Choice and Preferences in the News Content of the Online Audience of Central Asia and Kazakhstan

Bakhtiyar Nurumov, Galiya Ibrayeva, Karlyga Myssayeva

al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan

Michael Brown

University of Wyoming Laramie, USA

Author Note

Bakhtiyar Nurumov, doctoral candidate, al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan. E-mail: bahanurum@gmail.com

Galiya Ibrayeva, professor, doctor of political science al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan. E-mail: galiya.Ibrayeva@kaznu.kz

Karlyga Myssayeva, PhD, al-Farabi Kazakh National University E-mail myssayeva.kn@gmail.com

Michael Brown, PhD Emeritus professor, University of Wyoming Laramie, Wyoming, USA. E-mail: mrbrown@uwyo.edu

Annotation

The article presents the results of a study to identify choices and preferences for news content in Kazakhstan’s online audience compared to users in Central Asia. The study is based on the results of a large-scale survey conducted by IWPR in 2019 in four countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. 4,130 people were interviewed, including a number of media experts. An online research method was used in which respondents were selected among Internet users in real time (River sampling). The study showed that, along with the increased penetration of the Internet into Central Asian countries, online consumers of news content in Kazakhstan began to use social networks and instant messengers more often. It was found that social networks in Central Asian countries show a tendency to replace traditional media in terms of users' consumption of operational news. At the same time, Kazakhstanis do not pay attention to the source of information, which can contribute to the influence of fake news and manipulations. The problems of lack of demand for online news of the economy, culture, ecology and other spheres of human activity are considered. Possible directions of the development of news consumption through social networks in Central Asia and Kazakhstan in the emerging multimedia environment are indicated.

Keywords: social networks, news, online audience, Internet, Central Asia

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Introduction

The Central Asia region and Kazakhstan, located at the junction of two continents, are integrating more and more into the global information space every day. Many factors contribute to this, the main one being the global development of information and communication technologies. In this regard, it becomes urgent to identify the changing preferences of local consumers of information content distributed via the Internet. What does an online news audience pay attention to? What forces a person to make a choice in favor of this or that information received in a global network? The answers to these and other questions are of interest to the authors of this article.

The Reuters Journalism Research Institute's Digital News Report (Digital News Report, 2019) provides an overview of online news consumption in 38 countries, including South Africa. However, the Central Asian countries and Kazakhstan are not included in this study. In this regard, we believe that a study entitled “Consumption of Internet News Materials in Central Asia” conducted by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in 2019 (Cabar, 2019) as part of the project “Development of New Media and Digital Journalism in Central Asia ”, in which the authors of the article took part, can fill the gap regarding the situation in Central Asia and Kazakhstan, in particular. In addition, each country studied has its own characteristics, based on the national specifics of online news consumption. Particular attention in this context will be given to Kazakhstan. It is worth noting that the IWPR study is the first attempt to measure the online audience of news media across the region, to offer their own data in comparison with global trends. In Kazakhstan, the topic of digital media was first addressed in 2011. This was the Internews Kazakhstan project “New Digital Media of Central Asian Countries”. There was no special study of the regional audience. Despite a noticeable shift towards Internet penetration, Kazakhstan is still on the periphery. A country, like many other developing countries, has to follow the trail of developed countries in the field of media.

