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Visual-Textual Publication Format as a Factor in the Organic Distribution of Content on Social Media

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Abstract

Organic distribution of content on social media depends on whether readers decide to pass a post along, and the visual and textual packaging of a post shapes that decision at the moment of exposure. The study examines the visual-textual publication format developed at Rifmy i Panchi (lit. Rhymes and Punchlines), a Russian-language youth media network that grew from a VKontakte hip-hop community launched in 2011 into a multiplatform outlet whose Telegram channel counts 1.43 million subscribers. A longitudinal single-case design combines first-hand editorial documentation with channel statistics for October 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 and for September 2026. The format consists of six elements: a branded image, a bold, resonant headline, a short text on a single news item, an optional quote, a closing punchline, and two stance reactions through which readers vote for one of two positions. In 2023, the editorial office tied editors' evaluations to forwards, with weights that increase as a post crosses 3,000, 5,000, and 10,000 forwards. Between October 2022 and September 2026, forwards per 1,000 views rose from 4.7 to 10.5, with the highest observed value of 12.7 in October 2025, average forwards per post rose from 976 to 1,694, and monthly output fell from 2,439 to 948 posts. A standardized format, coupled with forward-based editorial selection, is associated with higher shareability per post and per 1,000 views. The model gives editors of messenger-based media a measurable framework for designing posts around reader-driven circulation.

Keywords: *Visual-Textual Format, Organic Reach, News Sharing, Shareability, Telegram, Editorial Metrics, Youth Media, Stance Reactions.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms distribute attention through feeds that publishers control only in part. Paid promotion buys exposure, while organic distribution rests on decisions made by readers who forward, repost, or share a publication with their own contacts, thereby carrying it beyond the source's subscriber base. Telegram channels have become an established venue for news distribution (Sánchez-Gonzales & Martos-Moreno, 2023). In such messenger-based media, the forward serves as a central route through which a post reaches people who have never subscribed, so the forward count becomes a behavioral trace of reader-driven circulation that outlets can observe for every publication.

Research on sharing has identified a set of content features that predict reader engagement. Language that is easy to process and arouses emotion keeps readers engaged for longer, while sad language shortens reading sessions (Berger et al., 2023). Field experiments with more than 100,000 headline variations demonstrate that negative words in headlines raise click-through rates (Robertson et al., 2023). Posts that refer to political out-groups attract more shares and comments than posts about in-groups, which ties engagement to the expression of collective stance (Rathje et al., 2021). A conjoint experiment on Facebook news sharing adds that content characteristics such as topic and geographic proximity carry the greatest weight in decisions to share, whereas popularity cues show no average effect (Trilling & Knudsen, 2025).

The visual layer of a post has received less systematic attention than its wording. A computer vision analysis of 34,610 organic brand posts on Facebook and Instagram found that text overlaid on images reduces likes and comments on average, although text-heavy images perform better when the text is centered, conveys information, carries positive emotion, and aligns with the picture (Dang et al., 2026). Emojis increase engagement with brand-related user-generated content, yet a large number of emojis yields no additional gain, and emotional emojis work best alongside positive text (Ko et al., 2022). These findings isolate single elements of brand communication on algorithmic platforms, and how a complete, standardized combination of image, headline, text,

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and interactive elements behaves in a news channel with a chronological feed remains an open question.

About half of the Spanish media outlets studied on Telegram publish without seeking interaction, and the remaining outlets rely on informal language and multimedia to reach users (Sánchez-Gonzales & Martos-Moreno, 2023). In the post-Soviet space, Telegram acquired a political role as an infrastructure that users perceive as resistant to censorship (Wijermars & Lokot, 2022). Studies of Russian-language channels describe the content models of the largest news channels in terms of topics, sources, and formats (Kadochnikova et al., 2025) and show that youth-oriented entertainment television channels adapted interactive formats on Telegram with greater success than general-interest broadcasters during 2022 and 2023 (Kruglova & Shchepilova, 2025). The single post as a designed object, together with its link to forwarding behavior, stays outside the scope of these studies.

Editorial decisions in digital newsrooms increasingly follow audience metrics. An ethnography of two Chilean newsrooms showed that real-time analytics fused click-based goals with editorial priorities, shifting opinion power toward platforms and analytics vendors (Dodds et al., 2023). An editorial system that rewards forward-encoding a different idea of success has consequences for the design of publications that have not been documented.

