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Analysis of Social Media in Karelia.

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This study is an attempt to raise awareness of the theories and practices, which shape the digital landscape of the world and Russia in particular, as well as of the multiple resources i.e. social platforms and tools that individuals and businesses use on equal terms to generate content and interaction on the web.

The research is aimed at answering the questions who and how is using social media in Karelia, which SM channels are most popular in Karelia and what role does it play in the life of a Karelian.

The theoretic part of the thesis reviews several important perspectives of SM, as a marketing and interaction solution.. One of them is Dave Evans, who explains SM's empowering effect on the social feedback cycle and consequentially the purchase funnel. Lon Safko, author of the Social Media and Fusion Marketing Bible,Brian Solis, Fred Cavazza and other contributors, movers and thinkers.

This thesis includes an overview of Russian social media environment, statistics and facts about presence of individuals and brands in Russian and Karelian social web and findings from qualitative interviews with Karelians over their online presence – most commonly on three to four well known networks, out of which Vkontakte.ru is the only Russian network by origin.

Results have shown that Karelians, inhabitants of the third most connected Russian republic, eagerly consume globally and locally created content and reflect on it in consistency with the evolving, already one billion worth of human attention, digital flow.

Keywords Karelia, Social Media, Fusion Marketing, , Social Feedback Cycle

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1 Introduction

"Social Media is the media we use to be social"(Safko2010, 3). Given the simplest definition by one of the fore minds of this evolving, constantly changing concept, Lon Safko, author of "The Social Media Bible", an unaccustomed reader might feel left with no clues about it. People have been social since ancient, tribal times while the Bible has been written over a thousand years ago to become one of the greatest and most referred to works in human history – so what would make a conscious man write a seven hundred pages worth read which is not just destined to expire sooner than the original name holder, being first published in 2008, but has arguably already expired as this small drop of information is being poured into the deepening digital ocean?

A typical user of the social web might want to take a look at several perspectives before drawing own assumptions, and he is destined to come across Wikipedia, one of the most recognized social platforms to date, which offers its definition of Social Media as a result of the collective human effort, otherwise referred to as "the wisdom of the crowd" and here it is as mentioned by Dave Evans(2012, 32) in his book "Social Media Marketing, an hour a day": "The term Social Media refers to the use of web based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue."

> "More often than not, and true to the promise of social media and the tapping of the collective, the resulting Wikipedia entry is dead-on"-says Mr. Evans (2012, 32).

Having mentioned Wikipedia, the most popular encyclopedia in the world, a perspective should be given to illustrate the influence of this online society-driven platform, which has numerous analogues, as well as "daughters" – wikis, which are often created collaboratively through a web browser using a simplified markup language or a rich-text editor. The developer of the first Wiki software, Ward Cunningham, originally described it as "the simplest online database that could possibly work". (Wikipedia, 2013.)

What is really astonishing, given its simplicity, is the size of Wikipedia. On its homepage the reader may choose from a variety of languages, of which English delivers most articles – 4 110 000, while over 940 000 articles are in Russian. In comparison, the third edition of the Big Soviet Encyclopedia (1969-1978), issued in thirty volumes, contained a scarce 100 000 articles (Wikipedia, 2013.)

It is also worth considering that a socially created article is much less likely to be politically distorted; moreover, each article on Wikipedia has a list of references often exceeding a hundred. The above-mentioned article about "wiki" contains 49 references – no individual author could refer to this amount of secondary sources – which shows the value of a collective effort, of the "wisdom of the crowd". Of the crowd, which has never before in history been empowered with this amount of information, channels of access to it and tools to collaborate.

The critical issue of validity and reliability is of course of great importance. As mentioned by Mr. Evans (2012, 32) "in a study conducted by the scientific journal *Nature*, Wikipedia was found to have 162 errors across 50 articles, compared with 123 for Encyclopedia Britannica", which also has a digital version.

> "Wikipedia tends to get corrected quickly, as doe's the online version of Britannica, so these online versions **actually fare better over time than do printed reference books.** A better way to view Wikipedia – and, in fact, any encyclopedia – is to imagine a group of interested participants, fastidiously reviewing the content entries and guiding a discussion, arriving at an accepted result."(Evans 2012, 32.)

And while the amount of people working on a printed version of an encyclopedia or any other printed source of information is limited, the access to Wikipedia and, more generally, to content creation on the web is simple, quick and limitless. All at the time when Internet becomes the "final instance" for people who want to find something out.

This thesis is my dedication to the growing, active social community of the Republic of Karelia; my attempt to build bridges between statistics, impressions and several internationally recognized theories on using social media for various interpersonal causes. It is for individuals eagerly looking forward to participate effectively, with benefit and for pleasure in the social world of digital.

1.1   How does SM differ from traditional media?

In order to understand the distinctive value proposition of social media, it is necessary to draw a perspective on both issues, which are interconnected and mutually aiding. Below you can see the Safko Wheel (Safko 2013, 25). It is an informative and convenient way to present just about every traditional tool in a marketer's toolbox. The context for using the Safko Wheel is marketing, because all forms of traditional media are engaged in selling goods, services, ideas etc. All of the tools listed below should be familiar to the reader: most of civilized people have come across all of them at least once in a lifetime, some, such as television and radio, are exposed to human attention on a daily basis.

Figure 1. Traditional marketing tools (Safko, 2013)

What is common for all the above-mentioned tools is the pattern of communication – it is **one way**: whenever individuals get a direct mail, look at a billboard, watch TV or listen to radio, information is being communicated to individuals, while their feedback cannot be as direct as the information they are exposed to, a situation of exposure, communication, but no dialogue. The idea of traditional marketing is to generate awareness of and attitude towards an issue – be it a company, product, or service, or idea. It is achieved through repetitive targeted information outflow. For example, an automobile commercial aired before, in the middle and after a TV show containing an emotional essence which shapes viewers' attitudes and the anticipated outcome – purchase.

Mr. Safko (2013, 16) emphasizes the fact that "every time we have developed a new way to communicate with one another, people in marketing and sales have figured out how to use that technology to sell." Below are some highlights of the evolution of communication technology over the past 6000 years (Safko 2013, 16):

> 6000 years ago: cupped hands (megaphone)
> 1450: Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press
> 1837: Samuel Morse invented the telegraph
> 1876: Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone
> 1899: Guglielmo Marconi invented the radio
> 1927: Philo Farnsworth invented the television
> 1972: Tim Byrnes and Vint Cerf invented the Internet
> 1999: E-commerce established a foothold
> 2000: E-mail went mainstream
> 2004: Social media caught on.

