMM industry and available social media management software solutions show that the following functions are considered to be relevant for a new tool:

- Social media analytics

- Social advertising

- Social media monitoring

- Content marketing

- Content curation

- Content creation

- Target audience identification and segmentation

- Team management

- Social influencer management.

Some of these services needed to be discussed with the potential users of the new solution. It was necessary to understand how exactly these functions will be used and which aspects should be developed in a special way. A number of questions were raised for further discussion with the interviewees:

1. Do the SMM managers create and curate content themselves, and if so, do they need content creation, content adaptation and content curation tools?

2. Do the SMM managers involve external talent for content creation, content adaptation and content curation, and if so, how do they find them? Do they use databases or talent pools, and how do they judge on someone's professionalism by looking at their online profiles? Is there a case-based talent pool database which shows the real-life works of those talents, and if so, do they use it or would they like to use it?

3. An integrated platform for team management is essential for a SMMS solution, but do managers incorporate other stakeholders (including clients, CEO, senior managers, etc.) in their conversation? If so, is there a need for a complex CRM solution inside the platform?

Finding answers to the questions had a significant importance in delivering the complete solution to the market. In order to do so, the interview topics were separated into 6 different sub-themes:

1. Introduction

The introductory topics helped to understand interviewees' perspective on the SMM industry and understand their approach to social media marketing projects. The participants were invited to share their thoughts on the following topics:

- Segmentation of social media marketing area

- Goals of a social media marketing campaign

- Question to the clients prior the implementation of a campaign

- Project stages.

The results of these discussion showed how much the managers are involved in the campaigns and what possible tools they require in order to make the work more effective, to save time and costs.

2. Difficulties

The interviewees were asked to share the most difficult parts of their job and the tools they wished they had to eliminate those complications. The results showed the areas of potential demand for new tools in the SMMS solution.

3. Content

Discussions about the content focused on the importance of graphics and textual materi-
als in marketing and the difficulties the managers have. The participants were invited to
share the thoughts on the following topics:

- Content strategy

- Difficulties when it comes to content

- Solutions: content generation and content adaptation functions

The results of these discussions showed how much the managers were involved in con-
tent creation and what possible tools they required to make the work more effective, to
save time and costs.

4. Communication

The participants were encouraged to share their opinions on the communication tools for
team management and client support, and a possible complex CRM tool integrated in the
new SMMS solution.

5. Case-Based Talent Pool Database

The participants were encouraged to share their opinions on finding external talent and
possible usage of online outsourcing platforms. They also commented upon a possible
case-based talent pool database integrated in the new SMMS solution.

6. Industry Forecast

The participants share their outlook on the future of the industry which helps to predict the
future needs of social media marketing managers in Russia.

5   RESULTS

Eight interviewees from Russia were social media marketing professionals with up to 15 years of experience. The participants' profiles were the following:

1.   Anna. Degree in Public Relations, 10 years' experience in social media marketing, self-employed.

2.   Roman. 15 years' experience in social media marketing.

3.   Aleksei. 12 years' experience in digital marketing. Used to work in a large corporation, now is the CEO of his own SMM agency.

4.   Alexander. MBA in Advertising, experience in eCommerce. Currently works in Netology, the online marketing educational institution.

5.   Roman. PR graduate, marketeer. Works in SMM since 2015.

6.   Anna. More than 10 years of experience in SMM.

7.   Natalia. Brand and digital strategy. Previously sales director.

8.   Ilya. Founder of an SMM agency, SMM consultant.

Full transcripts in Russian and summaries in English are presented in appendixes 1-8 respectively.

5.1.1   Introduction

All the participants share some of the SMM goals, and each of those goals mentioned are presented below:

- Lead generation

- Audience attraction

- Brand image support

- News sharing

- Advertisement of the brand or their products

- Communication with brand's audience

- Sales growth

- Training and consulting.

The new SMMS tool could be used to support the achievement of all the aforementioned goals.

