

Cyber-libertarianism or marketing strategy? An investigation of Telegram’s domain-specific agency

PETR GULENKO^{1,*} 

Received: 29 November 2025 – Revised: 1 March 2026 – Accepted: 3 March 2026

ABSTRACT: The article investigates Telegram’s political agency—defining the latter as the capacity to make explicit and politically relevant choices that influence the social and political environment—and how it exercises this agency through its performance. The paper offers a novel analytical framework for understanding Telegram’s agency as a non-state actor, systematically examining its mission, funding structure, operational model, platform performance, and public perception. The study implements a mixed-methods approach combining elements of structural-functional analysis, discourse-historical approach, and digital ethnography. Data used in this study included Telegram’s media releases, investigative and analytical articles in global press, along with interviews and posts made by Telegram’s founder, Pavel Durov, covering the period from 2011 to August 27, 2025. As will be shown in this article, while Telegram, particularly through its founder, Pavel Durov, consistently promotes cyber-libertarian ideals of privacy, neutrality, and independence, its actions and evolution reveal a more complex picture. The platform’s unique blend of private messaging and public channels, coupled with its adaptive technological responses to political crises, demonstrates distinct agency. Financial independence, initially achieved by self-funding, has been a core principle, albeit challenged by monetization efforts. Despite advocating for unmoderated speech, Telegram faces pressure from governments and corporations, leading to shifts in its content moderation

¹ Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

* Corresponding author: pgulenko@gmail.com

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as appropriate credit is given to the original author(s) and the source.

policies. The case study of Telegram in Russia reveals the platform's transformation from a "shelter of freedom" to a cell of diversified state propaganda, raising questions about the sincerity of its declared values versus strategic business and political adaptations.

KEYWORDS: Telegram, non-state actor, political agency, cyber-libertarianism, propaganda, social media.

JEL CODES: L96

1. Introduction

Media platforms have a unique position as non-state actors (Marton 2024). Though commercial entities provide digital services, they often act as media outlets without producing their own content. Instead, they function as gatekeepers, establishing distinct digital ecosystems and setting rules for engagement within them.

In contemporary academia, the term "political agency" encompasses different meanings and approaches, including liberal, conflictual, and action-oriented perspectives (Sanchini et al. 2019). However, a common thread across all definitions is the emphasis on capacity as a key defining feature. In this study, political agency for media platforms as non-state actors refers to their capacity to make explicit and politically relevant choices (Marton 2024: 21-22) that influence the social and political environment. This agency is evident in their deliberate efforts to shape information flows and public debate.

The political agency of corporations like Meta, Google, X, and TikTok is widely recognized. Studies show that recommendation algorithms on platforms such as Facebook, Google, and TikTok influence political agendas (Gilardi et al. 2022), public opinion (Ausat 2023), and even human behavior (Metzler – Garcia 2023). Their impact on election outcomes is also well documented (Fornasier – Borges 2022; Fujiwara et al. 2023). Concerns also exist regarding the conformity of their moderation policies with human rights (Celeste et al. 2023; Oliva 2020). Some scholars even argue that tech companies wield quasi-nation-state power, affecting global infrastructure and sociopolitical dynamics (Lindman et al. 2023).

Conversely, Telegram's agency is often questioned (Herasimenka et al. 2022), attributed to its technological characteristics, apparent lack of moderation, and stated refusal to implement recommendation algorithms. This can create the illusion of the detachment of Telegram's managers from the content on its platform. However, this perceived lack of rigorous moderation attracts criticism from authorities, public figures, and academics, who argue it condones the spread of pornography (Semenzin & Bainotti 2022),

illicit drug sales (Dewey – Buyyetti 2024), and terrorist cell formation (Yayla – Speckhard 2017). Consequently, Telegram faces legal proceedings, and its owner, Pavel Durov, has been subject to a criminal investigation (Akbari – Gabdulhakov 2019). Activists, nevertheless, commend Telegram for resisting authoritarian censorship (Santos et al. 2021). The public image of the company and Durov also plays a significant role in this debate. Admirers describe him as a consistent proponent of cyber-libertarian ideals (Avetisyan 2024)—an ideology rooted in 1990s cyberpunk that advocates complete internet communication freedom and individual autonomy. This ideology’s appeal is heightened by pervasive mistrust (Breakwell 2022). Others, however, suggest this ideology may simply be a marketing strategy to enrich the social network’s owners (Shvetsova – Epstein 2021). Nevertheless, a complex and comprehensive analysis of Telegram’s political agency is lacking in academia, and this paper strives to bridge that gap.

The study examines Telegram as a non-state actor with domain-specific agency (Marton 2024: 21-22), investigating whether it is a genuine cyber-libertarian project or merely a successful marketing strategy. The article is structured as follows. First, a brief overview of Telegram’s history is provided, and the evolution of cyber-libertarian ideology and its core postulates is critically analyzed. Then, a novel analytical framework for investigating non-state actors with vertical management is developed and further applied to Telegram. A systematic analysis of each derived parameter allows for exploring how the communication platform has been transformed in the light of cyber-libertarian ideas throughout its history. Telegram’s activities in Russia are also used as a case study. Russia was selected as an explicit example of how the articulated principles of the company could be adopted by the political regime, even as Durov and his company faced accusations of deviating from these very principles. Scholars mostly focus on Telegram’s digital ecosystem and its functioning in Russia. Some academics research how different social groups utilize Telegram’s affordances and features to advance their specific interests (e.g., Lyakhovenko 2022) and for political mobilization (Rudnik – Rönnblom 2024), others demonstrate how this medium became a battlefield in the Russia-Ukraine war (see Ghasiya – Sasahara 2023; Bawa et al. 2025, among others), while only some of them have investigated Telegram as an independent entity focusing on its resistance to governmental control (Ermoshina – Musiani 2021). The case study described in this research allows for a systematic and comprehensive assessment of Telegram’s activities in Russia as a media platform, creating a specific digital ecosystem. The conclusion discusses the results of the research, demonstrating the dual nature of the medium, where ideology effectively serves business objectives.

2. Telegram's founding

Telegram's origins are closely tied to its founder, Pavel Durov, whom the Western press often dubs the "Russian Mark Zuckerberg" (Miller 2015) due to his co-founding of VKontakte (meaning "in contact" in Russian), the equivalent of Facebook, with his brother Nikolai in 2006. Durov himself stated that "the best thing about Russia at that time was that the Internet sphere was completely not regulated. In some ways, it was more liberal than the United States" (Hakim 2024). For instance, in 2007, VKontakte allowed users to upload and share music and videos, often despite copyright restrictions (Storchevoy – Belousov 2020). In a 2012 manifesto, Durov argued Russia should "rid society of the burden of obsolete laws, licenses, and restrictions ... the best legislative initiative is absence" (Durov 2012).

By 2011, VKontakte had become Russia's most popular social network, significantly surpassing Facebook and other domestic competitors (Reuter – Szakonyi 2015). However, following parliamentary elections involving widespread falsification that winter, mass protests—which some commentators dubbed the "snow revolution" or "winter revolution" (Ioffe 2011) (by analogy with the "color revolutions" in other countries)—erupted nationwide. At this point, Durov, by his own account, actively supported the protestors, particularly by increasing the visibility of protest leader Alexei Navalny's posts on VKontakte (White – McAllister 2014). Over the subsequent two years, Durov faced intense pressure from authorities and special services, reportedly being compelled to sell his stake, which culminated in an attempted arrest (Toor 2014). Durov later recounted that this period inspired the idea for a new messenger service. He stated that the realization that he lacked a secure means of communication with his brother, Nikolai, while facing the threat of police measures was "how Telegram started" (Hakim 2014).

Following the company's sale, Durov departed Russia with several loyal employees and launched Telegram in August 2013. Initially a messaging application, Telegram began its evolution into a media platform two years later, in 2015, with the introduction of channels. Over subsequent years, Telegram attracted users, reaching nearly one billion monthly active users by March 2025 (Durov 2025a). India, Russia, Iran, Brazil, and Indonesia are often cited as primary countries of its dissemination.

