CITY

BEAUTY OF NATURE

STRONG
SPIRIT

Centre for Studies of Civil Society
and the Nonprofit Sector
Institute of Security Studies

"Using Digital Tech in Grassroots
Volunteering Activities in Russia —
Benefit or Bane"

Alexandra Telitsyna, Alexander Rudchenko, Ilya Karnaukhov

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Russia is a country spanning Eastern Europe and Northern Asia

Size
17 million square kilometres

Time Zones
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Borders
16 sovereign states

People
144,1 mln people
160 nations

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The problem

Digital technologies can enhance the effectiveness of grassroots initiatives by improving communication, mobilization, and networking (Simsa et al., 2019; Slave et al., 2023).

For instance, social media platforms can be used to create awareness, mobilize resources, and connect with supporters (Starbird and Pale, 2011, Song et al., 2020).

Additionally, digital tools such as online surveys, data visualization software, and mapping applications can help grassroots organizations to collect and analyze data, map out strategies, and measure impact (Prince, Piatak, 2022).

On the other hand, some scholars have argued that the reliance on digital technologies in grassroots initiatives can lead to exclusion and elitism.

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Hypothesis

H1: The use of data-driven insights and analytics in philanthropic decision-making enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of resource allocation, leading to increased social impact.

Explanation: This hypothesis proposes that leveraging data analysis and metrics can enable philanthropic organizations to make more informed decisions, identify areas of need, and allocate resources strategically, ultimately resulting in greater effectiveness and measurable outcomes.

H2: Peer-to-peer giving platforms promote a sense of reciprocity and community engagement, encouraging individuals to participate in philanthropy and contribute to causes.

Methods

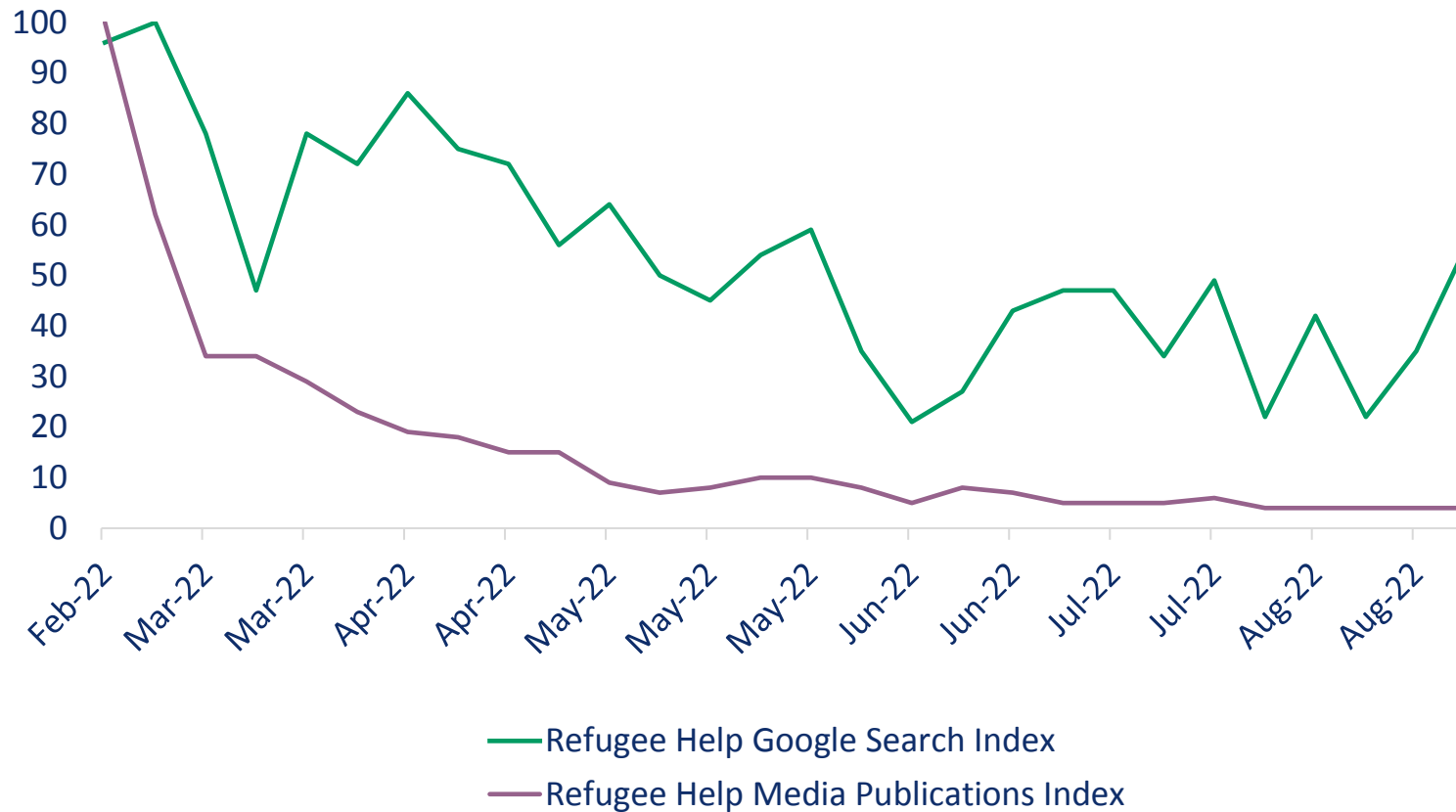**Media monitoring:** Software Katysha, Google trends, Telegram Stat.