Literature review

The nature of the audience of new media has long been the subject of scrutiny by scientists and specialists not only in journalism, but also by sociologists, philosophers, political scientists, economists, and others. The topic is extensive and requires study due to the daily changing reality: new social networks appear, and accordingly, new people who use them. At the same time, some types of new media are becoming less popular, and some are getting ahead in terms of percentage of use. In addition, the flow of news itself is changing, which, with the development of digital technologies, is acquiring new formats. Both Kazakhstani and foreign scientists, including researchers from Central Asian countries, speak about the importance of studying such a phenomenon as social networks and instant messengers (Bykov, Hradziushko, Ibrayeva & Turdubaeva, 2018). A number of russian researchers (Loseva, 2016), (Mikhailov, V. & Mikhailov, S., 2004), (Mikheev & Nestik, 2018), (Radina, 2016), (Rykov, 2017) pay great attention to the topic of the audience of new media. Among foreign scientists studying the audience of new media, it can be noted (Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012), (Layng, 2016), (McPartland, 2013), (Sherman, Michikyan & Greenfield, 2013). Social networks have been the subject of study by Mexican researchers (Sandoval-Almazán, R. & Núñez Armas, J. 2016), who tried to find a connection between social networks and the so-called “smart” cities. Meanwhile, a number of scientists offer their own ways to study the consumption of online news. In particular, the work of a group of researchers (Majó-Vázquez, Nielsen & González-Bailón, 2019), which proposed a new approach to comparing the consumption of online news on the example of three European countries, is noteworthy. At the same time, the audience in some countries is fragmented largely due to the dominance of several sources with very high coverage (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017). The relationship between the audience and the news is in the middle of a paradigm shift, and what the audience will ultimately do is difficult to predict, Malaysian researchers note (Mustaffa, Sannusi, Abu Hasan & Mat Saad, 2017). An essential factor in determining the audience’s news preferences is the online news video. Giants such as Facebook and Google have long been promoting a format that allows you to create, distribute and use forms of digital video content for news, while generating revenue from advertising (Kalogeropoulos & Nielsen, 2018). In this regard, the question arises - are consumers ready to pay for online news? A group of Danish researchers (Kammer, Boeck, Hansen & Hauschildt, 2015) found that most of the audience did not want to pay for news either online or offline. The willingness to pay for online news, according to scientists, depends on several factors: the fundamental position of the consumer, journalistic quality and the subscription model. At the same time, the results show that the older audience is more likely to pay for online news than the younger ones. An important factor is the banal consumer confidence in modern Internet technologies. Issues such as security and privacy are often an obstacle for users to accept online applications (Shah & Lim, 2011). Currently, there are attempts to predict the further development of new media segments. Meanwhile, these forecasts are based on a key factor for new media - how to make more money. In other words, studying an online audience is beneficial only from a financial point of view. In this context, our study is aimed not so much at creating an overall picture of consumers of online news in Central Asia, but rather about identifying the motives of the online audience in choosing and preferences for news content.

Purpose and goals

The purpose of the study is to provide comprehensive data on the choice and preferences of news content for an online audience of Central Asian countries with an emphasis on Kazakhstan. The task was to conduct a comparative analysis of the online consumers of the four states, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the consumption of news content distributed through social networks and instant messengers. In particular, determine the patterns of consumption of online news by main sources, format, genres and topics; analyze patterns of use of social networks by news agencies.

Hypothesis

As a hypothesis, the authors of the study believe that over time, the online audience of Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan, will only expand. At the same time, social networks and instant messengers will become the main source of receiving operational news than traditional media. By online audience of news content we mean the maximum audience, that is, all visitors to the Internet, including those who have used it at least once (Logunova, 2019, p. 241).

Methodology

The basic research methods were an online survey and in-depth interviews with media experts. Respondents were asked to answer 32 questions with answer options that were divided into groups (general information, topics and genres, platforms (channels), attitude, fact checking, gender sensitivity and hate speech in news materials). In-depth interviews with 20 media experts set the goal of identifying and analyzing an expert opinion on the features of new media, the state of journalism of new media in the country, and patterns of news consumer behavior. The survey was conducted in the form of a semi-formalized online questionnaire with self-assessment in five languages: Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Russian, Tajik and Uzbek. The questionnaire was distributed through partner news agencies, social networks, instant messaging services, mailing lists, posters, advertising banners, etc. In addition, analysis of accounts in social networks of 40 new media, including 10 Kazakhstani, was carried out. The study was limited by the low penetration of the Internet in rural areas and the low representation of women in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In total, within the framework of a survey conducted over 30 days (May-June 2019), 4,130 respondents from Kyrgyzstan (31.5%), Kazakhstan (24.3%), Uzbekistan (23.5%) and Tajikistan (20, 7%) aged 16 years and older. At the same time, 62% of men and 38% of women took part in the survey and in-depth interviews with experts. It is noteworthy that the distribution of respondents in Kazakhstan in the sex ratio is different from the total - men (47%) and women (57%).

The study is new to the region because it uses methods to attract respondents; the sample was formed using the method of technology of attracting respondents (river sampling). River sampling is an online research method in which respondents select among Internet users in real time for a specific survey. The advantages of this method are:

a) It is well suited for interviewing a specific target group (in our case, online news consumers), especially due to the inaccessibility of the total aggregate number of people consuming news online.

b) Allows you to collect fragmented data on the consumption of information on different platforms (for example, in social networks, instant messaging services, applications and websites).

c) This applies to the audience, which by definition already has Internet access and allows them to attract other real users.

d) Facilitates the collection of a large number of responses in a short period of time and provides access to a potentially unlimited target group of respondents.

Since the purpose of the survey was to identify trends in the consumption of news on the Internet, respondents were selected to exclude those who do not consume news on the Internet. Thus, the survey covers only those who read, listen to or watch online news materials: on websites, in mobile applications, social networks, blogs, video channels and other online tools. This restriction was indicated in the survey.

