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Business optimization in the digital age: insights and recommendations

Abstract. *Introduction.* Digital transformation and the high level of offline and online competition have a significant impact on business, which emphasizes the relevance and need to implement the successful relevant marketing strategy that includes the search engine optimization (SEO). The SEO increases the business visibility on the Internet in comparison with priority competitors, promotes better communication and interaction in accordance with varied requests of online buyers (customers, clients). SEO is especially important for successful retailers' business characterized by constant bifurcations in the short and long term.

The Purpose of the presented research is to substantiate the importance of the local optimization of the retailer's business for search engines to increase organic traffic; to represent insights and give practical recommendations for retailers regarding local optimization of their business in Google as part of an effective marketing strategy; to create the typical valid data micromarking (by the example of the Ukrainian retailer), which will contribute to an advantageous placement in the Local Pack in comparison with competitors, and increase organic traffic and conversion.

Methods. To achieve the purpose, the system of general and special research methods are used, including the logical generalization, analysis, comparison and synthesis. To formulate recommendations for retailers, the following online tools are used: Google My Business (to study the specifics of profile), JSON-LD Generator (to generate the data micromarking), Google Structured Data Testing Tool (to verify the validity of data micromarking). HTML Symbols - Unicode symbols is used to add special symbols in the data micromarking. The program MS Excel is used for visualization and interpretation of data.

Results. Based on the results of a study and analysis of the retailers' business (namely, Yves Rocher Ukraine cosmetics, which is a part of the world-renown corporation Yves Rocher Group), it is reasonably justified that SEO is an integral component of an effective marketing strategy. It is justified that the SEO aims to increase the organic traffic and conversion by quickly finding the requested store in the search engine and its attractiveness from the point of view of the Internet user (potential online customer of the retailer). It is identified that Google is the search engine that is the most popular in Ukraine according to the results of a comparative analysis of 2010-2020. The main trends in the Internet users' preferences for the study period is determined. The insights and substantiated practical recommendations regarding local optimization of the retailers' business in Google are represented.

Conclusions. The expediency and importance of using the developed recommendations are demonstrated by the example of a Ukrainian retailer in the drogerie segment based on the results of the short-term forecasting. The typical data micromarking is created by using the developed recommendations. The implementation of the micromarking will help retailer to increase organic traffic in Google, conversion and CTR, as well as provide the most favourable position for the retailer in the Local Pack block.

Keywords: Google; Business; SEO; Local Optimization; Digital Marketing; Micromarking; Microdata; Organic Traffic; Retail; Yves Rocher Ukraine; Drogerie Market

JEL Classification: L81; M1; M31

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Оптимізація бізнесу в цифрову еру: інсайти та рекомендації

Анотація. Автором обґрунтовано необхідність і важливість своєчасної оптимізації бізнесу в умовах цифрової трансформації, у тому числі в сфері ритейлу. Детерміновано, що пошукова оптимізація (SEO) є невід'ємною складовою ефективною маркетинговою стратегією, що спрямована на підвищення органічного трафіку та конверсії за рахунок швидкого знаходження запитуваного магазину в пошуковій системі й привабливості його контенту з точки зору Інтернет-користувачів (потенційних онлайн-покупців). На базі компаративного аналізу тенденцій 2010–2020 років ідентифіковано, що Google є пошуковою системою, що найбільш популярна в Україні. Виявлено основні переваги Інтернет-користувачів за досліджуваній період. Репрезентовано інсайти та обґрунтовано практичні рекомендації щодо локальної оптимізації бізнесу ритейлерів у Google.

Доцільність і важливість застосування цих рекомендацій продемонстровано на прикладі українського ритейлера в сегменті дрогері (Ів Роше Україна) на базі результатів емпіричного аналізу й короткострокового прогнозування. Розроблено типову валідну мікророзмітку (мікрмаркетинг) даних для офлайн-магазину мережі ритейлера із застосуванням обґрунтованих рекомендацій, імплементація якої сприятиме збільшенню органічного трафіку в Google, підвищить конверсію та показник клікабельності (CTR), а також забезпечить максимально вигідні позиції у блоці Local Pack.

Ключові слова: Гугл; бізнес; SEO; локальна оптимізація; цифровий маркетинг; мікрмаркетинг; мікродані; органічний трафік; ритейлер; Ів Роше Україна; ринок дрогері.