Apart from the megaphone joke, which the author used to illustrate an exchange situation from far ago, when people used solely their voice to promote goods for exchange, all the other inventions until the end of the millennium were very expensive and hard to mass-produce. It took decades for telephone and television to be accessed by a

larger audience, while e-mail, often referred to as the "original killer app", gained a foothold of the mass within a much shorter time period.

Indeed, the importance of communication and alignment impulses some of us to explore new ways to get closer to each other, to create new patterns for others to trace and to facilitate interaction. Be it with one another, or one with a business, or many – communication inevitably flows between people.

With the appearance of Internet, social networks and all the applications designed to connect people, communication became ever more digital, so you do not have to go and see somebody – you write an e-mail or send a text message: in this situation of distant relations it is natural that we create a social identity in the digital format. That is to say enter social media.

1.2   Background to the thesis

This study is an attempt to raise awareness of the theories and practices, which shape the digital landscape of the world and Russia in particular, as well as of the multiple resources i.e. social platforms and tools that individuals and businesses use on equal terms to generate content and interaction on the web. Whether it is a product, service, experience or an idea that a person intends to make sound of, this piece of work is aimed at facilitating effective usage of Social Media for the above-mentioned purposes.

Even though this work is concentrating on the individual and uses qualitative as the research method, it might be of interest to companies both from abroad and from other parts of the Russian Federation, which are evaluating entry opportunities to the Karelian market.

The key objectives of this thesis are to provide the reader an overall understanding of the atmosphere in Russian and Karelian SM, to determine the most influential SM channels and to give a range of individual perspectives on SM and its usage from people of different age, profession and attitude.

1.3 Research aims and questions

The research question of this thesis is: "How is social media used by individuals in the Republic of Karelia?" For this small-scale work it is appropriate to interview insiders of the Karelian digital environment, of different age and occupation, and gain an understanding of their current SM efforts and objectives as well as reasons to be present online and perspectives on the future – all to touch the collective understanding of SM as part of a Karelian's life.

General sub questions:

- Who and how is using SM in Karelia?
- Which SM channels are most popular in Karelia?
- What role does SM play in the life of a Karelian?

1.4 Company X

Private company of Mr. Le Duk Thiem and his family is a reseller of casual clothing and accessories for the middle aged customer segment (25-40). The price varies from a couple euros for a pair of gloves to a couple thousand euros for a fur coat. There is an option to pre-order clothes through catalogues with a return on full refund guarantee.

Mr. Thiem's business operates five stores in Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Republic of Karelia and has ten employees apart from family members. The company has been present in Karelia for over fifteen years.

The company has a general interest in social media, especially in online pre-order and product representation. So far no initiative has been taken to access social media and the Internet in general, and the company does not have a web site. There are concerns that the target group (people of 25 to 40 years old) is scarcely present online in the republic.

Mr. Thiem agreed to be the commissioning party for this thesis and wishes to gain an overall understanding of social media, key social networks and the reasons for its growing popularity as well as the opportunities to market company's products on the web.

2   Social Media

The following chapter is an attempt to represent the current trend of social media, its classification and value proposition from pioneering perspectives of some of the worlds' talented minds.

2.1   Social Media classification

If Internet may be considered an extension of human thought, social media from the consumer perspective is an extension of life experience, in which consumer experience inevitably plays a role, significant or not. Facebook with over 900 million users has become a key strategic partner in terms of marketing for every firm; the same is truth for Twitter, which grew 13% in 2012 (Brandwatch, 2013).

Figure 2. Social media landscape 2012 (Cavazza, 2012)

The figure above is a popular yearly chart prepared by Fred Cavazza, which presents the "most emblematic social platforms"(Cavazza, 2012). It defines not only the most popular social websites, but classifies them in accordance with their purpose and the technology used to access definite platforms. For example, localization websites, such as foursquare, which is well known in Russia, are accessed through smart phones, while sites for publishing i.e. blogging are more conveniently accessed through desk or lap-top computers.

Facebook, Twitter and Google+ are placed in the middle as the biggest networks and also because most other applications are accessed through or at least drive traffic from the "digital whales" which hold the digital world (Cavazza, 2012):

> "I regularly talk to people referring to social media as the web, the whole web. Indeed, the web has become social and it is hard to find non-social websites. This being said, how can you explain social when anything is social?"

We use social networking websites everywhere, all the time. It is easy to see how we love digital social: in the States 76% of people felt positive after participating in social networking and key words used were 'connected' and 'informed' (Brandwatch, 2013). But for a person who wants to use social media effectively it is vital to visualise not only the big picture, but also to know and be able to apply the tools in such a way to achieve synergy throughout all the chosen means of connecting.
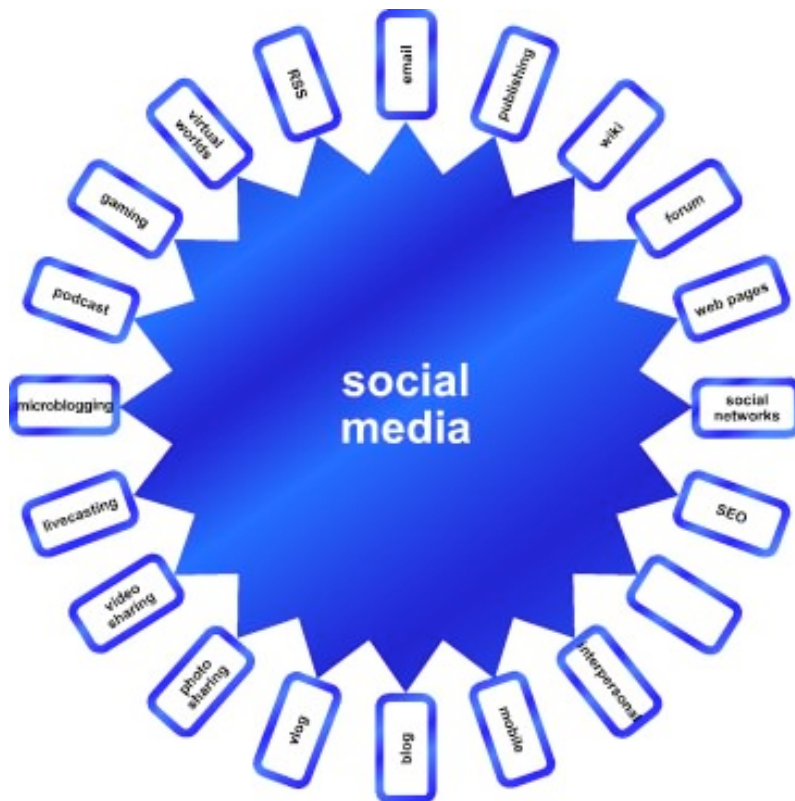
Figure 3. Social media (Safko, 2013)