Results

According to Internet World Stats, Kazakhstan is the leader in Internet penetration in Central Asia (Internet World Stats, 2019). In a country with a population of more than 18 million people, 78.9% use the Internet. In Uzbekistan, these indicators are much lower (52.3%), Kyrgyzstan (40.1%), Tajikistan (32.4%) (Fig. 1). At the same time, Kazakhstanis are more likely to use social networks (39%) and social networks via mobile phones (19%) (Fig. 2). Meanwhile, the study showed that social networks are leading as a source of news in Central Asia, and messengers are gaining popularity (Fig. 3). 88% of Kazakhstan users consume news through social networks. They are ahead of the Kyrgyz (92%) and Tajiks (90%). In Uzbekistan, this figure was 87%. In addition, this country leads in the use of instant messengers as a source of news (85%). According to these indicators, Kazakhstan is in second place (69%). News sites use the same in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (82% each), Kazakhstan (76%), and Kyrgyzstan (75%).

In Kazakhstan (89%) and Kyrgyzstan (83) Instagram dominates as a social network as a source of news content. In Uzbekistan (70%) and Tajikistan (82%) it is Facebook. In this regard, the WhatsApp messenger is more popular in Kazakhstan (83%) and Kyrgyzstan (78%). In Tajikistan (62%) and with a large gap in Uzbekistan (97%), Telegram is the leader (Fig. 4). In all countries except Tajikistan (61%), the use of Viber is low (about 12%). This suggests that such a messenger as Viber in the next few years may finally lose its position in Central Asia.

A more detailed analysis indicates that 25.6% of Kazakhstanis spend more than 5 hours of time daily on the Internet (Table 1a, Table 1b, Table 1c). At the same time, 31.1% of citizens are people aged 24 to 32 years. Most of all, the attention is paid to the Internet from 2 to 5 hours daily by representatives of the younger generation aged 19 to 23 years (56.6%). The number of men and women spending more than 5 hours on the Internet every day is almost the same (25%). By occupation, more than 5 hours on the Internet are spent daily by most managers (32.1%). Pupils (18.8%) and students (23%) are the least. This is due to the fact that schoolchildren and students are more busy studying in schools and universities during the day than wandering around the Web. However, it is worth noting that with the totality of indicators of schoolchild and student, this category will be the most numerous (41.8%). Meanwhile, it is noteworthy that the Internet from 2 to 5 hours daily use the most freelancers (68.2%). High level of Internet use over the same time period is provided by pensioners (60%) and housewives (50%).

Usually, most of all, 78% of people over 53 years old read, watch, or listen to news material on the Internet from 1 to 5 times a day. At the same time, more than 5 times a day, 38.1% of people aged 24 to 32 receive news material from a global network. It is noteworthy that women more than men read, watch and listen to news materials on the Internet from 1 to 5 times a day - 67.2% versus 53.6%. However, in terms of the indicator more than 5 times a day, the fair sex is much inferior to the stronger sex - 24.3% and 42.9%, respectively. Most of all more than 5 times a day, freelancers read, watch and listen to news materials on the Internet (50%). From 1 to 5 times a day, schoolchildren (75%) and leaders (73.6%) do this most of all. According to this indicator, students (62%), specialists (63.9%), entrepreneurs (66.7%) and retirees (60%) fell in the interval from 60% to 70%.

The answers of Kazakhstani respondents to the question of whether the source of news material is important to them are noteworthy. It was proposed to choose between foreign sources and national. Almost half (46.4%) replied that it did not matter. The materials of national and foreign / international publications prefer to read an equal number of respondents (27% each). A large percentage of those who do not pay attention to the source of news materials due to various factors. Firstly, we can conclude that Kazakhstanis feel the need for additional information and are afraid to remain in the information vacuum. Moreover, many residents of the country are “omnivorous” in terms of information. This explains their ability to talk about events that are not directly related to them and occurring both within the country and beyond its borders. Secondly, the lack of selectivity and the ability to verify news sources indicates a low degree of media literacy among the population. For this reason, users are more influenced by fake news and manipulation. Media experts note that the concept of source of information for the average user is practically absent. This is evidenced by the fact that having at their disposal several online news sources and going from one to another through links, people do not remember the source, do not remember where they read, saw or heard the news for the first time. On the one hand, this is good - the user does not use only one source, but resorts to several. On the other hand - bad for the media - their recognition is lost.

For what reason do Kazakhstan users read, listen or watch news material? It turned out that more than half of the respondents (54%) consume news content "in order to know all the latest news and to keep abreast of events." However, only 16% believe that the news reflects real facts and incidents. A small percentage of respondents (11%) are sure that the news affects the changes in the country. 9% and 4% of Kazakhstanis respectively read, listen or watch news due to work or study.