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Оптимизация бизнеса в цифровую эру: инсайты и рекомендации

Аннотация. Автором обосновано необходимость и важность своевременной оптимизации бизнеса в условиях цифровой трансформации, в том числе в сфере ритейла. Детерминировано, что поисковая оптимизация (SEO) является неотъемлемой составляющей эффективной маркетинговой стратегии, которая направлена на повышение органического трафика и конверсии за счет быстрого нахождения запрашиваемого магазина в поисковой системе и привлекательности его контента с точки зрения Интернет-пользователей (потенциальных онлайн-покупателей). На базе компаративного анализа тенденций 2010–2020 годов идентифицировано, что Google является поисковой системой, которая наиболее популярна в Украине. Вывявлено основные предпочтения Интернет-пользователей за исследуемый период. Репрезентовано инсайты и обосновано практические рекомендации относительно локальной оптимизации бизнеса ритейлеров в Google.

Целесообразность и важность применения этих рекомендаций продемонстрировано на примере украинского ритейлера в сегменте дрогері (Ив Роше Украина) на базе результатов эмпирического анализа и краткосрочного прогнозирования. Разработано типичную валидную микроразметку (микрмаркетинг) данных для офлайн-магазина сети ритейлера с применением обоснованных рекомендаций, имплементация которой будет способствовать увеличению органического трафика в Google, повысит конверсию и показатель кликабельности (CTR), а также обеспечит максимально выгодные позиции в блоке Local Pack.

Ключевые слова: Гугл; бизнес; SEO; цифровой маркетинг; микрмаркетинг; микроданные; органический трафик; ритейлер; Ив Роше Украина; рынок дрогері.

1. Introduction

Digital transformation and the high level of offline and online competition have a significant impact on business, which emphasizes the relevance and need to implement the successful relevant marketing strategy that includes the search engine optimization (SEO). The SEO increases the business visibility on the Internet in comparison with priority competitors, promotes better communication and interaction in accordance with varied requests of online buyers. SEO is especially important for successful retailers' business in the short and long term, which are characterized by constant bifurcations

2. Brief Literature Review

The study of the impact of digital transformation on the conduct and development of a business, its business model, as well as the study of the characteristics of adapting a business to environmental fluctuations, were carried out by scientists and economists, among whom are: Hein et al. (2019); Joshi et al. (2018); Rachinger et al. (2019); Vogelsang et al. (2019). The need to change marketing strategy when promoting business in the Internet and the factors that positively and negatively affect the online business success are described in the works by Alford &