The above chart from Lon Safko is similar to Figure 1, traditional media tools, and this time it reveals the social media tools, some of which are complex and require an effort to develop, such as virtual worlds, while others, such as e-mail or forums are simple to use. The essence of Safko's (2013, 78) Wheel, as a tool, lies in the idea of integrated, "tradigital" marketing and not through doubling the amount of tools in use, but instead through careful alignment, evaluation of ROI of each tool in use, elimination of all unnecessary and search for cross-combination (or "fuse" opportunities) as illustrated in the figure below:
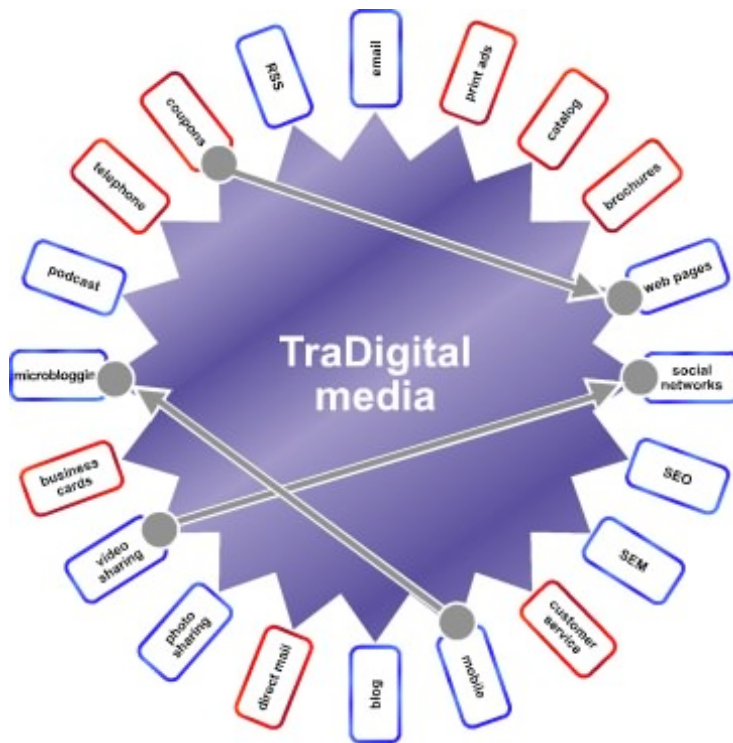
Figure 4. Tradigital media (Safko, 2013)

The amount of possible combinations in case of forty tools is a number with 47 zeros after it, which is a lot to choose from and impossible to do all. So while the bigger companies are trying to integrate traditional with social more effectively, the smaller enterprises and individuals need to develop manageable, effective marketing plans that can be implemented successfully. (Safko 2013, 79.)

A more down to earth concept for starting social media marketing is called The Trinity of Social Media: blogging, micro blogging and social networking. It is important to have an effective "WII-FM" (What's in it for me?) message that is centred on the prospect, the reader. (Safko 2013, 104.) Individuals with a large base of subscribers/followers face the challenge of diversity within their networks and tend to provide universal content, such as interesting facts or quotes, as part of their communication, to satisfy the majority of followers.

The difficulty lies in content creation: it is the same story with modern media as with modern musical instruments and applications – what to play with all of it? And it is worth mentioning that content, as the primary online activity for those online, is just

emerging: up through 2006 communications and not content had the leading share of online time expenditure. (Evans 2012, 19.)

The initial decision to participate in digital social, from the corporate perspective, makes both Mr. Evans and Mr. Safko agree on two advices: firstly, those responsible for corporate social media must be the same people who do traditional marketing and secondly, content for the web must be an extension and illustration of real activity of a firm. In order to be successful online the company (or individual) needs to adapt to listening and observing – and promoting a dialogue instead of monologue, one-way communication.

2.2   Social feedback cycle, relevance and trust

The following figure is an illustration of the purchase funnel, a concept used to describe consumer purchase behaviour. Traditional marketing efforts, as explained by Dave Evans (2012, 44), are concentrated mainly on generating awareness and optimising point-of-purchase solutions. The stage of consideration, which stands in between, is "typically avoided, primarily because it hasn't been – and still isn't – directly accessible." What has also not been accessible to marketers is the post-purchase conversation, the last stage illustrated in figure 5. Ten years ago such conversations took place between people familiar to each other, in a bar downtown or on a fishing boat in the countryside, just as today. In these cases the experience-generated opinion of a product or service, negative or positive, could be translated to a limited group of consumers, whereas with the rise of SM these discussions went online, where they are recorded, saved and can be tracked, observed and listened to by a truly large audience, including marketologists. And of course, attempts are made to use this new incredible opportunity to be as close as it gets to consumer emotions and desires and to direct the post-purchase conversation strategically.