65.3% of Kazakhstan users are interested in the news of domestic and foreign policy. At the same time, people of 53 years and older (84.6%) follow the news of this kind most of all. Politics and students are the least needed. Rarely and very rarely are 46.7% of schoolchildren and 41.2% of students interested in political news in the country and in the world. Interestingly, the gap between the share of men and women interested in domestic and foreign policy news is relatively small: 70.5% of men and 61.2% of women. Thus, women in Kazakhstan are almost on a par with men interested in obtaining information about politics, which may be the basis for them in terms of real political activity. It is worth agreeing with P.M. Fedorov, who studied the gender aspect of Internet activity. According to him, “interest in politics, characteristic of the male gender role, is also manifested in communication on the Internet: men usually comment on messages more often. However, the drama and emotional richness of the commented events attract an additional audience, and women are the majority in it ” (Fedorov, 2019, p. 109).

More than half of Kazakhstanis (64%) pay attention to science and technology news. Only 1.6% of users have never been interested in such news. At the same time, schoolchildren (86.7%) are most interested in the news of science and technology. The global popularization of science and new advances in digital technology (gadgets, smartphones, computer games), as well as the realization that science and technology are the future, encourage students to follow the news of science and technology.

As for the news of the economy and finance, things are different here. Only 46.8% of Kazakhstani respondents said that they are monitoring the situation in the sphere of economy and finance. Almost half of the respondents (49.6%) are rarely or very rarely interested in this topic. Small indicators indicate that the topic of economics and finance is difficult for users to perceive, except for those who, due to their work, encounter it daily.

News covering social issues and society issues also fall into the category of significant for Kazakhstan users. 76.1% of respondents always and often follow such news. At the same time, people aged 33 to 42 years (82.9%) pay the most attention to such information. This is explained by the fact that they represent an occupied layer of the population and want to make a personal contribution to the development of society. In addition, this age category is most active in consuming news on the environment and ecology (59.1%). Meanwhile, the mentioned topic is less interested in users (54.8%) in comparison with the news of the policy. The main reason for this, in our opinion, lies in the small amount of information about the environment and ecology that falls into the news. This also includes the absence of journalists who professionally cover environmental issues. As a result of which, the user receives less news about events affecting the environment and ecology. E.A. Shcherbinina noted that “it is the media today that are responsible for the level of environmental culture in society, being for many people the main source of environmental problems. Today, the ecological culture of society as a whole depends on the environmental literacy of the journalists themselves, on the quality of the presentation of environmental information in the media ”(Shcherbinina, 2015, p. 29). One cannot disagree with the russian scientist.

Kazakh women are more interested in cultural and art news than men (61.3% to 47.7%). At the same time, the total percentage of people trying to stay up to date with events affecting the theme of culture and art is 55.2%. It is noteworthy that citizens aged 33 to 42 are less interested in cultural and art news, while the older generation (67.6%) always and often pay attention to this. Thus, it is clear that the news of culture and art is not a priority for the Kazakhstani online audience.

Education news is mostly of interest to 66% of the population of Kazakhstan. Most of all, teenagers aged 16 to 18 years (75%) are interested in such news. At the same time, the least interest in education is among people in the age group 43-53 years. The topic of education in the country is more interesting for women (71.8%) than for men (59%). It is worth noting that Kazakhstani school students showed the greatest interest in news about education (80%).

Health news is interesting to 59.2% of respondents. Among them, people over 53 years old are most interested, and the age group from 19 to 23 years is the least interested. As well as education, the topic of health care is more interesting for women (62.9%) than for men (54.6%). Kazakhstani housewives showed the greatest interest in health news with 80%.

News about women, children and the elderly is interesting only to 51% of the Kazakhstani online audience, and the most interested group of people was 33-42 years old. At the same time, young people aged 19-23 showed the least interest. The results of the survey showed that the topic of women, children and the elderly is significantly less interesting for men (40%) than women (60.4%). Housewives turned out to be the most interested in news about women, children and the elderly.

Meanwhile, the survey showed that most people in Kazakhstan are not ready to read news about people with disabilities. Only 33.4% of respondents interact with similar news. The smallest results were found among young people aged 19 to 23 years (62.3%). Women and men are relatively equally uninterested in news about people with special needs. The results show that managers and freelancers least consume news about people with special needs, only housewives showed their concern for the topic.

Sports news turned out to be interesting to 47.2% of respondents, the two age groups of 16-18 years old and 24-32 years old with 53% and 53.6% respectively became the most interested. It is worth noting that men (62.4%) are significantly more interested in sports than women (34.9%). School students and individuals with professions not listed are most interested in sports news. The least interest in sports news reports was shown by freelancers. Based on the survey, it can be assumed that in Kazakhstan, sports news is most interesting for relatively young men.