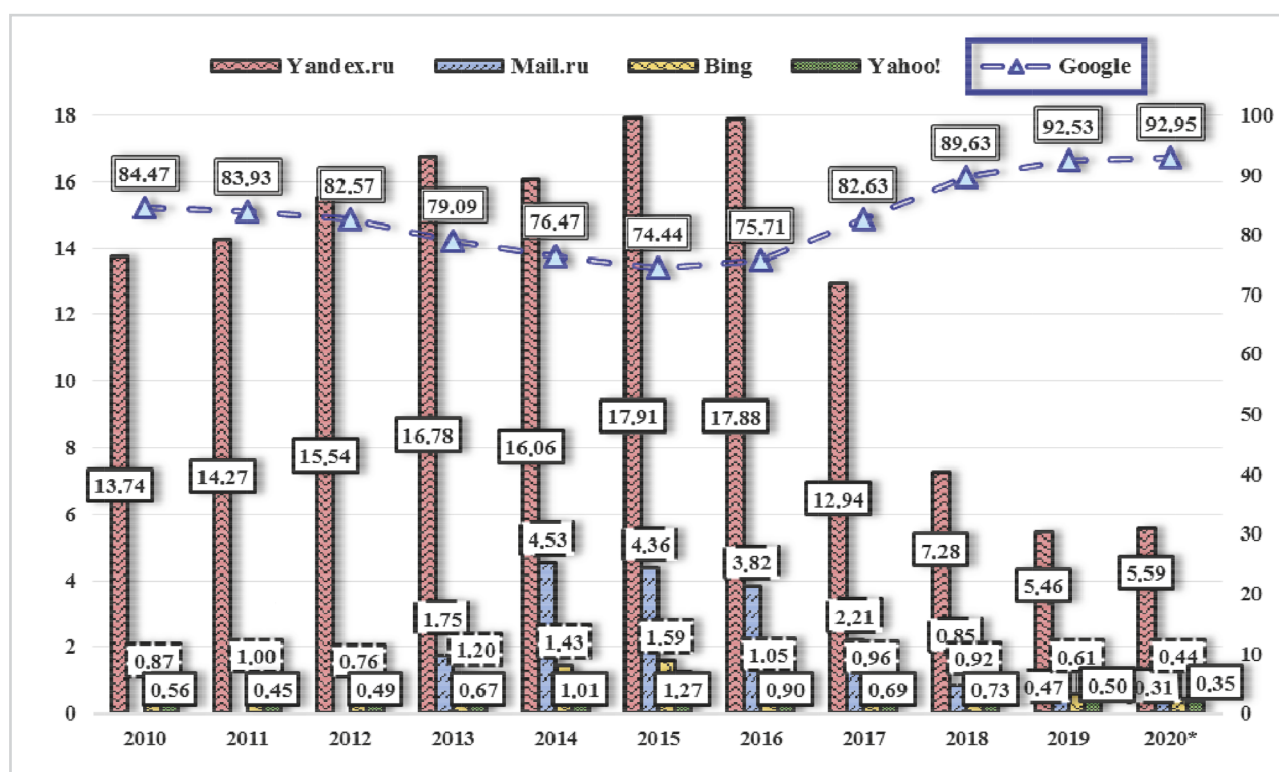
Page (2015); Iskandar & Komara (2018); Kingsnorth (2016); Sousa & Rocha (2019). The main aspects of SEO during marketing promotion in the Internet are displayed in the publications of Baye et al. (2016); Meraz (2015); Murphy (2019); Zilincan (2015). However, according to the study of these works, it was found that there is no concretization of the type of business, and the authors do not take into account the features of SEO, which depend on the specifics of the business. The fragmentation of studying SEO specifics and the lack of researches about the retailer business local optimization are emphasized the importance of the further research in this direction.

3. The purpose of this paper is to substantiate the importance of the local optimization of the retailer’s business for search engines to increase the organic traffic; to represent insights and give practical recommendations to retailers regarding local optimization of their business in Google as part of an effective marketing strategy; to create the typical valid data micromarking (by the example of the Ukrainian retailer), which will contribute to an advantageous placement in the Local Pack in comparison with competitors, and provide organic traffic and conversion increase.

4. Results

According to StatCounter GlobalStats (2020), over the past ten years, Google’s search engine has been a leader in terms of Internet users’ requests in Ukraine (Figure 1).

According to Figure 1, in 2010-2020, the most popular among Internet users in Ukraine was Google search engine, and over the past 10 years, the percentage of use by the Ukrainian Internet users of this search engine has increased by 8.48% and at the beginning of 2020 amounted to 92.95%. It should be noted that in 2011-2015 in Ukraine it was observed the tendency to an insignificant, but constant, loss of Google’s market share. It was due to the strengthening of the Yandex.ru search engine market position. It is not common using Bing and Yahoo! among Ukrainians, due to the low quality and less convenience of search compared to Google, as well as a weak level / lack of privacy protection. Russian-origin Yandex.ru and Mail.ru search engines lost a significant market share and in February 2020 amounted to 5.59% and 0.31%, respectively. This is explained by the political and economic situation in Ukraine, as well as foreign state policy and



Notes: * - data for January and February, 2020

Figure 1:
Market shares of the most popular search engines in Ukraine in 2010-2020
Source: Calculated and created by the author according to the Statcounter GlobalStats (2020)

the application of sanctions against Yandex LLC, Yandex.Ukraine LLC, Mail.ru Group LLC and Mail.ru Ukraine LLC.

Given the above, it can be concluded that the Google search engine is the undisputed leader in the Ukrainian market due to the constant preferences of Internet users. This proves the importance and necessity of optimizing the business of Ukrainian retailers to the Google search engine for successful operation in the online environment. One of the indicators of a successful business online is the organic traffic as a result of the issuance of a search engine. So, organic traffic promotes the placement, for example, of a retailer's website or business account on social networks, in the top of Google's search results. This increases the click-through rate (CTR), conversion and directly increases the likelihood of purchases by the Internet users. Moreover, it is important to mention that today, due to the high level of competition in the market, it is extremely important for retailers to implement Google optimization based on targeted requests from Internet users.