The interviewees segment the industry on different basis:

- By parties interested in social media marketing: self-employed (bloggers promoting themselves), inhouse marketing departments (marketeers, PR managers, brand directors), contractors (agencies or freelancers hired by the companies and promote their clients (companies)).
- By parties involved in the implementation of campaigns: "targeters" (those who define target audience and cater the marketing activities to those audiences), content creators, designers, managers, tech specialists.
- By company size: large (have their own marketing and content-creation departments), medium (have inhouse marketeers), small (CEO is highly involved in SMM).
- By company revenue: large (big budgets, high value contracts), medium (more than a million (rub) in monthly revenue), small (300-400 thousand (rub) in monthly revenue).
- By types of SMM managers involved: "old-school" (experienced in all spheres of SMM, they work with planning, content creation, analytics, bloggers, etc.; they do not require special tools, solve problems as they come), "new-school" (narrow field professionals who are experienced in a specific activity on a specific platform).

Based on the variety of segmentation variations it is clear that managers have different outlooks and approaches to campaign management, and therefore require a tool that can be adjusted to their needs.

The SMM managers ask the clients the following ten questions prior to starting to work on the campaign:

1. What does their company do?

2. Who is their audience?

3. What do they want to achieve?

4. What is their budget?

5. Do they need content adaptation or creation?

6. Do they have a marketing strategy?

7. What type content do they want to use?

8. What makes them different from their competitors? (Product, target audience, etc.)

9. What is the seasonality, trends on their market?

10. What marketing initiatives were implemented previously and what are their results?

The questions asked suggest that the clients are involved in the campaigns, and therefore there is a potential need for a complex CRM solution which allows client-manager-stakeholders communication on different project stages.

The projects usually include the following stages:

1. Negotiations with the client

2. Budgeting

3. Search for third-party professionals involved in the project implementation (if needed)

4. Creation of content plan;

5. Test

6. Implementation

7. Analytics.

Some of the most relevant for the SMMS tool project stages mentioned are negotiations (need for a communication tool), planning, and analytics. Additionally, search for outsourced talent could be integrated into the tool as a database.

Overall, the results presented above reveal that SMM managers are highly involved in all the aspects of the campaigns from negotiations and communication with clients to planning, content creation, competitors and campaign analysis, etc. It means that the interviewees require a complex solution, which needs to include some customer relationship management (CRM) and team management systems combined to communicate throughout various project stages. They also require content creation, curation and adaptation tools, as well as some platform for outsourcing talent, including content creators, designers, tech specialists, and influencers.

5.1.2 Difficulties

The interviewees mention the following aspects of their work as significantly difficult:

- Content – the primary problem of SMM.
- Analytics – the second most frequently mentioned problem among participants. No single platform for full analytics of all accounts, which leads to struggles in campaign effectiveness evaluation.
- Communication with the client: explaining the strategy, its effectiveness, and costs of services.
- Communication within the team: no platform connecting the client, the team members, the outsourced talent and freelancers together.
- Simultaneous campaigns management and ads management.
- Segmentation and targeting.
- Effective promotion algorithm: social media trends change too fast and there is not one set of rules that will work for all.
- Lack of SMM expertise, which leads to high entry threshold into some industry areas (e.g. SMM for FMCG).

The new SMMS tool can potentially solve all these problems, and therefore bring value to the clients. Communication, analytics and planning have already been mentioned several times by each of the interviewees as either focus or problem areas of their job.

5.1.3 Content

Content is considered the primary problem of SMM by many. The reasons for it are:

- Disagreements between the customer and the performer (SMM agency or freelancers).
- People do not understand what to post. They do not realize that content should be unique and suited for different purposes and different platforms.
- Outsourced talent (especially copywriters) are not skilled enough, and they do not understand the target audience.
- Lack of materials on the subject (industry-specific content).
- Content management: difficult to remain consistent and create exciting content for long periods of time.

Content strategy is based on competitor analysis. However, the content itself (especially graphical content: images and videos, as they are perceived more important than text) is difficult to generate if not provided by the client.

Content generation is the service of interest for the minority of the participants. They believe it causes devaluation of specialist work, and such content would be unacceptable for large companies who expect unique creative work.

However, the majority of interviewees are interested in content creation (photo, video and text editing software) and content adaptation services. The adaptation will be especially valuable considering that, for example, hashtags do not work on Facebook while links do not work on Instagram. A service that will cater to such specifics of different platforms are mentioned by the majority of the participants. Other ideas include:

- Video adaptation: analysis of the most popular videos of the account, what they have in common, etc.
- Image adaptation: analysis of the most popular images of the account, what they have in common, etc.; adaptation of previews.
- Text adaptation: the service considers text's size for different networks, text formation, stylistic advice.