Short news notes about daily events are of interest to 84.5% of respondents. Among them, people over 53 years old (96.3%) showed the greatest interest. Men and women are equally interested in this format. A short type of news is most interesting to entrepreneurs (96.7%) and retirees (95%), but it is worth noting that almost all respondents showed a significant interest.

The format of the materials, diluted with illustrations, infographics, background music or video, is interesting to 53.5% of Kazakhstani respondents. The greatest interest was in the age group 19-23 years, and the least interest was shown by people over 53 years old (46.1%). Men (59.1%) relate to materials with videos, photographs, etc. more favorably than women (49.1%). With regard to professional activities, the greatest interest was shown by freelancers (68.2%) and schoolchildren (60%), and the least by entrepreneurs (41.4%) and housewives (42.4%).

Only half of the respondents are interested in analytical materials. Basically, age groups 43-53 (64.9%) and 53 and older (64.5%) are ready to consume analytical materials. This genre is the least popular among young people 16-18 years old (36%) and 19-23 years old (39.5%). Analytical materials are more interesting to men (56.6%) than women (42.1%). Representatives of creative professions (63.2%) are most interested in analytical materials. A similar genre is least interesting to students (63.8%).

As for journalistic investigations, the majority of Kazakhstani respondents are not interested in this genre (48.1%). But it is worth noting that two age groups are interested in investigations - these are people over 53 years old (56%) and a group of people 33-42 years old (54.7%). Men (49.8%) read such materials relatively more than women (44.4%). As for the type of employment, the most interested were pensioners (73.7%) and entrepreneurs (62.1%), and the least interested were students (36.4%). From this we can conclude that despite the low popularity of journalistic investigations in Kazakhstan, older people create demand for this genre.

The format of video reporting turned out to be popular among the Kazakhstani audience (67.8%). This format is most popular among people aged 33-42 (67.6%). Men (65.9%) watch video reports with great interest than women (58.6%). This format is most interesting to entrepreneurs (80%).

The following format of audio news on the example of radio and podcasts is listened to by a small part of Kazakhstani respondents (28%). 57.4% of men and 57.5% of women equally rarely listen to news in audio format. Of the respondents, only senior citizens often listen to audio recordings of news.

News materials filmed using virtual reality technology as well as audio format news are of low popularity among Kazakhstani audiences (25.1%). The most frequent consumers of this format were adolescents aged 16-18 years (32.3%). Men were more interested in this format (26.8%) than women (23.7%). It is worth noting that among the respondents, this format was most often used by pensioners (35%), when 40% of freelancers have never tried it.

Information materials in the form of various tests and quizzes are rarely consumed by the Kazakhstani audience (54.9%). People over 53 showed the greatest interest in this format (41.1%). Women and men equally rarely pass tests and quizzes with 53.9% and 56.1%, respectively. Respondents who indicated other types of professions were most interested in this format (41.2%).

Live broadcasts from the scene are rarely watched by Kazakhstani viewers (51%). The least rare online broadcasts are watched by people aged 43-53 years, and most often they are watched by people in the age group 33-24 years. Men and women equally rarely watch a similar format for broadcasting news. With regard to professional activities, most often live broadcasts are watched by freelancers (60%) and school students (54.5%), and the least rare are representatives of creative professions (60.5%).

As part of the study, an analysis of 10 Kazakhstan news sites was conducted. Four of them are official sites of domestic television channels (Qazaqstan, Khabar 24, Astana, Almaty), the main budget of which is formed at the expense of state funds. One site is a state news agency, the rest position themselves as private (free media).

Visual analysis of sites kaztrk.kz (Kazakhstan channel), 24.kz (Khabar 24 channel), astanatv.kz (Astana channel), almaty.tv (Almaty channel), tengrinews.kz (Tengrinews), inform.kz (Kazinform), qamshy.kz, 365info.kz, azattyq.org (Azattyk radio) and vlast.kz (Vlast) indicate that the listed information resources pay different attention to the work of promoting their content on social networks and instant messengers. This confirms the neat location of the logos of social networks on the main page of sites. 8 out of 10 sites posted pointers to their pages in social networks above (right or left), 2 sites - below (right or left). The placement of links to the social networks below (365info.kz and vlast.kz) indicates that the developers of the site are trying to keep users on the site, and for them, social networks and instant messengers are only secondary.