Given the fact that, in practice, retailers' offline stores are located in different regions of a country, it is important to carry out SEO taking into account the geolocation of the target audience in order to achieve the maximum sales volume. The high level of retailers' competition among targeted queries in Google makes it difficult to place a description of the offline stores in the top of organic list, which greatly complicates the search for potential buyers. Therefore, it is recommended to consider local optimization as a component of an effective retailers' marketing strategy that will increase the online store position in the search results, taking into account the features of the search depending on geolocation.

SEO is an integral part of the marketing strategy that aims to increase CTR and conversion by quickly finding the requested offline store in the search engine by the Internet user (potential online buyer for retailers). In addition, SEO is an important significant and effective tool for the retailer, which is aimed at the formation of relevant local search engine blocks based on the existing ranking mechanism. In practice, there are two blocks of local results in the Google search engine:

The organic block (list of links) generated by Google in accordance with the relevance of the content at the request of the Internet users.

The Local Pack block which contains a Google map and placed above the results of the organic block, which forms Google according to the request of the Internet user, recognizing its local intentions. The Internet user does not need to indicate the geography of the search. In this block, offline stores are displayed on the Google map, the data on which most closely matches the query criteria, because the geolocation of the Internet user is one of the priority ranking factors in the Google.

According to the study of Meraz (2015), 44% of Internet users prefer to look the results of the Google local search in the Local Pack block to find necessary information, 8% - look at «More places» in the local search, 29% go to the results of organic search, and 19% view contextual ads. Thus, the local optimization in Google makes offline stores of the retailer's network visible in the Google maps and affects the search results based on relevant local Internet users' queries. Categorical, commercial or branded queries of Internet users are also local. Given the above, in this paper the author represents insights and gives practical recommendations to retailers regarding local business optimization in Google as part of the effective marketing strategy implementation where SEO is an integral part (Figure 2).

Figure 2 shows that Google local optimization of retailer's business includes 13 components, the interpretation of which is given below. A significant number of offline stores can be located on the retailer's network, despite the fact that they have one common business profile on social networks. Therefore, for retailers it is recommended to use Google My Business for rational business administration. Designation of the real offline stores geolocations (latitude, longitude), as well as landmarks that are located nearby, clearly contributes to local optimization. The geolocation of offline stores in Google maps makes offline stores visible to potential buyers and positively affects conversion. The main advantage of specifying of the offline stores addresses of the retailer's network is that customers who are looking for the right information using smartphones and tablets can immediately get directions and calculate the distance, see the customer service department contacts. Creating the Google My Business profile helps local users (potential buyers) find necessary information about the retailer's offline store and associate it with a specific address / point in the Google maps.

Also, the retailer has to take into account the requests of Internet users containing the names of cities, districts and streets that can be tracked in Google My Business, as well as use when writing