> "The social feedback cycle is set in motion by a post-purchase opinion that forms based on the relationship between the expectations set and the actual performance of the product or service. This opinion drives

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word of mouth, and word of mouth ultimately feeds back into the purchase funnel in the consideration phase."(Evans 2012, 45.)
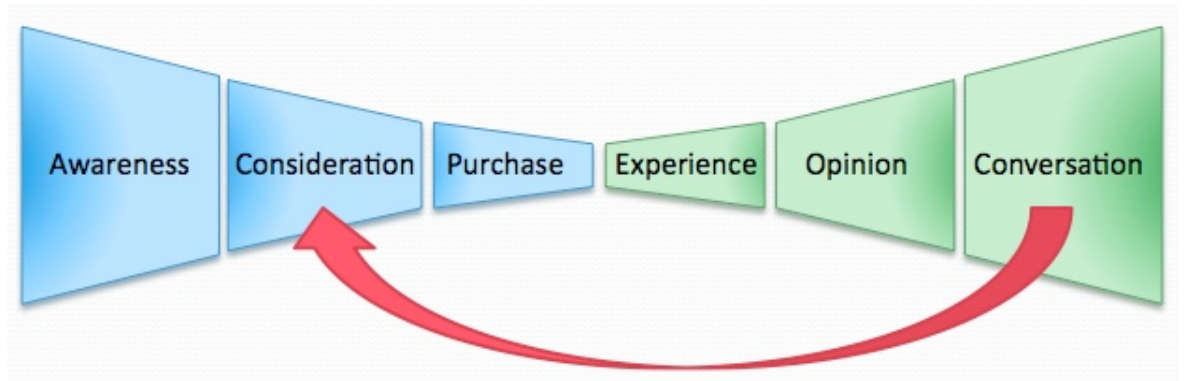

Figure 5. Purchase funnel (Evans 2012, 44)

That is where brands need to participate: to observe, listen and align their internal efforts with consumer expectations, because otherwise they are irrelevant to social media.

> "It is better for the industry to act voluntarily. Otherwise, after a long court battle, angry citizens will get rid of the commercial speech doctrine and replace it with the right to be left alone." – Gary Ruskin, executive director of Commercial Alert (AdAge, 2004.)

Within ten years consumers have adopted the social web and ad-suppressing technology for that exact cause – to be left alone by purely interruptive marketers (Evans 2012, 19). It is highly important to realise that social media is and will always be customer-driven, as long as companies and clients will be using same tools – and it is so for the time being after ten years of software development.

> "Consumers have attained a level of expertise and sophistication with regard to their judgement of advertising that far surpasses that of their fifties and sixties counterparts. Mistrust and avoidance are predictable endpoints for messages and campaign methods that fail to represent contemporary consumer sensibilities." (Evans 2012, 19.)

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People worldwide have gained access to a virtually unlimited amount of knowledge about everything and the base is growing with books being recaptured in digital format and the more increasing amount of open, free of charge content. The greatest writings of humanity are now accessible to any undergraduate to explore and perceive – and some do take self-education seriously… It has been about twenty years since Internet went viral – imagine how intellectually and experientially advanced people will be – we will be – in another twenty years. And how large a part of reality we want to devote to online? Although science had already proven that reality is no such thing? Does Google know that? And "what do we really know about ourselves?" entry gives over 65 million results within 0,33 seconds.

2.3   What is social media used for?

We can recognize that communication, the need to belong to a group and to be appreciated, are the natural needs that we all encounter. A study from 1993 by Dr. Robin I. M. Dunbar of the Human Evolutionary Biology Research Group of the University College London anthropology department made an important discovery about the workings of social networks and human interaction, which is referred to as the Dunbar's number."(Safko, 2010, 26):

> "Dunbar proposed that the cognitive limit to the number of people with whom one person can maintain stable social relationships was 150. These are relationships in which individuals know who each person is, and how each person relates to every other person. The size of a typical social network is constrained to about 150 members because of possible limits in the capacity of the human communication channel."

We can openly rephrase Mr. Dunbar today by saying: "was constrained" instead, because the opportunity and the benefit that social media brought about is the enrichment, intensification and extension of a social network. All of a sudden anyone got a chance to be recognized by an audience on a global, international scale through text, video, audio and photo sharing tools – all for the human mind to utilize.

Therefore and on the one hand social media enabled people to communicate and co-create on a new, unprecedented level. And as mentioned earlier communication was the main reason to go online until 2004, when the other, empty hand started to fill with **content**. Mr. Bill Gates gave a call to the large community back in 1996, stating that content is the next hot business model again and today paid content is reality.

The phrase "content is king" is viral today, just a few years after a severe recession, which struck not only heavy industry and machinery, but television and advertising – online advertising as well. We could see advertisement prices cut in half and even more, today we see a totally different scene: costs of content creation are falling rapidly due to the emergence of digital platforms and tools, such as BuzzFeed, Vox Media, Buzz Media, Thrillist, Tumblr and other, which either create content themselves at a very low rate or provide opportunity to do it with virtually no cost. (Paid Content, 2012.) Today we are talking "branded content", "sponsored content" and "native advertising" (a case when, for example, an athlete promotes hydrated water through his own social media channels – it does seem natural, obvious and not interruptive at all, and convincing). So there is great opportunity to manage advertising organically and tolerantly. And it was proven that original interruptive marketing faces intolerable feedback from consumers on the social web.

To try and answer the question: "What is social media used for?"- Is an overwhelming task, because we use it for everything. Even the two "hands" of communication and content are inseparable from one another in the same way, as a visit to the bathroom becomes another opportunity to get under the digital shower – a moment to play a flash game online, order food and clothing, reserve a table in a restaurant, pay mortgage, watch a football game or post a photo of yourself on a recent holiday to refresh memories.

Overly speaking, social media is young and is developing. It is getting cheaper, reaches further and is becoming inseparably integrated into the life of a civilian. It is tempting, colorful, a chance to escape habitual. And on top of all it is desirable to have an online identity because it is so visible and so easy to relate to. It is a mirror into which many

of us look and maybe social media will eventually become the mirror, in which humanity will look for a reflection – and probably it will get a +1, given that it looks at itself.

As a matter of fact, we are obsessed with ourselves. A consumer is first of all a human being, a presence, consciousness which is a complete mystery, but we rarely think about it, because it is much more comfortable to know who you are rather than not to.

3 Russia in terms of Social Media

The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader an insight into russian social media environment from both a corporate and individual presence perspective.

3.1 Overview of Russian social media environment

In a study by Rose Creative Strategies and Headhunter, the leading online recruitment company in the Russian market with a base of over four million Internet users, the crucial numbers have been revealed for the first time in Spring 2010. The following information had been obtained through quantitative interviews of 5 364 active Internet users. The aims of the study were to obtain objective information of time spend, behavioural patterns, including purchase decision and brand perception. (Cossa, 2012.)