General characteristics of the studied media - they are all represented on social networks, instant messengers and video hosting sites. Meanwhile, each media has its own niche, the most popular among users. So, television channels focus on Facebook and YouTube. With this, Facebook prevails. You can highlight azattyq.org, which is a multimedia site and it would seem that it should promote itself on YouTube, but does it through the same Facebook. It is worth pointing to astanatv.kz, which, being a television channel, along with YouTube has a large number of Instagram followers. In this regard, news portals have chosen social networks and messengers as the main channel for promoting information. For example, tengrinews.kz, inform.kz pay attention to Facebook and Vkontakte. Qamshy.kz is only Facebook. 365info.kz - Facebook and YouTube, and vlast.kz - Facebook and Twitter. The current picture suggests that it is possible that this is due to the period of opening accounts on social networks (the earlier it is opened, the more regular subscribers), the popularity of the latter in the country and the age of content consumers.

It is worth mentioning separately about the multilingualism of the studied sites. The presence of additional languages ​​expands the user base and geography of coverage. Along with the main interface languages ​​(Russian and Kazakh), a number of sites have English and Chinese, as well as Kazakh in Latin or Arabic script. At the same time, vlast.kz does not have a Kazakh version of the site. We believe that this is due to the lack of Kazakh-speaking journalistic personnel or the language policy of the site as a whole. However, the overall picture on the issue of language does not look so rosy. Kazakh-language pages of multilingual sites are visited less than Russian-language ones (except for sites originally Kazakh-language, such as qamshy.kz, kaztrk.kz, azattyk.org).

Brief information about 10 Kazakhstan news sites. Data taken from open sources (Analysis, 2019).