The study was conducted in Russia in 2022. A qualitative research approach was used (N=27), conducting **expert interviews** with members of nonprofit organizations and volunteers who have experience using digital technologies in their work

Content analysis: analyzing and interpreting the content of digital platforms, such as social media posts, websites, and online campaign materials: themes, and engagement levels in online content related to volunteer and philanthropic activities.

Data mining and web scraping to extract information from large datasets available on digital platforms: online fundraising platforms, social media platforms, and other digital sources to identify patterns, trends, and correlations related to digital social participation in grass-root initiatives. Web scraping techniques had been used to collect specific data from websites and online platforms.

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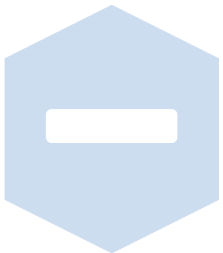
10

Grassroots in data

The number of users who searched on Google how to help refugees remained higher than the number of publications about refugee assistance from large NGOs.
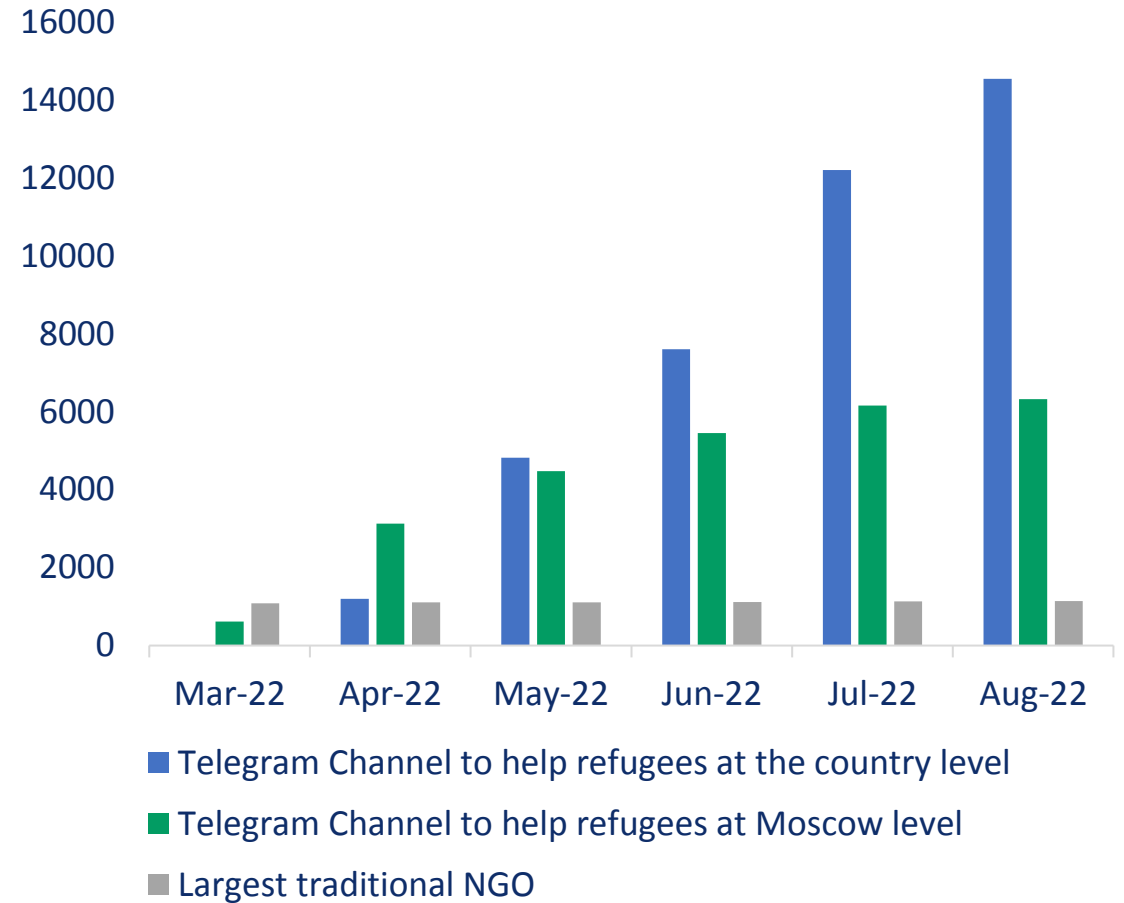
Comparison of the participants number in Telegram channels VS traditional NGOs and grassroots groups