To start with, out of nearly 142 million inhabitants, there are currently about 43 million Internet users in Russia (who access the Internet at least twice a year) and 25 million active users (who access the Internet on a daily basis). Out of those active and based on the research, 89% have at least one account on social networks.
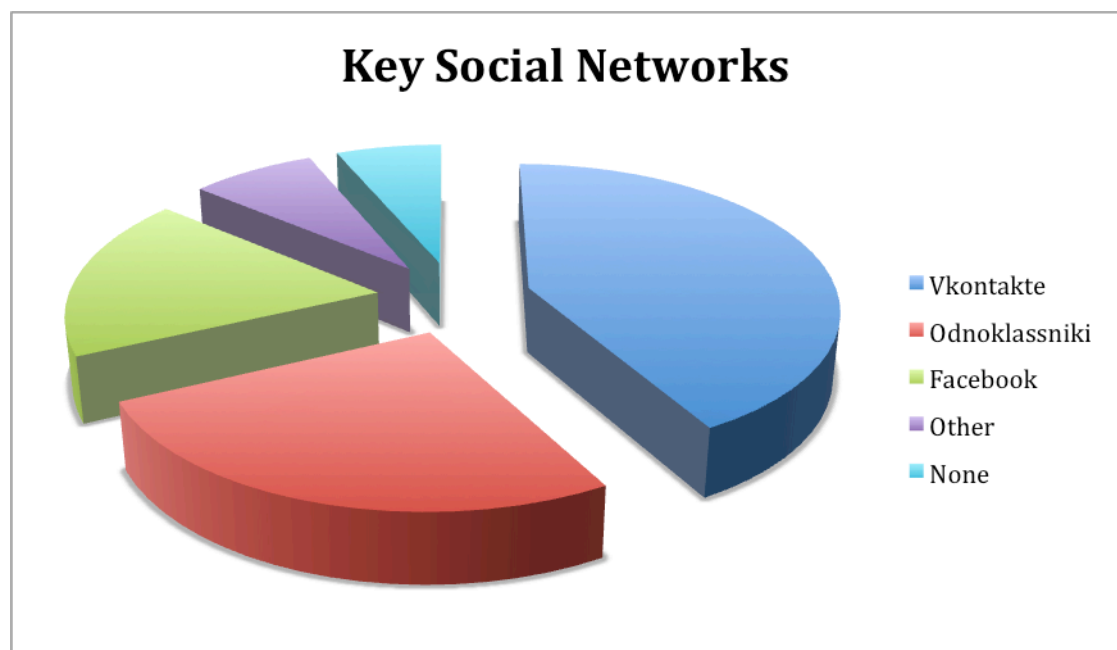

Figure 6. Key Russian social networks (Cossa, 2012)

As revealed in figure 6, the two main social networks are Vkontakte (75+ million users) and Odnoklassniki (45+ million users). There are several reasons underlying Vkontakte's dominant market position: from the fact that only a small part of the Russian population speaks foreign languages to its unresolved piracy issues. It is very tempting to gain access to millions of videos and terabytes of music open to download and left without censorship. Notably, even though Facebook has a 31% share, only one million active users were identified at the time of the research. Other networks, including blogging and micro blogging services have a registry among 13% of Russian Internet users. (Cossa, 2012.)

Despite a seemingly low registry on blogging platforms, the study shows that large portions of people are visiting them to collect information (Cossa, 2012):

- Never – 21%
- Once a month – 13%
- Once a week – 15%
- Once a day – 25%
- Several times a day – 26%

In other words 51% of active Internet users access blogging on a daily basis, which is a significant number and an opportunity to establish presence worth careful consideration.

> "Almost 90% of those who read about brands (commentaries of other users and thematic posts) in social media before taking a purchase decision, state that the material affected the decision making process. After aligning the number of these respondents with the sample of the research, 24% (or nearly one out of four Russian Internet users) depend on social media before making a purchase."(Cossa, 2012.)

When it comes to discussing products and services online 63% of respondents say to never have participated, 30% do participate as observers and 7% participate and comment.

Whereas the micro blogging segment, which is almost exclusively Twitter, had shown much more scarce results: 71% of users are never there at all, while 13% use it on a daily basis.

The numbers are destined to grow as more and more Russians access the Internet via mobile phones. Currently about 48% of Russian Internet users access the Internet from their mobiles, 39% of those run an e-mail application, 30% access social media and 21% search for news. As the phones become more technically suitable for the cause, the number of users accessing social media and especially microblogs will grow and it is likely that the growth will exceed that of the more developed economies, because mobile phones are simply cheaper to buy than personal computers. (Cossa, 2012.)
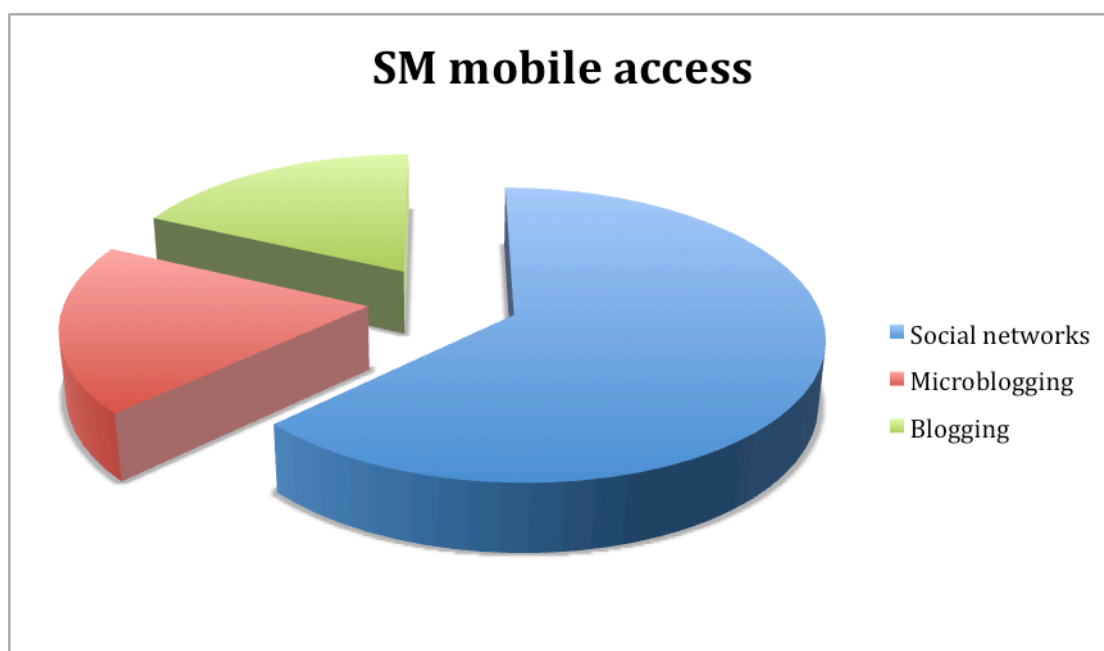