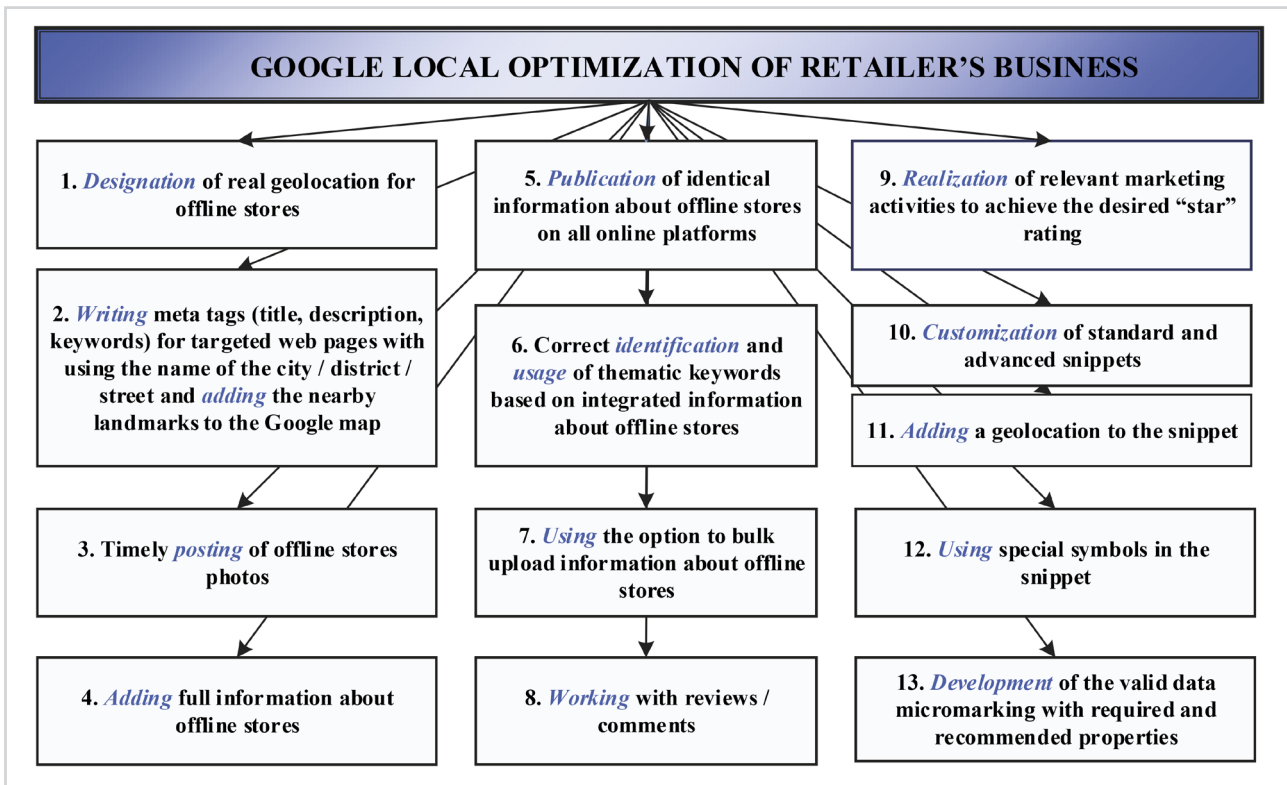


Figure 2:
Google local optimization of retailer's business
Source: Developed by the author

meta tags (title, description, keywords) for target web pages. However, it is important to note that Google has reduced the number of characters in page descriptions (Google My Business profile). According to the Rank Ranger (2020), as a result of entering a search query on the desktop, Google gives results with a description (meta description tag) of 160 symbols, which is 70 symbols less than earlier (SERPSTAT, 2019).

Adding links to Google Business profile, as well as relevant photos and images encourage Internet users to take targeted actions on the retailer's website. Targeted actions of Internet users, including the number of routes and quantity of calls are directly depend on the number of photos uploaded by retailers (Murphy, 2019).

The presence of additional information about the retailer's offline stores in Google My Business (including the type of business, working hours, contact phone number, email, routes to the offline store, a link to the online store) has a positive effect on the results of issuance in Local Pack, because it is convenient for perception by potential buyers. If the information about the offline store's indicated in Google My Business is up-to-date and supplemented with photographs and has reviews / comments, then its position in the Local Pack will be higher than that of the competing one.

Another factor that affects the position in the Local Pack is relevant and identical information on all online resources. For example, inconsistencies revealed by Google when comparing the data on the website and in the profile of the retailer in the name, address, phone number, will lower the store's position in the «Local Pack».

Verification in Google My Business allows analyzing the statistics of search queries of the Internet users related to the retailers' activities. Google estimates the number of the Internet users' organic clicks in the retailers' profile and takes these metrics into account when ranking. Using the integrated information about offline stores in Google My Business, the retailers have the ability to accurately identify relevant keywords, namely due to their monitoring and determination of their geolocation, which, in turn, will help make adjustments to the Internet promoting strategic plan.

Google associates keywords from publications and the Questions and Answers block with retailer activities. Therefore, the use of keywords similar to low-frequency queries increases the likelihood of a retailer's site being placed in the Local Pack block.