The present study examines the visual-textual publication format of Rifmy i Panchi, a Russian-language youth media network, as a factor in the organic distribution of its content. Three research questions guide the analysis. The first question asks which elements constitute the format and how each element acts on the reader. The second question asks how the distribution indicators of the Telegram channel changed after the editorial office linked the evaluation of publications to forwards in 2023. The third question asks which trade-offs accompany a shift toward fewer publications with higher shareability. The study contributes a first-hand, documented model of a messenger-native news format and a set of indicators that separate per-post shareability from aggregate reach.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study follows a longitudinal single-case design in which one media organization serves as an instrumental case for examining how a publication format relates to organic distribution. Rifmy i Panchi, a name that translates as “Rhymes and Punches,” was selected because it combines a format that has evolved uninterrupted since 2011, a documented editorial evaluation system, and a large audience across several platforms. However, the introduction of the template began in 2017. The outlet began in 2011 as a VKontakte community devoted to Russian and international hip-hop and later became a news resource covering music, film, internet trends, public affairs, and everyday matters that concern Russian-speaking young people. Its Telegram channel, @rhymestg, has operated since 2016 and has a mirror on the MAX messenger. The VKontakte community duplicates most of the Telegram content, and the network also includes thematic satellite channels on games, news, music, and sports that promote one another. The outlet’s name is a registered trademark, and since 2019, the media has served as the main promotional platform for the Rhymes Music label.

The empirical base combines three types of material. The first type consists of first-hand editorial documentation: the specification of the post template, the guidelines for shift editors, the criteria for topic selection, and the rules of the monthly evaluation report. The second type covers Telegram channel statistics. Subscriber counts at the beginning of October 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026 come from the TGStat subscriber history. Average views per post, average forwards per post, and the number of posts per month come from the publication statistics of the channel, and average views per post are available for October 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025, and for September 2026. The subscriber count at the beginning of October 2026 serves as the end-of-period value, matched with the September 2026 statistics. Average forwards per post are available for October 2022, October 2025, and September 2026, and the number of posts per month is available for October 2022 and September 2026. The third type comprises open industry data on the VKontakte community. Tsiklopedia reports 4.7 million subscribers as of October 2021, and the AdIndex ratings of May 2023 and March 2024 and an Afisha Daily article of March 2024 report 5.2 million subscribers in May 2023, 5.3 million in March 2024, and an average post reach of 200,000 views in 2023 and 200,000 to 300,000 views in 2024.

Four indicators operationalize distribution, and each derived value follows an explicit formula. The forward rate serves as the measure of shareability throughout the study and equals average forwards per post ÷ average post reach × 1,000, so for October 2022 it equals 976 ÷ 209,000 × 1,000 = 4.7 forwards per 1,000 views. The reach rate equals average post reach ÷ subscribers × 100%, so for October 2022 it equals 209,000 ÷ 783,862 × 100% = 26.7%, and the same formula gives 200,000 ÷ 5,200,000 × 100% = 3.8% for VKontakte in 2023. Monthly views equal posts per month × average post reach, and monthly forwards equal posts per month × average forwards per post, which gives 2,439 × 209,000 = 509.8 million views and 2,439 × 976 = 2.38 million forwards for October 2022. Forwards per subscriber equal monthly forwards ÷ subscribers, which gives 2,380,464 ÷ 783,862 = 3.04 for October 2022. The annual change in subscribers equals subscribers in a given October ÷ subscribers a year earlier × 100% − 100%, and the index of any indicator equals its value ÷ its value in October 2022 × 100. The editorial records date the shift to forward-based evaluation to 2023 without a specific month, so October 2022 serves as the pre-reform baseline, and October 2023 may fall on either side of the change.

The documentation was examined through qualitative content analysis, in which each rule and template element was coded for its function, the stage of the publication cycle it governs, and the year of its introduction. The quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, since five-yearly observations do not support inferential testing. The editorial accounting records advertising posts and giveaways apart from organic content, whereas the channel-level averages from the monitoring services may include advertising posts. Editor reports are reconciled with the posting service Anypost and the analytics services Popsters, Telemetr, and TGStat.

The case material derives from direct, first-hand access to the outlet's managerial and editorial records. Such access provides details unavailable to external observers and introduces a risk of favorable interpretation. To limit that risk, the analysis reports the indicators that declined over the period alongside those that improved and relies on third-party monitoring services for all audience figures.

RESULTS

The format took shape over three stages, and Table 1 summarizes them by platform, formatting elements and editorial logic.