Figure 7. Access to social media via mobile phone (Cossa, 2012)

When it comes to mobile phones 63% of users run social network applications and for good reasons: all key social networks have developed tailored apps for all the major

mobile software platforms, which allows the user to take his online identity "to go" and use it simultaneously together with key daily routines, such as food consumption, watching TV or residing in a traffic jam. Vkontakte makes up an incredibly wide storage of video and music files and ever since telecommunication service providers allowed unlimited Internet access, lots of people started using Vkontakte as an online media player with an astonishing library of files.

More interestingly, micro blogging (19%) and blogging (18%) do have a very large mobile audience, which makes perfect sense, especially concerning micro blogging. The reason for micro blogging to be so popular "on the go" is due to its more frequent renewal and, as Brian Solis, author and thought leader, points out on his Youtube channel (BrianSolisTV, 2013), that information is spread the fastest through micro blogging due to its compressed format and through the sharing [retweet] function, which is at the core of micro blogging experience. The information is also destined to expire the fastest on Twitter and similar platforms – an estimated two to three hours. Thus the micro blogging experience, as well as social networking in general gives the user an immediate sense of fulfilment, belonging, engagement and empowerment through access to relevant content.

The issue of content relevance is an ongoing discussion over a process, which is extremely complex. Of course, historically the most relevant information was that which came out of an authority and more often than not in human history the authority, be it a government, a regime, a royal family or religious commune, has had a dominant position in spreading information.

That is usually the government and Russia is one good example of information control, but when it comes to social media, the information is not being just consumed as it had been with radio and television, but criticised by sometimes thousands, sometimes millions of human eyes. And if the information (or lack of information) is being found misleading, untruthful or otherwise hazardous to the community – the audience with an audience, with an audience – the reaction may well be dangerous to the maximum for any hierarchic structure, including a government. There are numerous examples

proving the incredible force of social media, a force that is destined to change the way we approach knowledge, a force that is already changing the game for governments, multinationals, enterprises, medium and small businesses and individuals around the world. For a simple reason: within the borders of social media there is only one ultimate authority – human attention and engagement and this force is growing in numbers, technologies and it is developing morally and intellectually. It is on a way to synergy, empathy and connectedness – and it demands sincerity and openness from any individual or enterprise in order to become approved, recognised and supported i.e. relevant.

When it comes to authority in terms of information provision, the news media are in the spotlight – the more interesting it is to see the distribution of news profiles followers on micro blogging platforms: an insignificant 4% actually follow mass media sources with highest attention paid to mass media and business sources:

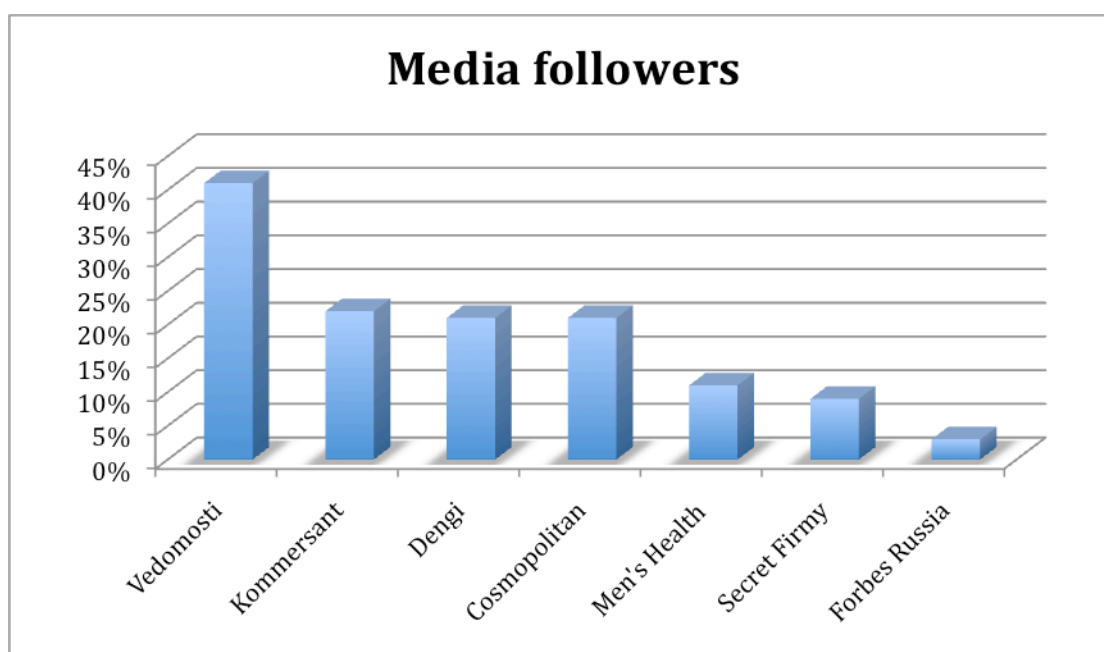Figure 8. Media followers distribution on micro blogs (Cossa, 2012)

It is clear to a Russian reader that institutions with a reputation in offline activities: on television, radio and in print media have that reputation transformed into followers, retweets, page views etc. It is only worth noticing that the mentioned online value currencies are much less solid and much more flexible – infantile and easily redistributing

with any new key market player gaining a foothold in social media. And that is true for businesses and individuals on equal terms. In order to better understand the environment of Russian social media it is necessary to observe key participators, both companies and people and the next two subchapters are an attempt to illustrate the big picture with targeted statistics and a few examples of efficient participation and engagement.