3. Cyber-libertarianism

Researchers trace cyber-libertarianism to the 1980s counterculture and punk movements, particularly among young San Francisco intellectuals (Pace 2020). Their worldview resisted a technocratic society that rendered individu-

als “unconscious puppets” and indicated their yearning for freedom from censorship, monitoring, and social re-engineering (Foley 2014). With the advent of the internet, they perceived not opportunities, but rather a new force for human enslavement and total surveillance (Beltramini 2020). The struggle for total, unrestricted free speech became the cornerstone for “cypherpunks” (Zhuk 2024), who rapidly combined crypto-anarchism with libertarianism in underground circles (Nabben 2023). Their ideal envisioned cyberspace as a public domain, free from state or corporate appropriation (Kushnarov 2023).

Key tenets of cyber-libertarian ideology include decentralization, freedom from control, expansive cyber-freedom, anti-statism, individual autonomy, and the conceptualization of cyberspace as a public domain (Golumbia 2024). The emergence of decentralized Web3, with its “crypto-economy,” blockchain, and cryptocurrency, is considered a logical progression of these ideas (Calzada 2024). Proponents view cyberspace through the lens of dogmas proclaiming absolute freedom and deregulation as the sole means of resisting the state apparatus, whether democratic or totalitarian (Deseriis 2017).

Critics, however, argue that this ideology has become a tool for a new digital bourgeoisie to extract super-profits and establish their “rules of the game” both online and offline (Vandelannoitte – Bertin 2024). They contend that terms like “open,” “free,” and “democratization” are exploited to mask the objective of enrichment (González 2020). Specifically, “permissionless innovation” is seen as a euphemism for lacking democratic governance or business regulation. Adherents insist that democratic power should operate solely through market forces. Promoters of cryptocurrencies, embodying cyber-libertarian policies, actively oppose demands for standard tax reporting, labeling them as “mass surveillance” and a threat to “freedom of speech” (Albano 2019). Companies with direct commercial interests (e.g., Google via YouTube) routinely profit from copyrighted content without compensating rights holders. Finally, it is argued that cyber-libertarianism often leads its ideologues and leaders towards far-right political views, bordering on fascism (Golumbia 2024).

Viewing Telegram as an exemplar of cyber-libertarian ideology suggests that its core tenets should be reflected through its official mission, its operational principles, and the tangible regulation of its digital ecosystem.

4. NSA agency: Analytical framework

To analyze the extent to which Telegram’s policy adheres to cyber-libertarian ideology, a specialized, novel analytical framework was developed. This framework is specifically designed for non-state actors with a vertical management structure, such as business entities, media organizations, or hierarchical non-

governmental organizations. It is not applicable to horizontally organized or semi-structured organizations, such as some armed non-state actors or social movements though some parameters may still hold relevance.

Drawing on Marton's theory of non-state actor agency (Marton 2024), three primary preconditions for an NSA to exercise agency are identified: Strategic Unity, Independent Initiative, and Willful Determination. To evaluate these indicators and analyze the domain-specific agency of NSAs (particularly Telegram), the following parameters were derived (see Figure 1):

Mission. This parameter refers to the purpose proclaimed by the company and its owners—essentially, its positioning or ideology. Key characteristics include the transparency of its goals, objectives, and values, both internally and externally articulated. The principles of operation directly influence its strategic unity. Concurrently, the mission (whether stated or implied) dictates the manifestations of independent initiative and influences the company's desire to become a significant actor.

Funding Structure. This parameter concerns how the platform secures its funding, which directly impacts its capacity for independence or dependence on other business actors and the state. It also affects business practices and operational decisions at both daily and strategic levels. Resilience in the face of external influence, including from political actors, is a crucial characteristic to assess. Dependence on external actors or the presence of irreconcilable shareholders directly impacts strategic unity and the platform's independence as a political and social actor.

Operational Model. This parameter is rooted in the NSA's organizational structure, its principles, and mechanisms of activity. In Telegram's case, it describes how the platform engages and retains user and advertiser interest. Adaptability is crucial, particularly the extent to which its capabilities allow the platform to adjust to external changes. The paper will examine the affordances and features offered to users and their safety. The operational model exhibits a dual nature: while it provides opportunities for the NSA to generate independent initiative, the utilization of its capabilities to exercise agency depends directly on its own will.

Performance. This encompasses the NSA's routine practices and outcomes. For social media, this is typically expressed through active moderation. A main characteristic is the control over information flows (transmitted and produced), and the degree of censorship. The platform's desire to influence these processes directly impacts its performance.

Perception. Finally, how the NSA is perceived by users, the state, and other political and social actors constitutes a further key parameter. The NSA's articulated mission exerts a primary influence on its perception. Simultaneously, this parameter has reciprocal relations, affecting both "willful determination" and

platform performance. Actions by the social network to moderate, administer, and transform its ecosystem, as well as its desire to exercise agency, influence its perception. Yet, concurrently, the expectations, demands, and acceptance or non-acceptance of the platform's actions by users and other actors influence both its performance and its "will" or strategic intentions.

Applying this framework to Telegram's case necessitates a mixed-methods approach that combines structural-functional analysis, a discourse-historical approach, and digital ethnography. Each parameter within the framework requires the use of specific methodological tools and data sources. The discourse-historical approach (Reisigl – Wodak 2015), a method of critical discourse analysis, allowed for the analysis of Durov's evolving ideological messaging as reflected in the "Mission" and "Platform Performance" parameters. For these purposes, the study analyzed interviews and posts made by Durov on his personal Telegram channel. The "Perception" parameter was also explored primarily through the DHA method by analyzing media publications. Digital ethnography was employed to observe Telegram's affordances, technological features, and user experiences (Ritter 2021), which facilitated the assessment of the "Operational Model" and "Platform Performance". To examine the "Funding Structure" and the company's financial outcomes, the research utilized Telegram's official media releases, analytical articles from the global press, and investigative reports. However, the analysis of this parameter faced significant constraints, and the assessment results are inherently limited due to the lack of official public information regarding Telegram's business structure and financial performance. Finally, structural-functional analysis (Lyden 1975) was used to explore the platform's functional capacity and how its integrated components—including funding, management, and features—work in concert in the exercise of its agency. The data gathered for this study spans the period from 2011 to August 27, 2025.

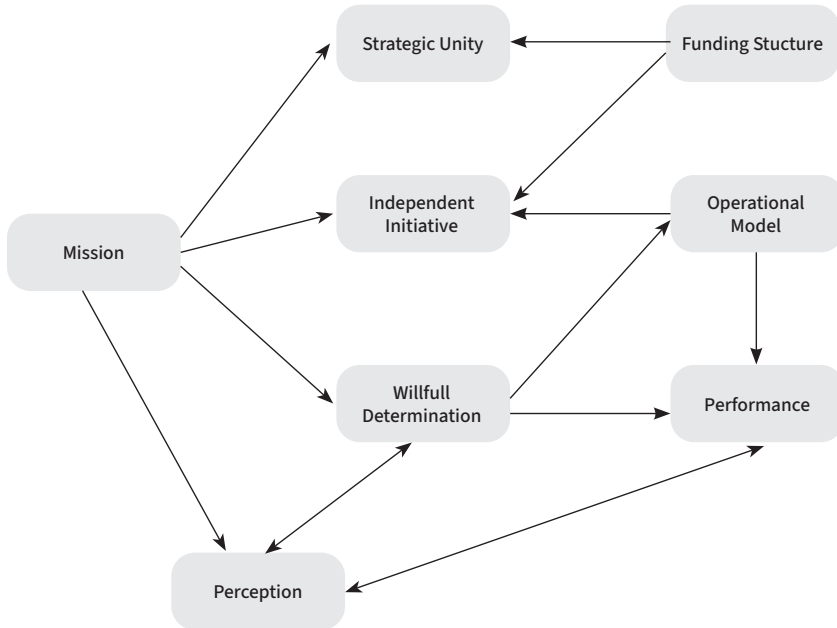


Figure 1. NSA Agency

Source: author.