Table 1. Evolution of the visual-textual format of Rifmy i Panchi

Stage	Platforms	Formatting elements	Editorial logic
2011 to 2017, hip-hop community	VKontakte	Capital letters and visual emphasis, paragraph breaks, an opening emoji as a semantic and navigational marker, designed images with large headlines, first template drafts	Thematic community on Russian and international hip-hop
2016 to 2022, entry into Telegram and the media and label model	VKontakte, Telegram channel @rhymestg	Opening emoji, capitalized headline in quotation marks, short paragraph, call to action, link	Shift toward a youth news outlet, promotion of Rhymes Music releases
2023 to 2026, standardized template	Telegram, MAX mirror, VKontakte, satellite channels on games, news, music and sport	Branded image, bold resonant headline, short text on one news item, optional quote, closing punchline, two stance reactions	Selection by forwards with weighted thresholds, monthly editor ranking, separate accounting of advertising

The earliest stage already contained the core of the format. Posts in the VKontakte community opened with an emoji signaling the topic, used capital letters and paragraph breaks to guide the eye, and paired the text with an image featuring a large headline. The second stage moved these conventions to Telegram. A post published there on 2 December 2021 about the music video for the track Dialogi tet-a-tet by ALEKS ATAMAN and FINIK.FINYA opened with an emoji, listed the artists' names and the title in capital letters, summarized the release in a single short paragraph, and ended with a call to watch the video. The post garnered 139,200 views, and the track, released by Rhymes Music in October 2021, reached number 1 on the VK/BOOM and Shazam charts within a week of its release. The third stage turned these conventions into a fixed template with a defined block order and added an interactive element that converts reactions into votes.

The branded image opens the post and works as a visual anchor that halts scrolling and identifies the source through a recognizable color scheme and visual style. The bold headline appears as a separate text layer beneath the image, so a reader can judge its relevance from the preview without expanding the post. The body text covers one news item in a short, ironic register that is close to the audience's vernacular. A quote appears when the story contains a statement from its protagonist, adding the voice of the original source, while editors check the facts of every story against the primary source before publication. The closing punchline condenses the story into a line that a reader would want to send to a friend. The final block offers two opposing positions on the situation and assigns each to a Telegram reaction, so that tapping a reaction counts as a vote and the reaction counter becomes a public tally of agreement. The guidelines name organic forwards as the primary success metric for a post, since forwards indicate that the audience distributes the content on its own initiative. Fig. 1 presents the template as a sequence of six blocks, linking each block to the mechanism through which it is intended to act on the reader, and shows the editorial selection loop that feeds back into the choice of topics.

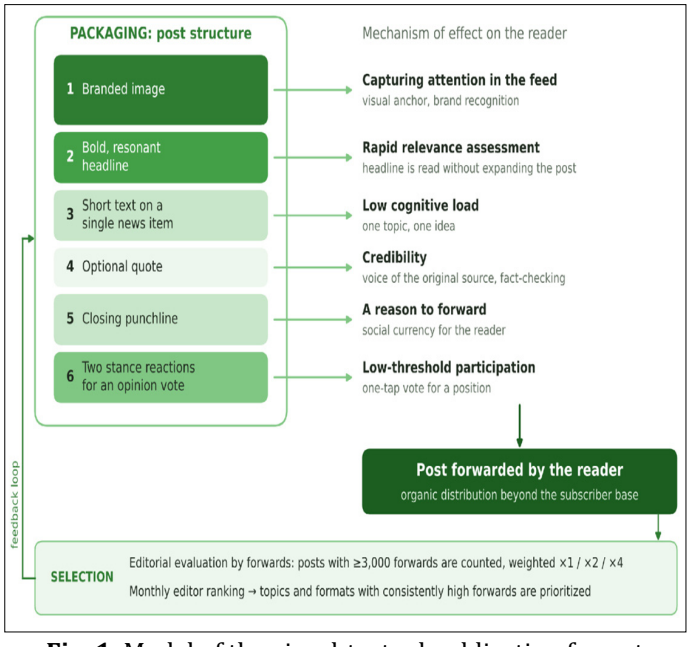


Fig. 1. Model of the visual-textual publication format

The template operates inside an editorial system that selects topics and rewards results. The editorial office consists of a chief editor and a core rota of five editors who work in shifts, while the thematic directions in games, sport, and music each have their own teams of three to five editors, and a separate unit handles automation and Instagram. During a shift, an editor searches Russian and international sources, selects news items, writes and publishes posts, and stays within the maximum post intervals set for the news direction. A topic qualifies for publication if it is new to the audience; stories that have already spread through other channels are dropped, and priority goes to stories that reach readers in person and offer a practical conclusion.