3.1.1 Presence of individuals in Russian SM

To start with, true to be said that individuals currently dominate Russian social media, especially micro blogs. It may well be linked to the fact that we, people, engage more openly with other people instead of companies – a persona is understood and related with much easier than a corporate entity. From another perspective, companies are facing difficulty trying to tailor a message to the basic user in an understandable, interactive way, using simple language to gain a follower, retweet or feedback – in other words to participate in a dialogue instead of communicating a message over and over. Individuals are far better off when it comes to discussing and when it comes to digital word of mouth, Twitter is the platform of choice for the majority.

Even though micro blogging unites a comparatively insignificant 10% of active Internet users who do participate, a few individual account holders do have a truly large and influential audience. The newest identified rating of top SM accounts, including twitter on the basis of four variables: followers, friends, favourites and tweets by T30P in partnership with Brandoscope (TOP 30, 2013) shows a perspective on the participators: ranking first comes the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Dmitri Medvedev with the largest base of followers on Russian Twitter: **1 893 237 followers**. The account was started during his presidency leading to wide recognition and an international audience. The top 30 rankings include only two accounts related to the Russian government: President of the Russian Federation (13) and Vladimir Zhirinovsky (23) Vice-Chairman of the State Duma, founder and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Presidential candidate during all presidential elections. Having presented Mr. Zhirinovsky, the other account named "President Rossii" is an account of official news

from Kremlin – not the account of Vladimir Putin. And despite several other accounts of officials, governmental presence in SM is scarce.

There is one effort worth mentioning when governmental participation is concerned – the one of Ramzan Kadirov, head of Chechen Republic since 2007. Being present in social media for one and a half years, Mr. Kadirov's team established presence on Twitter and Instagram and through remarkable synergy between text and photo as means of daily routine illustration, has gained an audience of over 32 thousand followers on Twitter and a much more impressive 100+ thousand on Instagram. An average of three photos a day, each with a long commentary enforces feedback and attracts attention on an increasing scale. What is yet unique for Russian SM is the consistency of messages and dialogue with the audience.

While the government continues to ignore social media, the ones who really caught the "digital wind" are journalists, TV hosts, actors and singers – those accustomed to content generation. Among hundreds of 50 000+ accounts a handful is close to or exceeds a million followers.

	Account name	Occupation	Followers
Ivan Urgant	@urgantcom	TV-host, actor	1 294 269
Michail Galustyan	@m_galustyan	Actor, comedian	1 293 428
Vera Brezhneva	@verabrezhneva	Singer, actress	1 235 208
Tina Kandelaki	@tina_kandelaki	TV-host, journalist	920 696
Pavel Volya	@realvolya	Comedian, singer	879 380
Timati	@timatiofficial	Hip-hop singer	870 509
Kseniya Sobchak	@xenia_sobchak	TV-host, journalist	646 671
Viktoria Bonya	@victoriabonya	TV-host, model	643 234

Figure 9. Top Celebrity Twitter accounts (24.3.2013) (figure by the author)

The above figure may not be anything but an illustration of how big are social networks in Russia to date. If compared to the States – very insignificant. In comparison

Oprah Winfrey, American TV-host and journalist has 17,5+ million followers on her Twitter.

Given another example, President Obama, who ran his election campaign to a large extent through social media, has 28,7+ million followers. It really is significant, and may very well be a political reason for Mr. Putin not to establish presence – because it will be insignificant in comparison with the West. And it is true that most of contribution to the world of digital comes from outside Russia and even that what is being done locally – is being copied. Though one example of an original idea that comes from, actually, a Russian high school graduate, Andrey Ternovsky, is a web site called "Chatroullette" – a service for random anonymous online chatting through text and video. The website gained international recognition and at its pique in Spring 2010 the page had 1,5 million attendants daily. (Wikipedia, 2013.)

A search for most popular pages on the biggest Russian social network, Vkontakte, gives the following results:

	Occupation	Subscribers
Pavel Durov	Vkontakte.ru creator	3 715 044
Dmitriy Medvedev	Prime Minister, Russia	1 626 296
Maria Kozhevnikova	Actress	1 102 842
Viktoria Bonya	TV-host, actress	791 806
Alexey Dolmatov	GUF (rapper)	774 824
Vasya Vakulenko	Basta (rapper)	645 605
Tina Kandelaki	TV-host, journalist	613 871
Maxim Golopolosov	+100500 youtube channel host	592 867

Figure 10. Top pages on Vkontakte.ru (24.3.2013) (figure by the author)

The above figure unveils eight most popular pages on Vkontakte.ru, four of them appeared on a similar ranking for Twitter. Coming in first with an incomparable amount of subscribers is Pavel Durov, the founder of Russia's biggest social network, Vkontakte.ru, with a three million gap ahead of Mr. Medvedev, who has about 200 000 less subscribers to his profile page than to his Twitter account.

All of the people on the list can be considered inspirational figures and moral authorities to Russian society or at least to interest groups. One of them is at the same time operates the most popular Russian Youtube channel +100500, plagiarism of the overwhelmingly popular "=3" show by Ray William Johnson – owner of one of the biggest Youtube channels worldwide. Both people are comedians observing viral videos of the week, both shows air for about 5 minutes a couple of times a week and both make a living from the digital content they provide.

What is surprising is that the median amount of followers on Twitter is higher than that of Vkontakte's pages, which means higher activity ratio for Twitter. This outcome is due to the ease and simplicity of sharing the limited to only 140 characters inconsequential bursts of information – "tweets". What is also true is that Vkontakte had been around for a much longer time period. It is reasonable to expect stronger growth from Twitter because of its international status, ease of usage, close relation with mobile technology and the sense of actuality, of here and now.

3.1.2   Brand presence

When it comes to brands 28% of people are searching for information on products and services, out of those 87% state that the information influenced the purchase decision. About 16% of SM users are present on corporate pages. Growth of this number is anticipated as a result of increasing corporate presence on social networks, which are most suitable for the cause i.e. Facebook, Twitter and Vkontakte. (Cossa, 2012.)