4.1. Telegram’s mission

An organization’s mission is typically communicated through public documents, interviews, public appearances by employees, press coverage, and the public image projected by its leadership. Telegram is strongly associated with its founder, Pavel Durov, who singularly articulates the platform’s specific meanings and principles. He rarely grants interviews; for instance, his 2024 conversation with Tucker Carlson was his first in seven years (Carlson 2024). Early in his career, he avoided the press, communicating through a spokesperson. More recently, Durov has primarily used his personal Telegram channel (@durov) for official statements, with significant posts often garnering press attention. Launched in October 2015, the channel initially featured infrequent nature photographs. From 2017 onwards, Durov began publishing substantive philosophical, ideological, and programmatic statements; he made 448 posts between October 28, 2015, and August 27, 2025.

Analysis of his statements reveals three key terms associated with Telegram: *privacy*, *neutrality*, and *independence*.

Regarding privacy, Durov defines it as user and correspondence confidentiality, positioning it as Telegram's core value and a fundamental human right:

“Telegram would rather exit a market than undermine encryption with backdoors and violate basic human rights. Unlike some of our competitors, we don't trade privacy for market share. In its 12-year history, Telegram has never disclosed a single byte of private messages” (Durov 2025b).

By neutrality, Durov signifies political neutrality, entailing a distancing from specific political views and thereby providing unmoderated freedom of speech to users:

“Another human right we feel passionately about is the freedom of speech. In some countries, Telegram is the only popular platform for independent sources of information. [...] Telegram has never yielded to pressure from officials who wanted us to perform political censorship” (Durov 2017a).

Even when facing political pressure, such as from Iranian authorities during the 2017 protests (Akbari – Gabdulhakov 2019), Durov declared complete neutrality:

“Obviously, our neutrality and refusal to take sides in such conflicts can create powerful enemies. Iranian officials [...] filed criminal charges against me back in September for letting Telegram spread ‘uncensored news’ and ‘extremist propaganda’. Today they imposed a block on Telegram – not clear whether permanent or temporary. And yet, doing the right thing is more important than trying to avoid having enemies” (Durov 2017b).

For Durov, his company's independence entails freedom from external state pressure and financial self-sufficiency, operating without external shareholders:

“The world needs Telegram to stay independent as a place where users are respected and high-quality service is ensured. Telegram must continue to serve the world as an example of a tech company that strives for perfection and integrity. And, as the sad examples of our predecessors show, that is impossible if you become part of a corporation” (Durov 2020).

Durov and his company cultivate an “underground” image, akin to that of cyberpunks advocating absolute cyber-freedom. This image is reinforced by the official FAQ, which, for instance, informs users about the team's nomadic history due to evolving IT regulations, having settled in Dubai but prepared to relocate

again if regulations change.² Durov also cultivates his external image with cyber-punk aesthetics, consistently dressing in black and occasionally hinting at Neo from “The Matrix” (Merkurov 2024). Thus, Durov and Telegram meticulously build an image of consistent cyber-libertarian adherence, a practice dating back to VKontakte (Miller 2015). Even his scandalous act of throwing 5,000-ruble banknotes folded into paper airplanes from his St. Petersburg office building can be interpreted as cypherpunk hooliganism (Sotnikova 2012), an act later ironically reflected in Telegram’s logo.

However, a single public statement by Durov from December 2011 sharply contradicts this narrative. As VKontakte’s head, facing Russian police pressure for refusing to block opposition pages, he published an open letter (Lenta.ru 2011) stating:

“Those who rushed to thank us for assisting political protesters miss a simple circumstance. If, in those same days, we had started losing in [the] competitive struggle due to the absence of some kind of virtual mass repression service, we would have had to introduce that too. And rest assured – our repressions would have been the most massive and most bloody on the market.”

This letter suggests Durov’s primary concern was not freedom of speech or privacy, but rather his company’s competitiveness, which he believed would suffer if VKontakte blocked its “active and passionate” opposition users. Yet, two years later, after selling his VKontakte stake, Durov still claimed he had divested from VKontakte to avoid having to hand over the EuroMaidan group’s data to the FSB, writing: “I still have something more important – a clear conscience and ideals that I am ready to defend” (Durov 2014). The above, largely unnoticed episode within Durov’s overall ideological messaging may cast doubt on the sincerity of his proclaimed values.

From a marketing perspective, Telegram entered a competitive market in 2013 (e.g., WhatsApp launched in 2009, Facebook in 2004, Instagram in 2010, and Twitter in 2006). By then, Facebook privacy scandals (Fuller 2019), involving data leaks and the commercial use of personal information, had erupted periodically, including accusations of political censorship (Keller – Leerssen 2020). Thus, Telegram’s declared security, political neutrality, and independence became a distinguishing feature, potentially attracting users dissatisfied with competitor platforms.

2 <https://telegram.org/faq#q-where-is-telegram-based>, accessed 05.11.2025

4.2. Funding structure

As a non-publicly traded commercial entity, Telegram's business structure and financial performance are not publicly disclosed. Consequently, its revenues and business model can only be inferred from official platform statements and press reports. Available information indicates that Telegram Messenger LLP, a limited liability partnership based in London, UK, serves as the primary owner (Walt 2016). Pavel and Nikolai Durov are consistently named as its founders. Companies registered in Germany and the United Arab Emirates are also part of its business structure (Wired 2022). Furthermore, Global Network Management, registered in Antigua and Barbuda and other offshore jurisdictions (e.g., British Virgin Islands), has been mentioned (Anin and Kondratyev 2025). This complex, undisclosed network of companies may represent a strategic effort to maintain business independence. Pavel Durov has repeatedly expressed a desire to avoid repeating VKontakte's mistakes and to shield Telegram from state influence and potential co-owners (Avetisyan 2024), thereby demonstrating an intent to maintain sole control.

Maintaining both financial and political independence, however, has proven challenging. In its early years, Durov largely self-financed Telegram's creation and operation using funds from the sale of his VKontakte shares (Monaghan 2014). Several years later, monetization strategies were actively explored. In 2018, Durov announced the creation of his blockchain platform, TON, and its cryptocurrency, Gram, intended to attract investment (Seddon 2018). A private presale of tokens for large private investors raised approximately \$1.7 billion. However, regulatory challenges, including SEC charges, ultimately led Telegram to pay an \$18.5 million penalty and abandon the project (Angelo – Salzer 2023).

Subsequently, Telegram's owners distanced themselves from the blockchain platform. TON transitioned into an independent open-source project following regulatory issues (Murphy 2024). Its management was formally transferred to the independent TON Foundation. This platform is powered by its native cryptocurrency, Toncoin, which was subsequently integrated into Telegram's structure, serving as the platform's internal currency for various payments within the social network (Rapoza 2022).

In 2021, Telegram launched Telegram Ads, enabling advertisers to place sponsored messages in public channels. Unlike other platforms, Telegram does not utilize algorithms to prioritize or restrict content visibility (Herasimenka 2022). Consequently, its advertising model may not support the same micro-targeting capabilities as social networks like Facebook or Instagram due to its privacy-focused approach. Telegram advertising effectiveness is, therefore, sometimes questioned in marketing circles (Parameswaran 2025). In 2022, the social network introduced a paid subscription service, Telegram Premium. According

to Durov, the number of paid users reached 12 million by the end of 2024 (Durov 2024a). To attract further investment, Telegram also conducted several rounds of debt bond issuance, totaling \$2 billion. These were due by late March 2026, by which time the company reportedly had plans to issue a stock exchange IPO (Initial Public Offering; Sun – Bergen 2025).