It should be noted separately that Google My Business has the ability to simultaneously download information about more than ten offline stores of the network. After confirming the added data about offline stores, they will be displayed in Google My Business, as well as in Google Maps and other Google services. At the same time, confirmation of data is carried out for Google's corporate account. Confirmed offline stores of the retailer's network will be considered all stores associated with it that do not have another owner.

Internet users' reviews / comments in Google affect the retailer's website position in the local search results. A detailed planned and systematic retailer work with customers' reviews / comments can affect its «star» rating, as well as the website placement in the Local Pack block. The Google maps represent the first online platform where potential buyers come from search results, so the reviews / comments there are the most popular among Internet users. Due to the correct verification in Google My Business, reviews / comments are systematized and ordered. The logging into individual accounts of offline stores is optional, which greatly simplifies local optimization for the retailer.

According to the Uberall global study (2019), the maximum website conversion is achieved with a «star» rating of 4.9. A gradual increase in the «star» rating of 3.75 by 0.1 can increase conversion by 25%. Thus, an increase in the «star» rating can increase the conversion and the likelihood of website appearing in the top of the Local Pack block. Therefore, it is advisable for the retailer to consider this when creating a clear mechanism for working with online customer reviews / comments and developing measures to promote the stores in the online environment.

The snippet is a tool that can increase the position of the store in the Local Pack block and Google's organic block in general, as well as increase organic traffic and positively affect the CTR. The snippet is a description that appears in Google under the link to the retailer's website (Statcounter GlobalStats, 2020) and is a reference point for the potential buyer to decide whether to visit online store. In view of this, retailers are encouraged to customize and optimize snippets in Google, where, depending on the type of content, the number of reviews / comments, prices and product characteristics, «star» rating, images and other content can be displayed.

Adding the offline store address to the snippet will enable the potential buyer to get to the retailer's card in the Google maps directly from the search engine. The length of the title in search snippets is about 50 symbols. The SERPSTAT study (2019) showed that Google forms snippets in three ways: using the contents of the meta tag description, using text from the meta tag body, as well as taking into account both description and body. The correct use of these meta tags will increase the retailer's position in the Google local search.

In addition, the text component plays a major role in specifying description. Therefore, it is advisable to include the main keywords in the metadata by which Internet users find the retailer's store. At the same time, visual appeal is an important component of the snippet in the search results for Internet users. To increase it, it is recommended to use special symbols. The use of special symbols in the description increases the CTR of the snippet and helps to attract Internet users.

In order to better recognize the content on the website pages by the crawler (search robot), retailers are proposed to use data micromarking, which is understandable for all search engines. For data markup, retailers should use the JSON-LD syntax, which, unlike Microdata and RDFa, is embedded not in the page code, but in the tag `<script>` and is a set of property-descriptor pairs that are easy to understand by crawlers and SEO specialists. JSON-LD syntax is recommended for use by Schema.org (2020) and Google. The use of the JSON-LD Generator (2020) online for data micromarking can significantly increase the productivity of SEO-specialists. Checking the data micromarking and removing duplicate properties in it are important aspects. Therefore, it was proposed to use the Google Structured Data Testing Tool (2020) as a validator for data micromarking. There are required and recommended properties in the micromarking. Required micromarking properties include the name and type of the offline store, hours of operation, geolocation (latitude, longitude coordinates), a link to a Google map, contacts, phones numbers. After specifying the recommended properties for extended blocks, in the snippet will display more information, which will be an advantage for the retailer in a competitive environment in the online space.

The appropriateness and importance of using of the author's developed recommendations are demonstrated on the example of one of the studied Ukrainian retailers in the drogerie segment (Natorina, 2017) - Yves Rocher Ukraine LLC, based on the results of organic traffic forecasting in Google.

As can be seen from Figure 3, the organic traffic of Yves Rocher Ukraine LLC in Google constantly increased during 2017-2019 and was seasonal. However, from December 1, 2019, the situation has changed, and there has been a significant decline in organic traffic. As of February 1, 2020, the organic traffic amounted to 55,559 clicks, which is 1.7 times less than in the same period in 2019 and 2.1 times less than in 2018. The results of realistic and pessimistic forecasts (seasonality index taken into account) for March-June 2020 (Figure 3) also indicate a possible significant loss by the Ukrainian retailer its organic traffic in Google. A polynomial trendline (the approximating function graph) with a confidence value of approximation of 0.77 (determination coefficient - R^2) indicates a high tightness of the relationship between the variables according to the Chedoke scale (Dzwigol et al., 2019).