1. Kazinform is the leading state news agency in Kazakhstan. The year of foundation as the International News Agency is 2013. The central office is located in the capital of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan. Agency staff - well-known television and radio journalists. Editor-in-chief - Tanelbaev B.S. Among Kazakhstani news Internet resources is included in the TOP-10. The attendance of the inform.kz web portal is 2,267,305 visitors per month, views are 4,135,905. 59.1% of visitors are from Kazakhstan, 13.5% are from China and 7.4% are from Russia. In gender ratio - 68% of men and 32% of women. Widely represented on social networks. At the same time, the largest social traffic (66%) is on Facebook. Vkontakte (9%), Twitter and Odnoklassniki at 6%, YouTube (5%).
2. Qamshy.kz - news agency. Year of foundation - 2012. Project manager - Bilal Kuanysh. Owner - Qamshy Media LLP. Office location - Almaty. It disseminates information in three languages ​​- Kazakh, Russian and English. The stated mission of the news agency is to support state policy, promote migration policy, support and expand the use of the state language, contribute to solving social problems of citizens, and contribute to state information security. Site traffic per month - 202 336, views - 371079. Geography of visit - 88% Kazakhstan, 8.8% China and 0.8% Netherlands. In terms of demographics, the site is most visited by men - 62%. Presented on social networks Facebook, VKontakte, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram. At the same time, Facebook is the main channel in social traffic - 98%. 1% on YouTube and Vkontakte.
3. Vlast.kz is a news and analytical online magazine. Declares that he offers a new look at the events in Kazakhstan, different points of view, controversial opinions, live reports, a fresh look at familiar things. Established in 2012 Belongs to the Publishing House Vlast LLP, where the founders are Vyacheslav Abramov and VMG Consultancy LLP. It has 530,265 visitors per month, mainly from Kazakhstan (72.3%), Azerbaijan (5.3%) and Germany (3.4%). Views - 1 928 735. Men are more interested in site news (87%). Facebook prevails in social traffic (71%), and relatively high rates on Twitter (12%) and Vkontakte (8%).
4. Azattyq.org is the first multimedia website in Kazakhstan. It was founded in 2008. Azattyk - Kazakh edition of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. Declares that it does not depend on any political party, ruling or opposition, emigrant communities, commercial companies and other specific organizations, as well as religious organizations. Has an editorial office in Almaty. The chief editor of the Almaty Bureau is Kuanyshbek Kari. The number of website visitors per month is 749,054, mainly from Kazakhstan (66.2%), Russia (5.4%) and the United States (3.1%). Views - 1 274 306. By gender, the site is visited more by men (63%). The main social traffic is Facebook (75%). YouTube (8%), Vkontakte (7%), Twitter (4%), Odnoklassniki (3%).
5. 365info.kz - information and analytical site. The online publication is owned by the eponymous LLP, the founders of which are Kali Koyshiev and Aidar Zhumabaev. The editorial office is located in Almaty. The number of website visitors per month is 2,331,695, views - 4,625,440. The geography of the visit is Kazakhstan (74.7%), Russia (3.2%), Germany (2.2%). Most of all, men visit the site (65%). The main social traffic is on Facebook (72%), but YouTube is also high on YouTube (12%). Vkontakte (7%), Odnoklassniki (3%), Whatsapp (2%).
6. tengrinews.kz - online edition. The project was founded in 2008. Founder: Effective Media Liaison LLP, Sunkar Karabalin - Director. It publishes daily news of Kazakhstan and the world. The editorial office is located in Almaty. The number of website visitors per month is 24 798 485, views - 76 124 750. The geography of the visit is Kazakhstan (66.2%), China (8.7%) and Germany (4.2%). Site gender: men 70%, women 30%. The main social traffic is on Facebook (57%) and Vkontakte (24%). Twitter (7%), YouTube (6%) Odnoklassniki (3%).
7. Qazaqstan (TV channel) is a state television channel of the Ministry of Information and Communications. The owner is JSC Republican Television and Radio Corporation Kazakhstan. Erkin Muhammedjanov is the director of NTK Qazaqstan. The broadcasting network of the TV channel includes news, series, feature films, documentaries and broadcasts. The official website was registered in 2009. For the month, kaztrk.kz visits 219 667 times, and 516 980 are viewed mainly from Kazakhstan (74.5%), Russia (1.8%) and the USA (1.6%). Site gender: men - 87%, women - 13%. Social traffic was distributed as follows: Vkontakte 51%, YouTube 21%, Facebook 20%, WhatsApp 3%, Instagram 2%.
8. Khabar 24 (TV channel) - a round-the-clock state news channel of the Ministry of Information and Communications. The owner is Khabar Agency JSC. The director is Olga Tsoi. It was launched as the 24KZ television channel in 2012. Later it changed its name to Khabar 24. Channel air - news (economic, sports and international reviews, press reviews, special author reports), analytical programs, reporting programs, programs about the life of the regions The number of site views 24.kz per month is 1 122 440, visitors 680 610. Visitors geography - Kazakhstan (77.3%), Turkmenistan (3.3%), Russia ( 2.2%). 70% of men and 30% of women prefer to visit the site. In social traffic predominates Facebook (52%), YouTube (19%), Vkontakte (14%), Odnoklassniki (7%), WhatsApp (5%).
9. Astana TV (TV channel) is a republican TV channel that broadcasts from the capital of Kazakhstan and is included in the information holding of the Nur Otan party. Bibigul Zheksenbai - General Director. The main directions of the channel’s broadcasting: socio-political, information-analytical, educational projects, as well as entertainment content with an emphasis on high-quality film screening. The website of the astanatv.kz television channel is visited 81 514 times a month, the number of views is 233 635. The geography of visitors was distributed between Kazakhstan (84.3%) and Russia (3.5%). It is noteworthy that the site is visited by an almost equal number of men (55%) and women (45%). In the field of social traffic, YouTube is the main one (39%). Good positions are on Facebook (31%), Vkontakte (12%), Instagram (7%) WhatsApp (5%).
10. Almaty TV (TV channel) - belongs to the akimat of Almaty and has been leading its history since 1999. General Director - Bolat Kalyanbekov. In 2010, he began to develop from a regional broadcaster as a republican channel. The basis of the broadcast is daily news in a live broadcast on the most important events in Almaty and in the regions of the country, as well as a variety of genres: film screening, analytical and educational programs, music and entertainment programs, documentaries, videos and concerts. The number of views on the website of the almaty.tv channel per month is 1,928,235, visitors - 1,421,015. Visitors' geography: 86.3% - Kazakhstan, 3.2% - Germany, 1.2 - Russia. The site is visited by men (82%) and women (18%). Social traffic has the following picture: Facebook (65%), YouTube (10%), Odnoklassniki and WhatsApp at 8%, Vkontakte (5%).

According to S.M. Karpoyan “the opinions and value judgments in the comments of social networks are aimed at fulfilling the main task - the self-presentation of the author of the comment” (Karpoyan, 2015, p. 243). From the visual review, we can conclude that the nature of the comments on the channels of the studied sites depends on the published information. Indignation, negative reviews and sarcasm prevail in the comments of those news that relate to the political, social and economic aspects of the life of the state. Almost always the spirit of nationalism / patriotism is felt in the comments to the news telling about the achievements of the Kazakhs and Kazakhstanis (sports, education, heroism). Meanwhile, sharp reviews on relevant topics can most often be found on free / private media sites than on state ones. The headings of the materials on private media sites are flashy (as independent journalism is supposed to), the headings of the articles use a large font, and there is an abundance of active advertising banners that can distract users from reading or viewing.