According to Durov, potential investors valued Telegram at \$30 billion (Murphy 2024), even though the company did not show its first profit until 2024 (\$547 million, with a total turnover of \$1.4 billion). As late as 2023, Telegram still recorded losses of \$173 million, and revenue was significantly lower—only \$343 million (Durov 2025a). Analysts attribute this sharp increase in financial performance not solely to operational successes, even though the social network reached 1 billion active users by March 2025. Some analysts suggest that the surge in profit and revenue is closely linked to the launch and operation of the affiliated Toncoin cryptocurrency, thereby raising questions about the company’s underlying financial stability (Edwards 2024). Currently, however, the independence of Telegram’s owners from direct external financial influence allows them to independently shape the company’s strategic unity and demonstrate independent initiative. From a marketing perspective, Telegram’s financial independence can be viewed as an additional advantage compared to its competitors.

4.3. Operational model

To evaluate the operational model, the affordances offered to users were considered. The Telegram ecosystem comprises personal chats (messaging and video calls), groups, channels, and bots. Telegram is a hybrid platform, combining messaging app functionalities with social network dynamics. This dual nature allows private message exchange and group chat creation (both public and private). Simultaneously, within the same personal correspondence “feed,” users find Telegram channels—one-to-many communication tools for broadcasts. Channel administrators share messages, photos, and videos, and conduct polls, with media features akin to those of Facebook and Instagram. This enables channel creators to operate “at arm’s length,” effectively intruding into subscribers’ personal space. This combination of messenger and social network is a distinguishing feature and an advantage for audience impact.

The inherent difficulty of combining private and public communication, however, poses challenges for Telegram developers in maintaining declared privacy. Although Pavel Durov consistently emphasizes his creation’s absolute security and user privacy protection, some experts express serious doubts (Cogliati et al. 2023).

A primary distinguishing feature of Telegram from other social networks is its refusal to use algorithms for user data collection and feed generation. Users independently choose which channels and chats appear in their feed. Consequently, content discovery on Telegram is often more constrained than on other platforms, primarily relying on message forwarding and cross-promotion between channels. Initially, user tools for content discovery were limited to searching by channel and chat names. However, the introduction of advertising on Telegram necessitated limited algorithmic functions for more accurate ad placement, leading to a “recommendations” feature (Telegram 2023) for similar channels in November 2023 and global hashtag search in May 2024 (Telegram 2024).

Researchers have noted Telegram’s remarkable adaptability to changing external conditions. For example, during the 2019 Hong Kong protests, Telegram introduced an update allowing users to completely hide phone numbers. Protesters, coordinating on Telegram, feared authorities might use phone-number databases to identify them in protest chats (Urman et al. 2021). An option to restrict who could find users by phone number also emerged. While an official message by Telegram did not directly mention the protests, it stated, “We believe that all people have a right to express their opinions and communicate privately” (Telegram 2019). Similarly, during the 2020 Belarus protests, Telegram introduced a feature allowing group administrators to hide names and participate anonymously, crucial for avoiding identification and detention (Wijermars – Lokot 2022). Channel commenting, previously unavailable, also appeared. This time, while events in Belarus were not directly mentioned, an official Telegram website hyperlink led to a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty article on the protests (Telegram 2020). In response to blocking attempts in Iran and Russia, Telegram released a specialized MTPROTO Proxy Server, enabling users in these countries to access the platform (Albrecht et al. 2025).

Thus, Telegram’s operational model demonstrates its capacity to quickly modify its tools and affordances, thereby exhibiting independent initiative based on willful determination. From a marketing perspective, this policy has led to Telegram’s widespread adoption in countries facing political restrictions, such as Iran and Russia, while in democratic countries, it has attracted marginalized groups (Zhong et al. 2024).

4.4. Platform performance

Telegram’s proclaimed political neutrality and absolute freedom of speech have resulted in a lack of robust content moderation. Durov has openly criticized competitors for restricting free speech, citing instances such as the suppression of the COVID-19 lab-leak theory by platforms including Facebook

and Twitter. He stated, “Telegram never blocked posts discussing the lab leak theory, because we didn’t think it’s our role to decide for our users what they should believe” (Durov 2021).

Content moderation within channels and groups is primarily delegated to administrators, leading to recurrent criticism that Telegram condones criminal activities, including the dissemination of extremist ideologies, coordination of violent attacks, and fraudulent schemes (Nohara 2024). This was reportedly a contributing factor to Pavel Durov’s 2024 arrest in France (Robb - P. L. 2024). Consequently, the platform has been labeled a “breeding ground” for disinformation, conspiracy theories, and a haven for radicals (Morgia et al. 2023).

Even in 2015, French authorities claimed that terrorist groups recruited and coordinated attacks in Paris via Telegram (Shehabat et al. 2017). Similar accusations were made by Indonesian authorities in 2017 (Arifin 2017). In response, Telegram banned terrorist groups and channels; Durov reported 8,500 terrorism-related channels blocked in a single month (Durov 2017a).

Since 2018, Telegram’s Privacy Policy has indicated a readiness to disclose user data upon legitimate law enforcement request (Roth 2024). A dedicated page for these requests launched in early 2024, and Telegram now publishes annual transparency reports on official data requests. The social network’s owner asserted that “we’ve always strived to comply with relevant local laws—as long as they didn’t go against our values of freedom and privacy” (Durov 2024b). For example, between February 2024 and February 2025, Telegram received 5,046 metadata requests and 553 content-related requests from EU countries.³

Telegram’s content moderation policies also faced pressure from corporations. In August 2020, Apple demanded the blocking of three Telegram channels that were exposing Belarusian law enforcement personnel during protests. Durov, describing the channels as tools “used by the people of Belarus to expose the identities of their oppressors,” came to the conclusion that they “should be left alone” (Durov 2020b).

The platform’s reluctance to implement strict content moderation also appears to stem from financial and organizational constraints. Durov financed Telegram’s development with his own funds, thereby limiting his team to 30-50 employees (Zhukova 2020). This small team was insufficient to moderate the growing volume of user-generated content, a situation that contrasted sharply with Facebook’s 40,000 content safety employees and \$13 billion spent for these purposes over five years (Wagner 2021). Following his arrest, Durov justified the limited monitoring by citing the platform’s inability to oversee a billion daily

3 <https://telegram.org/tos/eu-dsa/transparency-2025>, accessed 17.10.2025

users (Durov 2024c). Moderation efforts were initially handled by volunteers, later supplemented by a specialized NGO (Kireev 2025). In 2024, Telegram also began implementing artificial intelligence for content moderation (Roth 2024).

Thus, while platform performance largely aligns with its founder's declared principles, it undergoes modifications due to political and administrative pressures, often compelling Durov to make concessions. Moreover, the absence of strict, centralized content moderation has afforded significant cost savings.

4.5. Perception

The platform's actions elicit diverse and often conflicting perceptions. Research indicates that Telegram has become a significant space for counterpublics challenging the dominant public sphere and established power relations (Wijermars – Lokot 2022). Users are often motivated by a desire to distance themselves from dominant narratives and to cultivate their own understanding within alternative communities (Bader et al. 2025). Telegram functions as an alternative media channel, circumventing traditional, often moderated, information sources. Its users are generally more active in seeking and disseminating information (Kitsa 2023). Opposition-minded citizens in authoritarian countries particularly appreciate Telegram's efforts to support protesters, sometimes explicitly and sometimes indirectly through anonymity-enhancing updates (Wijermars – Lokot 2022).

Conversely, critics often label Telegram as “the most divisive messaging app in the world” and even a “dark media,” akin to the darknet (Nohara 2024; Rawi 2021). Governments, law enforcement, cybersecurity specialists, and human rights groups consistently express indignation, asserting that Telegram has fostered an ecosystem favorable for criminal activity, extremist propaganda, misinformation campaigns, and various other illegal endeavors (Nohara 2024). However, the platform's administration frequently disregards these concerns, altering its policy only under direct pressure and in response to restrictions (Santos et al. 2021).