The above indicates the need for Yves Rocher Ukraine LLC to implement an integrated system of marketing events, which involves the local Google optimization aimed at increasing organic traffic and, as a result, CTR and conversion. Taking into account the recommendations presented above, the typical valid data micromarking with the JSON-LD syntax has been created for one of the offline stores of the Yves Rocher Ukraine (Figure 4). The validation of the data micromarking was done using the Google Structured Data Testing Tool (2020).

As shown in Figure 4, the micromarking includes the required and recommended properties, as well as special symbols, among which the type of offline store, its description, photo, geolocation, Google map link, working hours, customer service contacts, logo, links to the retailer's main page and business accounts in social networks. It should be noted that in the micromarking the description is developed based on the subject of the retailer's online store with the special symbols. For example, for a symbol * it was used (HTML Symbols - Unicode symbols, entities and codes, 2020): unicode number - U+2B50; code in HTML - $\&\#11088$; code in CSS - $\&\#2B50$. The use of special symbols will increase the attractiveness of

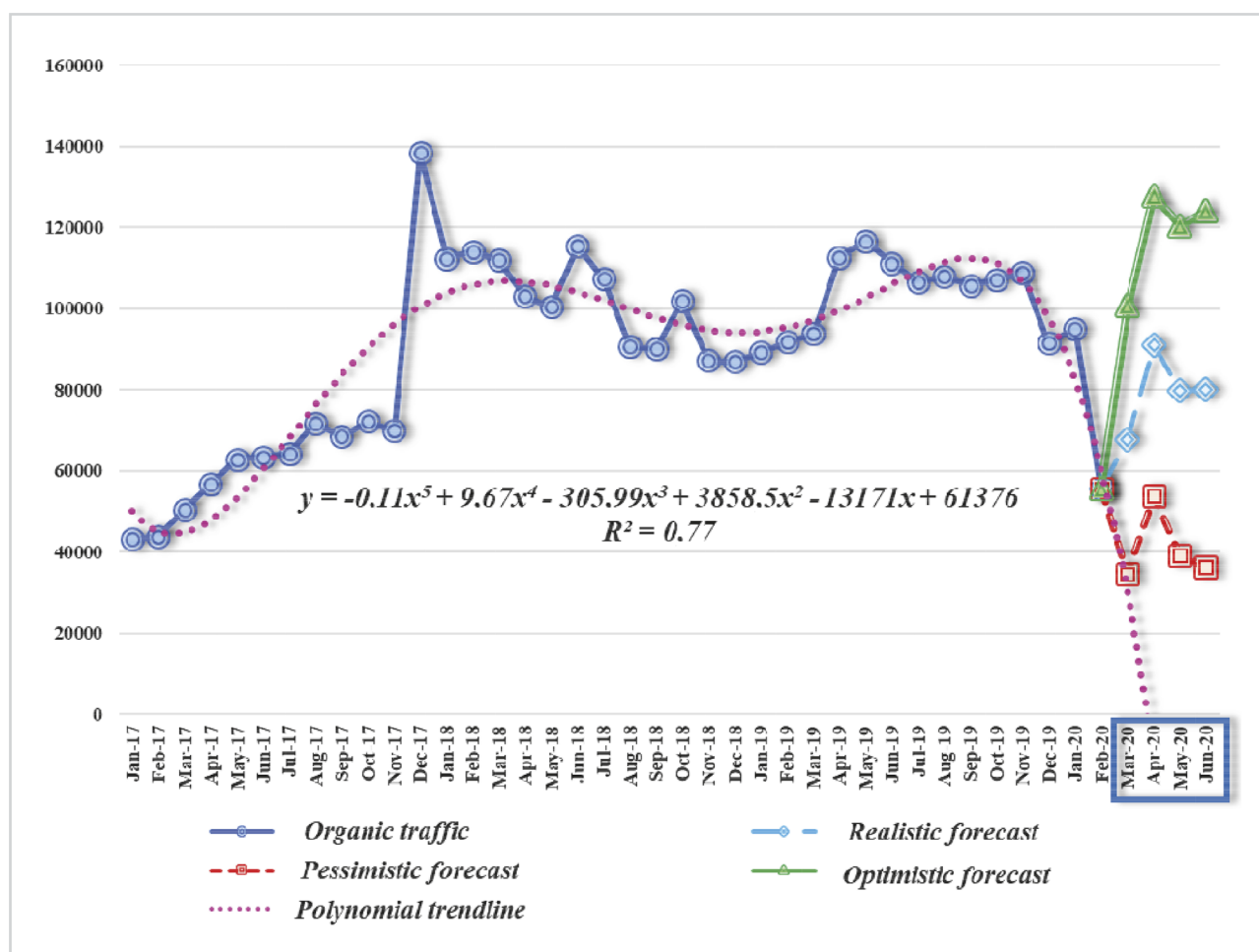


Figure 3:
Organic Traffic Forecasts of Yves Rocher Ukraine LLC
Source: Compiled by the author based on Rank Ranger data (2020)

```

1 <script type='application/ld+json'>
2 {
3   "@context": "http://www.schema.org",
4   "@type": "HealthAndBeautyBusiness",
5   "name": "Магазин косметики та парфумерії Yves Rocher",
6   "url": "https://www.yves-rocher.ua/control/main",
7   "sameAs": [
8     "https://www.facebook.com/yvesrocherua/",
9     "https://instagram.com/yvesrocherua",
10    "https://www.youtube.com/YvesRocherUkraine"
11  ],
12  "logo": "https://www.yves-rocher.ua/images/header/uk_UA/header-logo-yr.gif",
13  "image": "http://eim-statics.yves-rocher.com/static/eim/eim/images/markerYR.png",
14  "description": "Магазин Yves Rocher - експерт рослинної косметики з Франції ☆ Рослинна косметика для обличчя і тіла ☆",
15  "address": {
16    "@type": "PostalAddress",
17    "streetAddress": "ТРК Мегамаркет, вул. Київська, 2В",
18    "addressLocality": "Гатне",
19    "addressRegion": "Київська обл.",
20    "postalCode": "08160",
21    "addressCountry": "UA"
22  },
23  "geo": {
24    "@type": "GeoCoordinates",