Conclusions

The study showed that in the context of Kazakhstan, pensioners and housewives use the Internet most of all. This audience has more free time. It should be noted that in general, Kazakhstanis feel the need to obtain additional information. It was revealed that many residents of the country are “omnivorous” in terms of information. However, the lack of selectivity of news sources requires attention in terms of increasing the media literacy of the population. In our opinion, another unexpected result of the study was the fact that women in Kazakhstan are almost equally interested in obtaining information about politics on a par with men. It has been found that the global popularization of science and new advances in digital technology stimulate most students to follow the news in this area. As expected, the topic of economics and finance, being difficult to understand, is not a priority for all age groups of consumers. Middle-aged people are more likely to follow social news. This is explained by the fact that they represent an occupied layer of the population and want to make a personal contribution to the development of society. Meanwhile, Kazakhstanis pay less attention to news about the environment and ecology due to their small volume in the news, as well as the lack of journalists who professionally cover environmental issues. In addition, news of culture and art are not a priority for the Kazakhstani online audience. Also, most people are not ready to read news about people with disabilities. But sports news and near-sports news are of great interest to relatively young men. As for the news format, consumers are most interested in the short form of news. The format of the materials diluted with illustrations, infographics, background music or video is also of interest to the majority of Kazakhstani respondents. It is noteworthy that only half of the respondents are interested in analytical materials. However, most are indifferent to such a genre as investigative journalism. In addition, the format of video reports turned out to be popular among the Kazakhstani audience. However, the format of audio news on the example of radio and podcasts is heard only by a small part of the population. At this stage, news items filmed using virtual reality technology are of low popularity. Information materials in the form of a variety of tests and quizzes are consumed by the Kazakh audience a little more than half the time. Kazakhstanis and live broadcasts from the scene are rarely watched.

Regarding the information resources studied by the authors of the article, it is worth noting that these resources pay different attention to the work of promoting their content on social networks and instant messengers. Some tend to keep users on the site, and therefore social networks and instant messengers are only secondary to them. At the same time, all the studied media are presented in social networks, instant messengers and video hosting sites. It is noteworthy that the presence of additional broadcasting languages ​​expands the user base and the geography of coverage of new media. However, it is worth saying that Kazakh-language pages of multilingual sites are visited less than Russian-language ones. As for the nature of the comments on the channels of the studied sites, it completely depends on the information published on them.

An analysis of the study suggests that social networks are rapidly becoming leaders as a source of news in Central Asia, and instant messengers are gaining popularity. If this trend persists, social networks and instant messengers will eventually become the main source of news for the online audience of the studied region, which confirms our hypothesis. At the same time, the struggle within and between social networks and instant messengers for the hearts and minds of consumers will also intensify, which encourages social network developers and instant messengers to introduce more and more new technologies with an emphasis on user safety.

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Graphs and Tables

Fig. 1

Fig.2

Fig.3

Fig. 4

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| **Table 1a.** How much time do you spend on the Internet daily? |
| by age | other | less than 1 hour to 2 hours | from 2 to 5 hours | more than 5 hours |
| 16-18 | 2,9% | 21,2% | 52,9% | 23,1% |
| 19-23 | 3,2% | 15,8% | 56,6% | 24,4% |
| 24-32 | 1,0% | 14,3% | 53,5% | 31,1% |
| 33-42 | 2,7% | 20,1% | 54,3% | 22,8% |
| 43-53 | 1,7% | 27,3% | 47,1% | 24,0% |
| 53 < | 2,4% | 32,9% | 43,9% | 20,7% |
| Kazakhstan | 2,2% | 19,5% | 52,7% | 25,6% |

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| **Table 1b.** How much time do you spend on the Internet daily? |
|  Occupation | Other | less than 1 hour to 2 hours | from 2 to 5 hours | more than 5 hours |
| Other | 2,8% | 18,3% | 49,5% | 29,4% |
| Schoolboy | 6,3% | 25,0% | 50,0% | 18,8% |
| Student | 3,5% | 19,1% | 54,3% | 23,0% |
| Specialist | 1,1% | 21,1% | 54,7% | 23,2% |
| Mid-level manager |   | 22,2% | 50,8% | 27,0% |
| Supervisor |  | 30,2% | 37,7% | 32,1% |
| Businessman | 3,3% | 13,3% | 53,3% | 30,0% |
| Creative worker | 7,7% | 7,7% | 56,4% | 28,2% |
| Freelancer |   |   | 68,2% | 31,8% |
| Pensioner |   | 15,0% | 60,0% | 25,0% |
| Housewife | 1,9% | 20,2% | 50,0% | 27,9% |
| Kazakhstan | 2,2% | 19,5% | 52,7% | 25,6% |

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| **Table 1c.** How much time do you spend on the Internet daily? |
| by sex | other | less than 1 hour to 2 hours | from 2 to 5 hours | more than 5 hours |
| Male | 2,3% | 17,2% | 55,5% | 25,1% |
| Female | 2,1% | 21,3% | 50,6% | 25,9% |
| Kazakhstan | 2,2% | 19,5% | 52,7% | 25,6% |