5. From a ‘Shelter of Freedom’ to a cell of diversified propaganda—the case of Russia

Following the emergence of anonymous channels in 2015, Telegram rapidly gained an audience in Russia, reaching 100 million unique users by 2025 (Gavriliuk 2025). Given Durov's background as an advocate for internet freedom, the platform quickly acquired a reputation as a secure messenger immune to

surveillance by special services (Ermoshina – Musiani 2021). Anti-system opposition groups, including those associated with Alexei Navalny, used Telegram to organize street protests (Herasimenka 2022). Anonymous Telegram channels also gained popularity, offering entertainment and alternative information unavailable through Kremlin-controlled mainstream media (Litvinenko – Smoliarova 2024).

Initially, Russian authorities paid minimal attention to the social network, although some members of parliament demanded Telegram's ban as early as 2015 following terrorist attacks in Paris, accusing the messenger of facilitating "the process of recruiting Russian citizens to ISIS" (KP 2015).

The Russian government's attention, however, shifted after the Yarovaya Law mandated that communication operators and internet providers store all user traffic (Kareem 2024). This law also mandated encrypted internet services to provide decryption tools to law enforcement upon request. While other major social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp continued operating without restrictions, LinkedIn was the sole major platform to be fully blocked.

In 2017 and 2018, the FSB issued two requests to Telegram for decryption keys, but the platform refused, citing cryptographic impossibility inherent to its architecture (Ermoshina – Musiani 2021). This initiated a two-year confrontation during which Roskomnadzor unsuccessfully attempted to block the social network. Telegram responded by implementing technological solutions, such as the MTProto Proxy Server, to bypass such blocks (Akbari – Gabdulhakov 2019), and users actively employed VPNs.

The blocking decision ignited widespread user protests, with anonymous crypto-activists devising bypass solutions and ordinary users organizing flash mobs and rallies, including those featuring paper airplanes resembling Telegram's logo. By 2018, Telegram had become a focal point for anti-government movements (Ermoshina – Musiani 2021). Indirect assistance was provided by competitors, as Telegram utilized Google and Amazon web servers to temporarily host the messenger, enabling it to "hop IP addresses" and circumvent censorship. Conversely, Apple impeded Telegram by refusing to publish updates in the App Store during this period (Stepanov – Ivanova 2023). Two years later, Russian authorities conceded defeat and officially ceased blocking efforts (Shestoperoev 2020). This confrontation significantly strengthened Telegram's reputation among Russian users as a censorship-free platform, a "shelter of freedom" (Avetisyan 2024).

Subsequent to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, several foreign social networks, including Facebook and Instagram, were blocked in Russia, and their parent company, Meta, was designated an extremist organization (RBC 2022). Telegram, however, was not banned; instead, pro-Kremlin propagandists actively began utilizing it (Willaert – Tutters 2025). Investigative journalists report

that the pro-Kremlin non-profit organization ANO “Dialog” coordinates the dissemination of pro-government narratives on Telegram (Meduza 2023).

Researchers argue that Telegram became a convenient platform for propagandists, particularly for reaching an international audience, due to its refusal to comply with EU requirements to limit the spread of Russian propaganda (Okholm et al. 2024). Consequently, the platform occupied a unique niche regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It is actively used by the Ukrainian side to cover military actions, and concurrently by Russian “nomenklatura” politicians, propagandists, and “Z channels” with millions of subscribers (Ghasiya – Sasahara 2023).

The author contends that after unsuccessful blocking attempts, Russian authorities opted to utilize Telegram for their own purposes, transforming it into a tool of “diversified propaganda” (Gulenko 2025). This shift was facilitated by the platform’s established image as a freer space providing alternative unofficial sources of information, coupled with the crisis of trust in traditional media and social networks (Dolgova – Gulenko 2023), which becomes acutely manifest during periods of crisis (Asmolov 2022).

Against this backdrop, accusations emerged that the platform’s management was cooperating with the Kremlin. Suspicions of Durov’s ties with Russian authorities and special services had previously surfaced (Kolesnikov 2013). However, a 2025 investigation alleges that Telegram actively cooperates with the FSB, disclosing opposition user data, hosting some servers with user data in Russia, and implementing, at Roskomnadzor’s request, a system for monitoring user traffic using Deep Packet Inspection technology. Journalists also claim that Durov, who asserts he has not visited Russia since his departure, actually travels to the country regularly (Anin – Kondratyev 2025). Additionally, Telegram has been preparing to establish its representative office in the country in accordance with new legislative requirements (Kapranov 2024). As may be evident from this, Telegram in Russia has ultimately transformed from a perceived shelter of opposition freedom into a potent conduit for state propaganda.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis demonstrates that Telegram, while proclaiming its neutrality and disavowal of censorship, thereby projecting an image of complete detachment from user-generated content, nonetheless exercises a distinct form of agency.

The strategic unity of the company is intrinsically linked to the persona of Telegram’s creator and owner, Pavel Durov. His consistent articulation of the platform’s foundational principles attracts and retains adherents of cyber-libertarian ideas. Maintaining sole financial control over business structures safe-

guards the company's internal affairs from external investor interference. The company's diversified structural presence across various jurisdictions also helps minimize interference from national state authorities; however, this does not exempt it from administrative or even criminal prosecution. Nonetheless, such incidents, including Durov's arrest in France, inadvertently reinforce his image as a champion of digital freedom.

The principles of neutrality and freedom of speech declared by Telegram can be interpreted as both a reluctance to exert initiative and an active exercise of its agency. Altogether, this stance inherently does constitute an exercise of agency. As demonstrated by the case of Russia, the platform's proclaimed non-interference with user-generated and disseminated content can be strategically leveraged by various political actors for their own objectives. Concurrently, the social network has demonstrated throughout its history that it is not entirely disengaged from the political and social processes that are unfolding globally. For instance, the platform has often, without explicit explanation, promptly adapted its tools and affordances during political crises in various countries, thereby influencing the course of events and showcasing its independent initiative.

The ideology championed by Telegram, and personally by Durov, is based on cyber-libertarian ideas that also effectively serve its marketing and business objectives. Telegram's "three ideological pillars"—privacy, neutrality, and independence—have enabled the platform to carve out a distinct niche among social networks and, amidst widespread distrust of traditional social structures and media, have allowed it to successfully expand its user base.

However, Telegram's initial business strategy, with its rejection of algorithmic content promotion and traditional advertising sales, hampered the company's capitalization and resulted in financial losses. The imperative to achieve profitability subsequently compelled the social network's management to adopt, albeit cautiously, strategies employed by other social networks, including the specific implementation of algorithms and artificial intelligence for advertising sales, as well as the introduction of paid subscriptions. Furthermore, the aspiration for financial independence led to the pursuit of risky financial and technological solutions, such as bond sales and the introduction of its own cryptocurrency.

In striving to maintain scientific neutrality, it is difficult to definitively ascertain whether the cyber-libertarian ideology proclaimed by Telegram's owner constitutes a principled stance or is primarily a successful marketing strategy enabling him to develop his business and augment his personal fortune, estimated at \$17 billion in 2025 (Forbes 2025). Nonetheless, it can be concluded that Telegram represents a compelling case where ideology effectively serves business objectives, and the pursuit of freedom is successfully converted into financial capital.