Since 2023, the chief editor has evaluated each editor through a formal monthly report built on four criteria. Forwards form the principal criterion. Only posts with at least 3,000 forwards enter the calculation, and the weight of a post grows with its result: a post with 3,000 to 5,000 forwards counts once, a post with 5,000 to 10,000 forwards counts twice, and a post with more than 10,000 forwards counts four times. The weighted sum yields the editor's score. Volume reflects the number of posts per month, discipline reflects punctuality against the shift schedule and compliance with the density norm, and quality is a score from 1 to 10 that the chief editor assigns for topic choice, headline, presentation, visual design, literacy, and factual accuracy. Advertising posts and giveaways are recorded apart from organic content so that they do not distort engagement indicators.

The monthly report feeds four decisions. Editors are ranked against previous months, and records are logged. Topics and formats that are brought forward regularly receive priority, while topics that occupy space in the feed with weak results are cut back. Each editor receives individual feedback, and in one documented case, a personal conversation reduced an editor's late arrivals from four per month to zero or one. The final ranking affects editors' pay. The weighting scheme works as a step function: posts with fewer than 3,000 forwards earn nothing; each step up doubles the weight; and a post with more than 10,000 forwards earns four times the weight of a post at the entry threshold, which channels effort toward publications that can travel far beyond the subscriber base.

The subscriber base of the Telegram channel grew from 783,862 in October 2022 to 804,987 in October 2023, 1,128,804 in October 2024, and 1,484,496 in October 2025, and then decreased to 1,432,593 in October 2026. The annual changes amounted to gains of 2.7%, 40.2%, and 31.5%, followed by a decline of 3.5%, and the net growth over four years reached 82.8%. The average post reach stayed within a band from 162,000 to 212,000 views and equaled 209,000 in October 2022, 198,000 in October 2023, 178,000 in October 2024, 212,000 in October 2025 and 162,000 in September 2026. Average post reach thus declined from 209,000 views in October 2022 to 162,000 views in September 2026, and the study does not attribute this decline to the format. Because the audience expanded faster than reach, the reach rate fell from 26.7% to 24.6%, 15.8%, 14.3% and 11.3% across the five observations.

Fig. 2 compares six indicators available for both ends of the period on a common index scale and marks the values for October 2025 where data exist.

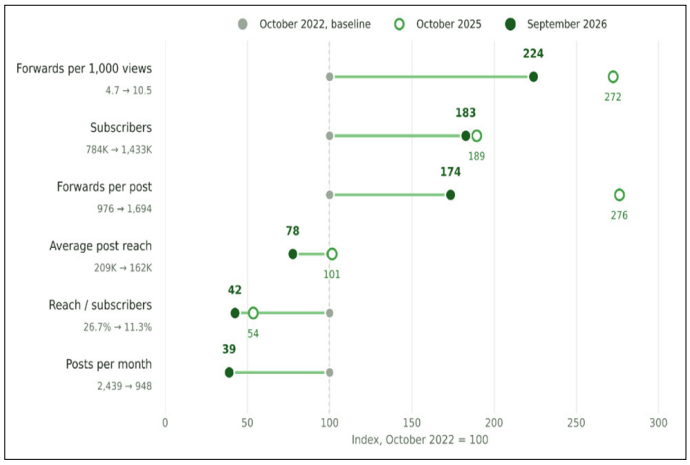


Fig. 2. Indicators of the Telegram channel @rhymestg, index, October 2022 = 100

Per-post shareability moved in the direction opposite to the reach rate. Average forwards per post increased from 976 in October 2022 to 2,696 in October 2025 and stood at 1,694 in September 2026. The forward rate rose from 4.7 forwards per 1,000 views in October 2022 to 12.7 in October 2025 and to 10.5 in September 2026, corresponding to index values of 272 and 224. Over the same span, the number of posts per month fell from 2,439, or 78.7 posts per day, to 948, or 31.6 posts per day, an index value of 39.

Aggregate indicators tell a more cautious story. Monthly views, calculated as the product of the number of posts and the average reach, declined from 509.8 million in October 2022 to 153.6 million in September 2026, and monthly forwards declined from 2.38 million to 1.61 million. Per subscriber, the channel generated 3.04 forwards a month in October 2022 and 1.12 forwards a month in September 2026. With 2,696 forwards per post, any output above 883 posts in October 2025 would have produced more monthly forwards than the baseline. If output in October 2025 was not lower than the 948 posts recorded eleven months later, that condition held.

The VKontakte community offers a cross-platform reference point. In 2023, it had 5.2 million subscribers and averaged 200,000 views per post, giving a reach rate of 3.8%, whereas the Telegram channel averaged 198,000 views per post with 804,987 subscribers and a reach rate of 24.6%. Thus, similar absolute reach coexisted with a 6.4-fold gap in reach per subscriber.