Grassroots NGOs show
a significantly larger increasece
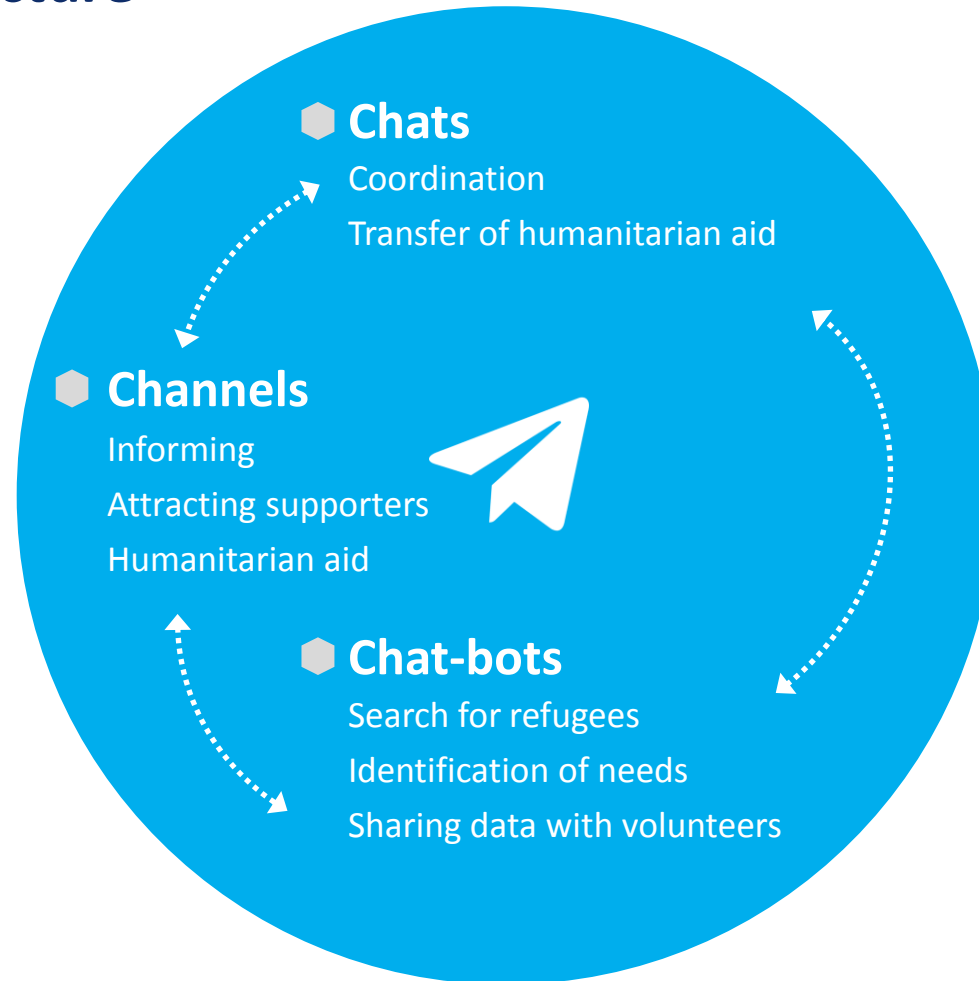in the number of members
of their communities

During the refugee crisis
in the Russian Federation, the largest
NGOs did not increase the number of
members of their communities

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Grassroots digital infrastructure

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Areas of use

Environmental
organizations

Human rights
organizations

Help
for refugees

Volunteer
firefighters

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Potential harms

1 Cyberbullying

social media platforms have also been used to perpetuate online harassment, which can have a chilling effect on civil society engagement

2 Digital divide

unequal distribution of access to and use of technology

3 Disinformation

digital technologies have also facilitated the spread of misinformation and disinformation, which can undermine civil society efforts by distorting public understanding of issues and eroding trust in institutions

Phone: +7 (905) 755 23 84
+7 (917) 599 09 08

E-mail: atelitsyna@hse.ru
arudchenko@hse.ru