References

- Akbari, A. & Gabdulhakov, R. (2019). Platform Surveillance and Resistance in Iran and Russia: The Case of Telegram. *Surveillance & Society*, 17(1/2), 223-231. <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v17i1/2.12928>
- Albano, A. (2019). Autonomous Distributed Networks: The Unfulfilled Libertarian Dream of Breaking Free from Regulations. SSRN, September 29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3461166>
- Albrecht, M.R., Mareková, L., Paterson, K.G., Ronen, E. & Stepanovs, I. (2025). Analysis of the Telegram Key Exchange. In S. Fehr & PA. Fouque (Eds.), *Advances in Cryptology – EUROCRYPT 2025. EUROCRYPT 2025. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol 15608*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-91101-9_8
- Al-Rawi, A. (2021). Telegramming hate: Far-right themes on dark social media. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 46(4), 821-851. <https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2021v46n4a4055>
- Anin, R. & Kondratyev, N. (2025, June 10). Telegram, the FSB, and the Man in the Middle. *Important stories*. <https://importantstories.media/en/stories/2025/06/10/telegram-fsb/>, accessed 18.09.2025.
- Arifin, N. A. (2017). The evolution of ISIS in Indonesia with regard to its social media strategy. *Jurnal Ilmiah Hubungan Internasional*, 13(2), 145-158.
- Asmolv, G. (2022). The transformation of participatory warfare: The role of narratives in connective mobilization in the Russia-Ukraine war. *Digital War*, 3(1), 25-37. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42984-022-00054-5>
- Ausat, A. M. A. (2023). The role of social media in shaping public opinion and its influence on economic decisions. *Technology and Society Perspectives (TACIT)*, 1(1), 35-44.
- Avetisyan, M. (2024). The Rise and Resilience of Telegram: An Examination of its Origins, Current Positioning, and Future Prospects in the Context of Russian Realities. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 11(6), 1-09. <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.116.17088>
- Bader, K., Müller, K.F. & Rinsdorf, L. (2025). Wanderer between the worlds: Telegram use from the users' perspective. *Publizistik*, 70, 133-155. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-025-00874-x>
- Bawa, A., Kursuncu, U., Achilov, D., Shalin, V. L., Agarwal, N., & Akbas, E. (2025, June). Telegram as a battlefield: Kremlin-related communications during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* (Vol. 19, pp. 2361-2370).
- Beltramini, E. (2020). Against technocratic authoritarianism. A short intellectual history of the cypherpunk movement. *Internet Histories*, 5(2), 101-118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24701475.2020.1731249>

- Breakwell, G. M. (2022). *Nedoverie* [Mistrust]. Bratislava: Time In.
- Calzada, I. (2024). Decentralized Web3 Reshaping Internet Governance: Towards the Emergence of New Forms of Nation-Statehood? *Future Internet*, 16(10): 361. <https://doi.org/10.3390/fi16100361>
- Celeste, E., Palladino, N., Redeker, D. & Yilma, K. (2023). Platform Policies Versus Human Rights Standards. In *The Content Governance Dilemma. Information Technology and Global Governance*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32924-1_5
- Cogliati, B-M., Ethan, J. & Jha, A. (2023). Subverting Telegram's End-to-End Encryption. In *IACR Transactions on Symmetric Cryptology*.
- Deseriis, M. (2017). Technopopulism: The emergence of a discursive formation. tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. *Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, 15(2), 441-458. <https://doi.org/10.31269/triplec.v15i2.770>
- Dewey, M. & Buzzetti, A. (2024). Easier, faster and safer: The social organization of drug dealing through encrypted messaging apps. *Sociology Compass*, 18(2), e13175. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.13175>
- Di Angelo, M. & Salzer, G. (2023). Identification of token contracts on Ethereum: standard compliance and beyond. *International Journal of Data Science and Analytics*, 16(3), 333-352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41060-021-00281-1>
- Dolgova, Yu.I., & Gulenko, P.V. (2023). Crisis of political communication: Is there a silencing effect in Russian media? *RUDN Journal of Studies in Literature and Journalism*, 28(4), 769–779. <http://doi.org/10.22363/2312-9220-2023-28-4-769-779>
- Durov, P. (2012, May 18). Гражданские манифесты. Павел Дуров, основатель «ВКонтакте». Что нужно сделать в России для того, чтобы страна стала лидером XXI века? [Civil manifests. Pavel Durov, the founder of V Kontakte. What should be done in Russia to become a leader of the XXI century?] *Afisha*. <https://daily.afisha.ru/archive/gorod/archive/pavel-durov-vkontakte/>, accessed 10.09.2025.
- Durov, P. @durov (2017a, October 29). You already know Telegram has your back when it comes to privacy. *Telegram*. <https://t.me/durov/66>, accessed 10.09.2025.
- Durov, P. @durov (2020a): As Telegram approaches 500 million active users, many of you are asking the question – who is going to pay to support this growth? *Telegram*. <https://t.me/durov/142>, accessed 10.09.2025.
- Durov, P. @durov (2020b, December 23). Apple is requesting that we shut down 3 channels used by the people of Belarus to expose the identities of their oppressors. *Telegram*, October 09. <https://t.me/durov/136>, accessed 10.09.2025.
- Durov, P. @durov (2021, August 14). It's hard to believe it's been 8 years since Telegram first appeared in the App Store. *Telegram*. <https://t.me/durov/164>, accessed 10.09.2025.

- Durov, P. (2024a, December 23). As I predicted 2024 turned out to be a very good year for Telegram. *Telegram*. <https://t.me/durov/386>, accessed 03.09.2025.
- Durov, P. @durov (2024b, October 02). My previous post may have seemed to announce a major shift in how Telegram works. *Telegram*. <https://t.me/durov/346>, accessed 10.09.2025.
- Durov, P @durov (2024c, September 05). Thanks everyone for your support and love! *Telegram*. <https://t.me/durov/342>, accessed 10.09.2025.
- Durov, P. @durov (2025a, March 19). Telegram now has significantly over 1 billion monthly active users. *Telegram*. <https://t.me/durov/404>, accessed 10.09.2025.
- Durov, P. @durov (2025b, April 21). Last month, France nearly banned encryption. *Telegram*. <https://t.me/durov/410>, accessed 10.09.2025.
- Edwards, J. (2024, September 02). Telegram's financials: It's a loss-making company (that holds a lot of crypto). *Fortune*. <https://fortune.com/2024/09/02/telegram-financials-crypto-toncoin/>, accessed 13.11.2025.
- Ermoshina, K. & Musiani, F. (2021). The Telegram ban: How censorship "made in Russia" faces a global Internet. *First Monday*, 26(5). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v26i5.11704>
- Foley, M. S. (2014). *Dead Kennedys' fresh fruit for rotting vegetables*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
- Forbes (2025, November 23). PROFILE. Pavel Durov. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/profile/pavel-durov/>, accessed 23.11.2025.
- Fornasier, M. & Borges, G. (2022). The current influence of social media on democratic debate, political parties and electioneering. *Revista de Investigações Constitucionais*, 9(1), 73–102. <https://doi.org/10.5380/rinc.v9i1.83460>
- Fujiwara, T., Müller K. & Schwarz, C. (2024). The Effect of Social Media on Elections: Evidence from The United States. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 22(3), 1495–1539. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeea/jvad058>
- Fuller, M. (2019). Big data and the Facebook scandal: Issues and responses. *Theology*, 122(1), 14-21.
- Gavriliuk, A. (2025, August 15). Telegram первым из мессенджеров охватил в России 100 млн пользователей [Telegram became the first messenger to reach 100 million users]. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.ru/tehnologii/543944-telegram-pervym-iz-messendzherov-ohvatil-v-rossii-100-mln-pol-zovatelej?ysclid=miewi07lc638152127>, accessed 14.11.2025.
- Ghasiya, P. & Sasahara, K. (2023). Messaging strategies of Ukraine and Russia on Telegram during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. *First Monday*.
- Gilardi, F., Gessler, T., Kubli, M. & Müller, S. (2022). Social media and political agenda setting. *Political communication*, 39(1), 39-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2021.1910390>