DISCUSSION

The results describe a format that evolved through first-hand editorial practice into a fixed template, paired with an evaluation system that rewards the outcome the template

is designed to produce. Over the period observed, the shareability of an average publication more than doubled while the channel published fewer than half as many posts. Two mechanisms can account for this change, but the available data do not distinguish between them. The first mechanism is packaging, which refers to the visual and textual form in which a news item reaches the reader. The second mechanism is selection, which refers to the choice of news items that the forward-based evaluation encourages.

The packaging mechanism agrees with experimental and observational research on content features. The short, single-topic text aligns with evidence that easy-to-process language sustains engagement (Berger et al., 2023). The bold, resonant headline aligns with findings on the pull of negative, emotion-laden wording in headlines (Robertson et al., 2023). The early VKontakte posts placed a large headline on the image, whereas the current template scheme moves the headline into a separate text layer beneath the picture, a design choice consistent with the finding that overlaid text depresses engagement and that its cost shrinks when the text sits in the center, informs, and agrees with the image (Dang et al., 2026). The opening emoji of the early posts anticipated the context-dependent effect of emojis on engagement (Ko et al., 2022).

The two-stance reactions turn a news item into a small public contest. By assigning opposite positions to two reactions, the template invites readers to take sides with a single tap. Research on social media engagement shows that posts that invoke opposing political groups draw more shares and comments (Rathje et al., 2021), and a binary vote on a public issue recreates a milder form of the same opposition. The same mechanism carries a risk, because a format that rewards division may push editors toward polarizing topics. The requirement to verify facts against primary sources and the quality score for factual accuracy act as counterweights, yet the data cannot show whether they offset the pull toward polarization.

The selection mechanism places the case within the debate on audience metrics in journalism. In two Chilean newsrooms, analytics built on clicks fused popularity goals with editorial judgment, shifting opinion power toward platforms (Dodds et al., 2023). A click records curiosity, whereas a forward records the reader's decision to place a publication in front of personal contacts, bringing the metric closer to the content features that predict sharing decisions (Trilling & Knudsen, 2025). The threshold of 3,000 forwards and the stepped weights remove weak posts from the score and reward editors for fewer posts with greater potential, which is consistent with the 61% fall in output between October 2022 and September 2026.

Many Spanish outlets on Telegram publish without seeking interaction (Sánchez-Gonzales & Martos-Moreno, 2023), and the largest Russian news channels follow content models organized around topics and sources (Kadochnikova et al., 2025). The Rifmy i Panchi template builds interaction into the post itself and treats the forward as its primary goal, placing it closer to youth entertainment channels that have adapted interactive formats with greater success than general-interest broadcasters (Kruglova & Shchepilova, 2025).

Six limitations qualify these conclusions. First, a single case limits generalization to youth entertainment and news channels with comparable audiences. Second, direct managerial access to the case brings a risk of a favorable interpretation. Third, the series contains five observations, and forward and post counts are missing for some years, so the analysis remains descriptive and cannot establish causality. Fourth, channel-level averages do not allow the effects of individual template elements to be disentangled from those of topic selection. Fifth, monitoring services estimate views and forward with unknown errors, and their channel-level averages may include advertising posts. Sixth, average post reach declined from 209,000 to 162,000 views and reach per subscriber fell from 26.7% to 11.3%, which may reflect subscriber growth, inactive accounts, and platform conditions, so the study does not link these declines to the format. Post-level coding of template elements and a comparison of identical posts across Telegram, VKontakte, and MAX would narrow these gaps.

CONCLUSION

The visual-textual format of Rifmy i Panchi combines six elements that address successive stages of the encounter between a reader and a post. In the model, the image captures attention, the headline signals relevance, the short text lowers cognitive load, the quote adds credibility, the punchline supplies a reason to forward, and the stance reactions offer participation at a low threshold. Developed through first-hand practice since 2011 and standardized as a template, the format operates alongside an editorial evaluation that, since 2023, rewards editors for posts that reach 3,000, 5,000, and 10,000 forwards.

Between October 2022 and September 2026, the forward rate rose from 4.7 to 10.5 forwards per 1,000 views, with the highest observed value of 12.7 in October 2025, and average forwards per post grew from 976 to 1,694. A standardized format, coupled with forward-based selection, is thus associated with greater shareability per post and per 1,000 views.

For editors of messenger-based media, the case points to three practical steps. The first step is to design posts as a fixed sequence of blocks, each with a defined function. The second step is to measure success through forwards per 1,000 views and to keep advertising separate from organic content in the accounting. The third step is to compare forwards per post and forwards per 1,000 views against a fixed baseline month, so that changes in shareability remain visible over time.

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