However, some of the interviewees are worried that it will take a lot of work and data analysis in order for content adaptation function to be successful.

Content is the area of high potential for the new SMMS tool as the communication, management and talent source sides of it as well as the possible generation and creation functions could be implemented as a part of the digital solution.

5.1.4 Communication

As communication within the team and with clients are considered difficult by the majority of the interviewees, they were asked to share their thoughts on CRM tools: what do they use now and what functions their current solutions of choice lack.

The tools the interviewees use on daily basis include:

- Megaplan
- Bitrix24
- Combination of Slack, Jira and Trello
- Combination of Trello, Asana, Basecamp and Slack
- Combination of Jira and Trello
- Combination of OnePost, cloud services and multiple telegram chats.

All of the interviewees find their current solutions inadequate. Reasons for it are:

- Inefficiency: need for a combination of tools.

- No possibility to connect all the team members and the clients together.
- Unneeded functions.
- Interface and navigation.

7 out of 8 interviewees see an opportunity for CRM for SMM service. They believe the solutions should have the following five functions:

1. Integrated communication tool for the team, the outsourced talent and the client: platform for discussions;

2. Content and materials storage;

3. Post preview for client's approval;

4. Integrated social networks and a possibility to post directly through the software;

5. Responsive design for mobile.

To sum up, an integrated CRM solution has a significant potential in the SMMS industry. The interviewed professionals find the current programs on the market inefficient and would like to see a new communication tool.

5.1.5 Case-based Talent Pool Database

None of the interviewees currently use any online outsourcing platform (e.g. Freelancer.com). The reasons for it are:

- It is impossible to estimate employee's professionalism and work ethics.
- It cannot guarantee results.
- It is difficult to explain tasks.
- It is impossible to filter talent based on their skills, previous experience, etc.

Only half of the participants believe in a case-based talent pool database. The four main concerns are:

1. Companies will not want to share any sensitive data and targets they achieved with the help of the talent, which is the most important in assessing talents' skills and experiences.

2. Difficult to assess and evaluate the case results: how do you calculate how many people visited a café because of its SMM activities and not something else (word of mouth, physical ads, etc.).

3. Difficult to verify the truthfulness of talent's profiles and cases.

4. The professionalism should be evaluated with the test tasks, not the portfolios.

The results presented above show that a case-based talent pool database is a questionable addition to the SMMS solution. It has some potential, but it should be tested and proved effective before becoming a permanent function of the new software.

5.1.6 Suggested Service Ideas

The interviewees have come up with the following functions for a new tool:

- Service that combines folders and files in Google Drive into social media posts.
- Service for content ideas, e.g. "Tomorrow is St. Valentine's day – create a post about it".
- A tool which will automatically post comments and start conversations with followers.
- Automated reports for clients.
- Target audience questionnaire compilator.

5.1.7 Industry Forecast

The participants shared their thoughts on the future of the industry, including new trends, new tools and new players in the field. The results are the following:

- Everything, including content creation, will be automated – the most popular prediction.
- People will prefer easily consumed content: videos and live streams.
- New tools: evaluating the effectiveness of posts, creation of a single database compiling target audiences from different social networks, report automation, a single tool for editing pictures and videos according to the needs and the account's theme.
- Chatbots.
- Cost of SMM services will decrease.
- Companies will have to pay for their posts to be visible on social media due to the new algorithms introduced by social networks to increase monetization.
- Direct payment through social networks.
- It will get harder to keep up with the trends.
- SMM specialists will have to become better strategists.
- The distance between brands and consumers will get smaller. Brand pages will be perceived as friend pages.

The new SMMS solution will be created for the users of today, but it will change in the years to come, and it is important to be ready for what the future will bring. One day the solution could require an integrated online wallet or a money transferring software, a complex targeting tool or video generating software. It is not advised to invest in these functions right now, but it is essential to be prepared for them to come in the future.

5.2   Interview Findings

The results of the interviews allowed the author to test their hypothesizes and to analyse the current state of the SMM industry in Russia from the real professionals' perspective.