- González, A. (2020). Tech power: a critical approach to digital corporations. *Teknokultura. Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales*, 17(1), 77-85. <https://doi.org/10.5209/tekn.66931>
- Golumbia, D. (2024). *Cyberlibertarianism: The right-wing politics of digital technology*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Gulenko, P. (2025). 'You're Dead!': Utilizing aggression as a propaganda technique in Russian political talk shows. *Discourse & Society*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265251386464>
- Gulenko, P. (2024). RTVI: An attempt to play on both sides. In P. Marton, G. Thomassen, C. Békés & A. Rácz (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Non-State Actors in East-West Relations* (pp. 687-698). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Hakim, D. (2014, December 2). Once celebrated in Russia, the programmer Pavel Durov chooses exile. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/03/technology/once-celebrated-in-russia-programmerpavel-durov-chooses-exile.html?ref=technology&_r=1, accessed 18.07.2025.
- Herasimenka, A. (2022). Movement Leadership and Messaging Platforms in Preemptive Repressive Settings: Telegram and the Navalny Movement in Russia. *Social Media + Society*, 8(3). Article e205630512211244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221123038>
- Herasimenka, A., Bright, J., Knuutila, A. & Howard, P. N. (2022). Misinformation and professional news on largely unmoderated platforms: the case of telegram. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 20(2), 198–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2022.2076272>
- Ioffe, J. (2011, December 10). Snow Revolution. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/snowrevolution#entry-more>, accessed 12.11.2025.
- Kapranov, S. (2024, October 2). Эксперт рассказал о формате сотрудничества Telegram с властями [The Expert told about formats of Telegram's cooperation with the government]. *Rambler*. https://news.rambler.ru/tech/53514533/?utm_content=news_media&utm_medium=read_more&utm_source=copylink, accessed 24.10.2025.
- Kareem, M. A. (2024). The Use of Social Media in Human Rights Campaigns. *Administrative Social Science Review*, 1(1), 37-45.
- Keller, D. & Leerssen, P. (2020). Facts and Where to Find Them: Empirical Research on Internet Platforms and Content Moderation. In N. Persily & J.A. Tucker (Eds.), *Social Media and Democracy. SSRC Anxieties of Democracy* (pp. 220-251). Cambridge University Press.
- Kireev, K., Mykhno, Y., Troncoso, C. & Overdorf, R. (2025). Characterizing and Detecting Propaganda-Spreading Accounts on Telegram. In *34th USENIX Security Symposium* (pp. 161-180).

- Kitsa, M. (2023). Telegram news channels: overview, audience preferences, specifics of functioning. *Bulletin of Lviv Polytechnic National University: Journalism*, 2, 66-72. <https://doi.org/10.23939/sjs2023.02.066>
- Kolesnikov, A. (2013, March 27). “Новая газета” о “письме Павла Дурова Владиславу Суркову” и манипуляциях в соцсети [“Novaya Gazeta writes about “a letter of Pavel Durov to Vladislav Surkov” and about manipulation in the medium]. *Novaya Gazeta*. https://web.archive.org/web/20231205025200/https://www.compromat.ru/page_33237.htm, accessed 27.09.2025.
- KP (2015, November 16). Депутат: Террористы сами признали, что пользуются мессенджером Telegram [The member of parliament: Terrorists confessed that they utilized Telegram]. *KP.ru*. <https://www.kp.ru/online/news/2222988/>, accessed 18.10.2025.
- Kushnarov, V. (2023). Cyberpunk as a Metacultural Movement: Philosophical-Cultural Analysis. *Culture and Arts in the Modern World*, 24, 40–48. <https://doi.org/10.31866/2410-1915.24.2023.287657>
- La Morgia, M., Mei, A., Mongardini, A. M. & Wu, J. (2023). It’s a trap! Detection and analysis of fake channels on telegram. In *2023 IEEE International Conference on Web Services (ICWS)* (pp. 97-104). IEEE.
- Leclercq-Vandelannoite, A. & Bertin, E. (2024). How to deal with Big Tech power? The “Big Tech Raj”, a new form of biopower in the digital age. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 208, 123732.
- Lenta.ru (2011, December 12). Здравый смысл Письмо создателя “ВКонтакте” Павла Дурова о цензуре и митингах. *Lenta.ru*. <https://lenta.ru/articles/2011/12/12/durov/>, accessed 15.09.2025.
- Lindman, J., Makinen, J. & Kasanen, E. (2023). Big Tech’s power, political corporate social responsibility and regulation. *Journal of Information Technology*, 38(2), 144-159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02683962221113596>
- Litvinenko, A. & Smoliarova, A. (2024): Trust in anonymous news? How users navigate political news channels on Russian Telegram. *Social Sciences*, 13(4), 180. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13040180>
- Lyakhovenko, O. I. (2022). Telegram channels in the system of expert and political communication in modern Russia. *Galactica Media: Journal of Media Studies*, 4(1), 114-144. DOI: 10.46539/gmd.v4i1.268
- Lyden, F. J. (1975). Using Parsons’ functional analysis in the study of public organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 59-70.
- Marton, P. (2024). A Theory of Non-state Actors. In P. Marton, G. Thomasen, C. Békés & A. Rác (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Non-State Actors in East-West Relations* (pp. 19-37). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05750-2_89-1
- Meduza (2023, September 18). Познакомьтесь с АНО «Диалог». Именно эта организация отвечает за пиар Минобороны РФ и создание фейков про

- Украину [Meet ANO “Dialog”. This particular organization is responsible for PR of the Russian Ministry of Defence and creating fakes of Ukraine]. *Meduza*. <https://meduza.io/feature/2023/09/18/poznakomtes-s-ano-dialog-imenno-eta-organizatsiya-otvechaet-za-piar-minoborony-rf-i-sozdanie-feykov-pro-ukrainu>, accessed 07.11.2025.
- Merkurov, A. (2024, October 09). Разрушение матрицы [The destruction of the matrix]. *Novaya Gazeta*. <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2024/10/09/razrushenie-matritsy?ysclid=miait9qjh9926089976>, accessed 12.09.2025.
- Metzler, H. & Garcia, D. (2023): Social Drivers and Algorithmic Mechanisms on Digital Media. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 19(5), 735-748. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916231185057>
- Miller, C. (2015, May 18). “Russia’s Mark Zuckerberg” takes on the Kremlin, comes to New York. *Mashable*. <https://mashable.com/archive/russias-mark-zuckerberg-pavel-durov>, accessed 23.08.2025.
- Monaghan, J. (2014, April 17). V Kontakte Founder Says Sold Shares Due to FSB Pressure. *The Moscow Times*. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/04/17/vkontakte-founder-says-sold-shares-due-to-fsb-pressure-a34132>, accessed 21.10.2025.
- Murphy, H. (2024, March 11). Telegram hits 900mn users and nears profitability as founder considers IPO. *FT*. <https://www.ft.com/content/8d6ceb0d-4cdb-4165-bdfa-4b95b3e07b2a>, accessed 15.09.2025.
- Nabben, K. (2023). Cryptoeconomics as governance: an intellectual history from “Crypto Anarchy” to “Cryptoeconomics.” *Internet Histories*, 7(3), 254–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24701475.2023.2183643>
- Nohara, K. (2024). Telegram under Fire: Exposing the Problems with the Most Divisive Messaging App in the World. *Journal of Artificial Intelligence General Science (JAIGS)*, 1(1), 268–273. <https://doi.org/10.60087/jaigs.v6i1.290>
- Okholm, C., Fard, A.E. & ten Thij, M. (2024). Blocking the information war? Testing the effectiveness of the EU’s censorship of Russian state propaganda among the fringe communities of Western Europe. *Internet Policy Review*, 13(3), 1-21. DOI: 10.14763/2024.3.1697
- Pace, J. (2020). Cyberlibertarianism in the mid-1990s. *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*. <https://doi.org/10.5210/spir.v2020i0.11299>
- Parameswaran, M. (2025, April 16). Telegram Ads: Everything You Need to Know for 2025 Success. *The Media Ant*. <https://www.themediant.com/blog/all-about-telegram-ads/>, accessed 18.10.2025.
- Rapoza, K. (2022, June 21). As Telegram’s Toncoin Usage Grows, Failed Gram Investors Seeing Red. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2022/06/19/as-telegrams-toncoin-usage-grows-failed-gram-investors-seeing-red/>, accessed 27.10.2025.