25    "latitude": "50.348122",
26    "longitude": "30.418633"
27  },
28  "contactPoint": [
29    { "@type": "ContactPoint",
30      "telephone": "+38 (044) 461-04-04, +38 (068) 040-04-04, +38 (063) 461-04-04, +38 (066) 461-04-04",
31      "contactType": "Customer Support"
32    }
33  ],
34  "hasMap": "https://goo.gl/maps/cVhZ6D63CURGKJ4k6",
35  "openingHours": "Mo 10:00-21:00 Tu 10:00-21:00 We 10:00-21:00 Th 10:00-21:00 Fr 10:00-21:00 Sa 10:00-21:00 Su 10:00-21:00",
36  "telephone": "+38 (044) 364-24-94",
37  "email": "contact@yves-rocher.ua"
38 }
39 </script>

```

Figure 4:
The typical data micromarking for one offline store of the Yves Rocher Ukraine
with the required and recommended properties

Source: Developed by the author

the snippet for potential buyers and, directly, will positively affect the CTR. Implementation of the recommendations by Yves Rocher Ukraine will ensure the most advantageous display of its offline stores in the top of the Google block «Local Pack» based on target requests of potential buyers.

5. Conclusions

Based on the results of a study and analysis of retailers' business, it is reasonably justified that SEO is an integral component of an effective marketing strategy. It is justified that the SEO aims to increase the organic traffic and conversion by quickly finding the requested store in the search engine and its attractiveness from the point of view of the Internet user (potential online buyer for the retailer).

It is identified that Google is the search engine that is the most popular in Ukraine according to the results of a comparative analysis of 2010-2020. The main trends in the Internet users' preferences for the study period is determined. The insights and substantiated practical recommendations regarding local optimization of the retailers' business in Google are presented.

The expediency and importance of using the developed recommendations in the article are demonstrated by the example of a Ukrainian retailer in the drogerie segment based on the results of the short-term forecasting. The typical data micromarking is created by using the developed recommendations. The implementation of the micromarking will help for retailer to increase organic traffic in Google and conversion, as well as provide the most favorable position for the retailer in the Local Pack block.

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