In addition to social media analytics, social advertising (ads management), social media monitoring, social influence management, social commerce, content marketing, content curation, content creation, target audience identification and segmentation, and team management, there are other functions that new SMMS tool has to include to satisfy the needs of the industry and to stand out from the competitors. Those three sets of functions were questioned in the subchapter 4.3, and the answers to those questions are the following:

1. The SMM managers do create content themselves, and therefore require content creation, curation and adaptation tools. However, the content generation service is not an area of interest for the interviewees.

2. The SMM managers do involve external talent for content creation and curation, however, they do not use any existing outsourcing platforms, and prefer to work with people they know. Half of the participants showed interest in a case-based talent pool database, but raised several concerns: how would this platform be created, would the companies willingly share sensitive information from the cases, and how can the talents' profiles and claims be proved truthful.

3. The SMM managers do need a complex CRM solution with both team management and client conversation integration, which should include multiple chats, possibility for post approval from the clients, and a content database.

6   CONCLUSION

This thesis' main objective is to evaluate the current market of social media management software and to identify services functions for a new solution. The objective is achieved with the help of the literature review, SMMS market analysis and 8 interviews with industry specialists.

The literature review shows that in the last decade the interest towards social media have been constantly growing both globally and in Russia. The social media management software industry is developing, and there is an opportunity for a new SMMS solution.

A variety of SMM tools offered to marketeers around the globe are not sufficient as it is difficult and time-consuming to constantly manage several platforms. A complex SMMS solution has to include a variety of functions in order to effectively achieve the goals of social media marketing: to advertise the brand and its products, to humanize the brand, to show the brand as a thought leader, to study the market and the competitors, to learn more about the clients and analyze their sentiment, to communicate with them and offer them customer service and support. The SMMS solution should also be able to connect all the interested parties: brand managers, social media marketing department of the company or the outsourced SMM agency (including freelancers) and their client, the talent participating in campaigns, partner businesses, etc.

The SMMS tool should include the following functions: social media analytics, social advertising (ads management), social media monitoring, social influence management, social commerce, content marketing, content curation, content creation, target audience identification and segmentation, and team management.

The analysis of the SMMS solutions shows none of them are sufficient for a Russian client. The global tools lack the integration of Russian social networks Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki, which are proved to be one of the most popular in the country, and therefore are crucial for social media marketing. Russian SMMS solutions are significantly limited in functions compared to the global ones, however, some of the services they provide are unique, like text adaptation or posts suggestions. Despite that, SMM managers in Russia have to use a set of different tools to keep track of their ongoing campaigns. None of the analysed solutions support social influence management, which is claimed to be one of the important functions of the tool.

The results of the literature review highlight the tools that SMM managers around the world use daily, however, some additional question about those tools appear: are they enough and how can a new SMMS solution stand out? Is there a need for a complex

CRM solution with team management and client support integration, a case-based talent pool database, content generation and content creation? The functions in question are further discussed in the interviews with industry professionals in the following chapters.

The literature review and market analysis are followed by the empirical part of the research: 8 interviews with SMM professionals with up to 15 years of experience in the industry in Russia. The aim of the interviews is to get the social media marketing managers' perspectives on the current situation in the industry and digital solutions they use or would like to use for social media management.

None of the interviewees is completely satisfied with the digital solutions they currently have. The interviews show that SMM managers are highly involved in all aspects of the campaigns from negotiations and communications with clients to planning, content creation, competitors and campaign analysis, etc. This means that the participants require a complex tool, which needs to include some customer relationship management (CRM) and team management systems combined to communicate throughout various project stages. They also require content creation, curation and adaptation tools, as well as some platform for outsourcing talent, including content creators, designers, tech specialists and influencers.

Content is described as the primary problem of SMM alongside with analytics, communication with clients and within the team, campaign management and ads management, segmentation and targeting, and lack of effective promotion algorithms and SMM expertise. The SMMS solutions should be able to minimize or completely eliminate those problems.

Reasons for content being the key issue of SMM are communication between the client and the performer (SMM professionals), lack of skills of content creators, lack of materials on the subject, and content management. This proves that many problems are linked to each other, and there is a lacuna in SMM tools offer which needs to be filled in order for those problems to be eliminated. The interviewees are interested in content creation and adaptation services.

When it comes to communication, a problem that was raised on its own and as a part of the content issue, an integrated CRM solution has a significant potential in the SMMS industry. The interviewed professionals find the programs on the current market inefficient and would like to see a new communication tool, which integrates communication within the team with the outsourced talent and the client. It should also include content and materials storage, post preview for client's approval, integrated social networks, a possibility to post directly through the software, and responsive design for mobile.