- RBC (2022, March 21). Суд запретил Instagram и Facebook. Что это значит для пользователей [The court banned Instagram and Facebook. What it means for users]. *RBC*. https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/21/03/2022/6238a5e89a79477e5dc0245f, accessed 23.11.2025.
- Reisigl, M. & Wodak, R. (2015). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Eyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (pp.87-121). Sage.
- Reuter, O. J. & Szakonyi, D. (2015). Online social media and political awareness in authoritarian regimes. *British Journal of Political Science*, 45(1), 29-51. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123413000203>
- Ritter, C. S. (2021). Rethinking digital ethnography: A qualitative approach to understanding interfaces. *Qualitative Research*, 22(6), 916-932. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941211000540>
- Robb, L. & P. L. (2024, August 28). Telegram Founder Charged With Wide Range of Crimes in France. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/28/business/telegram-ceo-pavel-durov-charged.html>, accessed 15.10.2025.
- Roth, E. (2024, September 23). Telegram will now hand over your phone number and IP if you're a criminal suspect. *The Verge*. <https://www.theverge.com/2024/9/23/24252276/telegram-disclose-user-data-legal-requests-criminal-activity>, accessed 19.11.2025.
- Rudnik, A., & Rönblom, M. (2024). TIKTOK and TELEGRAM: as platforms for political mobilization in Belarus and Russia. *Baltic Worlds*, 17(4).
- Sanchini, V., Pongiglione, F., & Sala, R. (2019). On the notion of political agency. *Phenomenology and Mind*, (16), 10-15.
- Santos, M., Saldaña, M. & Tsyganova, K. (2021). Subversive affordances as a form of digital transnational activism: The case of Telegram's native proxy. *New Media & Society*, 26(1), 131-153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211054830>
- Seddon, M. (2018, January 10). Telegram app plans to join blockchain mania. *The Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/351eac5a-f60c-11e7-88f7-5465a6ce1a00>, accessed 17.11.2025.
- Semenzin, S. & Bainotti, L. (2020). The use of Telegram for non-consensual dissemination of intimate images: Gendered affordances and the construction of masculinities. *Social Media+ Society*, 6(4), 2056305120984453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120984453>
- Shehabat, A., Mitew, T. & Alzoubi, Y. (2017). Encrypted Jihad: Investigating the Role of Telegram App in Lone Wolf Attacks in the West. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 10(3), 27-53. <http://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.10.3.1604>
- Shestoperov, D. (2020, June 18). Роскомнадзор разблокировал Telegram [Roskomnadzor has unblocked Telegram]. *Kommersant*. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4381003>, accessed 09.09.2025.

- Shvetsova, O. A. – Epstein, M. Z. (2021): The Influence of the Institutional Environment on Telecommunication Company Development: Case Study of Telegram. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education*, 12(7), 571-581.
- Sotnikova, A. (2012, September 29). Скандальный Павел Дуров. Пять выходов создателя «ВКонтакте» [Scandalous Durov. Five antics of the Vkontakte creator]. *AiF*. <https://spb.aif.ru/society/135374?ysclid=mibklye3u0801227013>, accessed 29.10.2025.
- Stepanov, S. & Ivanova, E. (2023). The Problem of the «Sovereign Internet» in Russia. *RUDN Journal of Public Administration*, 10(2), 195-209. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2023-10-2-195-209>
- Storchevoy, M. – Belousov, K. (2020). Evolution of the Russian digital media market: Legitimacy of the illegal. In *Handbook of Business Legitimacy: Responsibility, Ethics and Society* (pp. 1427-1441). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Sun, Y. & Bergen, M. (2025, April 30). Telegram Weighs \$2 Billion Bond Sale to Refinance 2021 Debt. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-04-30/telegram-weighs-2-billion-bond-sale-to-refinance-2021-debt>, accessed 18.10.2025.
- Telegram (2019, September 5). Scheduled Messages, Reminders, Custom Cloud Themes and More Privacy. *Telegram Blog*. <https://telegram.org/blog/scheduled-reminders-themes>, accessed 27.10.2025.
- Telegram (2020, September 30). Search Filters, Anonymous Admins, Channel Comments and More. *Telegram Blog*. <https://telegram.org/blog/filters-anonymous-admins-comments>, accessed 06.11.2025.
- Telegram (2023, November 30). Similar Channels, Reposting Stories, and 9 More Features. *Telegram Blog*. <https://telegram.org/blog/similar-channels>, accessed 18.10.2025.
- Telegram (2024, May 31). Message Effects, Hashtag Search, and More. *Telegram Blog*. <https://telegram.org/blog/message-effects-and-more>, accessed 11.11.2025.
- Toor A. (2014, January 31). How Putin's cronies seized control of Russia's Facebook. *The Verge*. <https://www.theverge.com/2014/1/31/5363990/how-putins-cronies-seized-control-over-russias-facebook-pavel-durov-vk>, accessed 18.11.2025.
- Thiago Dias, O. (2020). Content Moderation Technologies: Applying Human Rights Standards to Protect Freedom of Expression. *Human Rights Law Review*, 20(4), 607–640. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngaa032>
- Urman, A., Ho, J. C. T. & Katz, S. (2021). Analyzing protest mobilization on Telegram: The case of 2019 anti-extradition bill movement in Hong Kong. *Plos one*, 16(10), e0256675. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0256675
- Walt, V. (2016, February 23). With Telegram, a reclusive social media star rises again. *Fortune*. <http://fortune.com/telegrampavel-durov-mobile-world-congress/>, accessed 24.10.2025.

- Wagner, K. (2021, September 21). Facebook says it has spent \$13 billion on safety and security efforts since 2016. *Fortune*. <https://fortune.com/2021/09/21/facebook-says-it-has-spent-13-billion-on-safety-and-security-efforts-since-2016/>, accessed 10.10.2025.
- White, S. – McAllister, I. (2014): Did Russia (nearly) have a Facebook revolution in 2011? Social media's challenge to authoritarianism. *Politics*, 34(1): 72-84.
- Wijermars, M. & Lokot, T. (2022). Is Telegram a “harbinger of freedom”? The performance, practices, and perception of platforms as political actors in authoritarian states. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 38(1-2), 125-145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2022.2030645>
- Willaert, T. & Tuters, M. (2025). From denazification to the Golden Billion: an inductive analysis of the Kremlin's weaponisation of digital diplomacy on Telegram. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun*, 12, 989. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05382-x>
- Wired (2022, February 08). How Telegram Became the Anti-Facebook. *Wired*. <https://www.wired.com/story/how-telegram-became-anti-facebook/>, accessed 07.09.2025.
- Yayla, A. S. & Speckhard, A. (2017). Telegram: The mighty application that ISIS loves. *International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism*, 9.
- Zhong, W., Bailard, C., Broniatowski, D. & Tromble, R. (2024). Proud Boys on Telegram. *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media*, 4, 1-47. <https://doi.org/10.51685/jqd.2024.003>
- Zhuk, A. (2024). Crypto-anarchy: a paradigm shift for society and the legal system. *J Comput Virol Hack Tech*, 20, 697-723. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11416-024-00525-1>
- Zhukova, K. (2020, January 18). История Telegram и TON от первого лица: что Павел Дуров рассказал адвокату SEC в Дубае [The history of Telegram and TON in the first person: what Pavel Durov talked to the lawyer of SEC in Dubai]. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.ru/tehnologii/391431-istoriya-telegram-i-ton-ot-pervogo-lica-cto-pavel-durov-rasskazal-advokatu-sec-v>, accessed 25.09.2025.