Outsourced talent presents an issue, as it is difficult to evaluate the professionalism of freelancers and to effectively communicate with them. The process of content creation is thus made more laborious. They are therefore seen as an overall complication to the social media marketing process by the interviewees. However, the interviews show that a case-based talent pool database, where each profile will be supported with a real-life case showing their professionalism and expertise, is a questionable addition to the SMMS solution. It has some potential, but it should be tested and proved effective before becoming a permanent function of the new software.

The SMM managers have ideas of their own when it comes to social media management solutions, which means they understand how specific issues could be minimized and eliminated. Those include: a service that combines folders and files in Google Drive into social media posts; a service for content ideas; a tool which automatically posts comments and start conversations with followers; automated reports for clients; target audience questionnaire compilator.

Finally, the participants share their predictions for the future of the industry. It is believed that for the new SMMS solution to be successful it is important to deliver updates in consistent and timely manner, keeping track and responding to the trends in the industry. The SMM managers believe that all actions in SMM will be automated, and the chatbots will be on the rise. Videos will become more popular than images and text, and new tools like evaluating the effectiveness of posts, creation of a single database compiling target audiences from different social networks, report automation, and a single tool for editing pictures and videos according to the needs and the account's theme will appear. The costs of SMM service will decrease, and the brands will have to start paying for their posts on social media. The customers will pay directly through social networks, and the distance between the brand and its consumers will get smaller. Finally, SMM managers will have to become better strategists, and it will become harder to keep up with the trends.

To sum up, all methods used in this thesis show that there is an opportunity for a new SMMS tool in the Russian market, and the literature review and the interviews have helped to establish the services functions for this new tool to be successful.

The main goal of the thesis was achieved. The answers to the research question and subquestion are presented in the following subchapter.

6.1   Answers to the Research Questions

Both the research question and the subquestion are formed in chapter 1.1. The sub-question is:

How is the Russian social media management software market different from the global one?

The main difference between the Russian and the global SMMS markets is the social networks those solutions support. Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki are the dominating networks in CIS countries, and they are not integrated in any of the international SMMS tools.

Additionally, the SMMS market in Russia is underdeveloped compared to solutions globally, and the services functions are limited. However, despite the smaller number of tools included in the solutions, Russian solutions offer some unique functions like text adaptation or posts suggestions.

The main research question is:

What services functions for a social media management solution are in demand on the Russian market?

The literature review and eight interviews with SMM industry specialists from Russia prove that the following eleven functions are in-demand on the market in question:

1. Social Media Analytics: a tool combining analytics from different platforms in one place, which also creates automated reports for clients;

2. Social Advertising: a tool managing ads campaigns on various platforms, running reports and optimizing those campaigns;

3. Social Media Monitoring: a tool for social listening; comment, mentions and keyword monitoring; sentiment analysis and reports;

4. Social Influence Management: a tool for finding and connecting with the influencers relevant for brand's industry and audience;

5. Content Marketing: a tool used for optimizing content promotion on different channels, suggesting the content types suitable for various platforms and offering content ideas;

6. Content creation: a tool used for creating unique content, including both texts and visuals, for different social media channels;

7. Content adaptation: a tool used for automatically adapting content for different platforms;

8. Content Curation: a tool used for storing and filtering existing content, which helps to work with big amounts of data;

9. Target Audience Identification and Segmentation: a tool used for discovering and learning more about social media users that fit brand's target audience, which includs target audience questionnaire compilator;

10. CRM: a communication tool integrating conversations within the team, with the outsourced talent and with the clients, which also includes content and materials storage, post preview for client's approval, integrated social networks, and a possibility to post directly through the software;

11. A tool which automatically posts comments and start conversations with followers.

6.2   Suggestions for Further Research

The main aim of this thesis is to evaluate the current market of social media management software and to identify services functions for a new solution in order to start a new company in Russia. This research is based on theory, and theory needs to be put into practice. In order to evaluate the findings, an actual software prototype could be developed for testing as a part of a practice-based research. The results of the recommended research will reveal which functions are in demand for a new service, and should therefore be implemented fully in the actual product, and which ones are not.

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