Table 1. Average amount of subscribers to Brand pages (Quant Research 2013)

Platform	Top 1 to 10 average subscribers	The rest
Vkontakte	41 000	18 000
Facebook	4 300	2 000
Twitter	1 600	900

A more recent study on corporate presence in the Russian social web by Quant Research, conducted in February 2013 gives a wide perspective on Russian companies using social media on four platforms, which are Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, Facebook and Twitter on the basis of two variables: followers and messages (Quant Research, 2013).

Table 2. Key network leaders (Quant Research 2013)

	Leader	Followers	Messages
Vkontakte	Vimpelkom	925 517	1 607
Odnoklassniki	Eldorado	25 080	320
Facebook	Vimpelkom	182 594	5 933
Twitter	Megafon	17 705	32 045

Notably Vimpelkom, better known in Russia as Beeline, one of the three largest telecommunication service providers, has established presence on all four platforms as well as Youtube and MyWorld. Out of 40 biggest Russian companies in terms of sales volumes 35% occupy Twitter and Facebook, 20% are present on Youtube, 13% on Vkontakte, 5% do blogging and 3% are present on Odnoklassniki, MyWorld and LinkedIn. (Quant Research, 2013.) Surprisingly, LinkedIn is rarely used, while it is nonetheless the biggest online CV storage of the world.

The same kind of metrics for top 40 Russian banks delivers a different distribution: Facebook is being occupied by 65% of those, Twitter is used by 55%, a lesser 40% use Vkontakte, while 33% post videos on Youtube. 18% do blogging and 15% use Odnoklassniki, while LinkedIn is not being used at all. (Quant Research, 2013.) It appears that Russian bank segment is using social media more actively than do the largest companies.

Other interesting findings of the research include (Quant Research, 2013):

- As of February 2013 no Russian company had over a million subscribers on any single network. Vimpelkom is the closest with over 925 thousand subscribers to their Vkontakte brand page.
- The absolute leader by subscriptions on Vkontakte within the banking segment is UniCredit Bank with 198 851 subscribers. Russian Central Bank comes second with 87 492.
- No Russian company identified in the research exceeds 20 000 followers on Twitter, which is 1 820 times less than the "Beliebers" community of popular singer Justin Bieber.
- Out of 40 biggest Russian companies in terms of sales volumes 15 established presence on at least one SM platform
- The most socially active business sphere is consulting with 9/10 companies present in SM.
- Out of 62 biggest retail chains in terms of sales spots the two biggest – Billa and Carrefour are not present online. 30 have established social presence and the most popular platforms are Vkontakte (26), Facebook (25) and Twitter (25).

On the general level the study shows insights of the consumer perspective on brand presence in social media: relating to a brand through Vkontakte is the option for the majority of consumers; at the same time brands find it equally necessary to participate in micro blogging. This probably means, from the brand perspective, anticipation of Twitter's growth as the growing number of smart phones increases the usage of mobile

Internet applications, it also means access to international audience and an opportunity to listen to what consumers say about them.

Twitter has a desirable feature for every company and not just because it is so often in a consumer's hand, straight in his phone, but because a tweet is missed only if the user scrolled through it, otherwise it always shows on the applications home screen – so the reader doe's not need to switch pages – just a straight bottom-up timeline, simple and very close to consumer. And so far consumers find it more convenient to maintain a more distant relationship through Vkontakte by subscribing to a profile page for the time being.

3.2   Karelia on the map of social media

The Republic of Karelia is situated in the Northwest Federal District of the Russian Federation, on the border with Finland and simultaneously with the European Union. The capital of the Republic is Petrozavodsk with 271 000 inhabitants.

The population of Karelia, according to GosKomStat (2013) population census, is 637 008 people out of whom 78,82% are urban civilians. The ethnic structure of the population is: Russian (82,2%), Karelian (7,4%), Belarus (3,8%), Ukrainian (2%), Finnish (1,4%), Veps (0,5%) and Other (2,7%).

The Republic concludes 17 urban settlements with population over four thousand, 776 rural settlements out of which 14% are uninhabited, 11 big enterprises, 2 800 km of railways, 101 bank cards to a hundred inhabitants, forests on 85% of its territory and 27 thousand rivers (Wikipedia, 2013).

According to the yearly rating of the Subjects of the Russian Federation in terms of Internet usage, prepared by Rosstat (2013), Karelia ranks fifth with 60,7% users among the most connected regions of Russia. The four forerunners are Moscow (71,9%), Saint-Petersburg (71,3%), Kamchatka Region (65,7%) and Murmansk Region (62,8%). (RIA, 2013.)

In terms of social media the Republic should be considered an integral part of Russian SM in the same manner, as Russian SM is inevitably part of the Global digital social network. There is not much to boast about on a global scale, even though Karelian Government as a structure and its law enforcing units have a presence on the Internet (Government, 2013). And with all due respect to local governmental authority, access to the Internet is regular, with no web pages prohibited.

Taken a closer look on current digital media in the region one example of successful local social media initiative is a domain http:/www.truba.com, which is a "glocally" generated video database, similar to Youtube and containing 287 930 videos to date (Truba, 2013).

A search for profile pages related to Petrozavodsk on Vkontakte gives 207 113 results, while the population estimate is 271 000 inhabitants (Vkontakte, 2013). Therefore Karelians do have a presence in social media. The research is an attempt to better understand the interests and causes for the majority of the Republic's capital to be present in social media.

One more perspective on SM in Karelia is an example of traditional media source presence on the web: Nika Plus, the local news and tele-radio communications company (Nika-media, 2013). On the web site's homepage the user finds a list of eighteen news, with the option to show twenty more on the bottom of the page. Each news has a separate field for commentary and for the first eighteen articles no commentary was left (25.3.2013). On the right hand side of the same Internet page you find a section for social media presence including Vkontakte (1 747 subscribers), Twitter (124 followers), Youtube (62 subscribers), Yandex News (80 articles posted to date) and Facebook. The link to Facebook leads to an inexistent page. (Nika Plus, 2013.)

All in all there are obvious signs of interest towards Internet and social media in the Republic and some initiatives on developing regional web content do originate from the government. At the same time, the key regional Internet providers are private en-

terprises owned by individuals with good expertise in the field of digital. And they are doing a good job in providing access to the web for a large audience – the fifth biggest in Russia and the third biggest republic in terms of Internet usage.

3.3   Summary of the theory

This chapter is an attempt to present in graphic format the conection between the global pool of social media, Russia and Karelia.
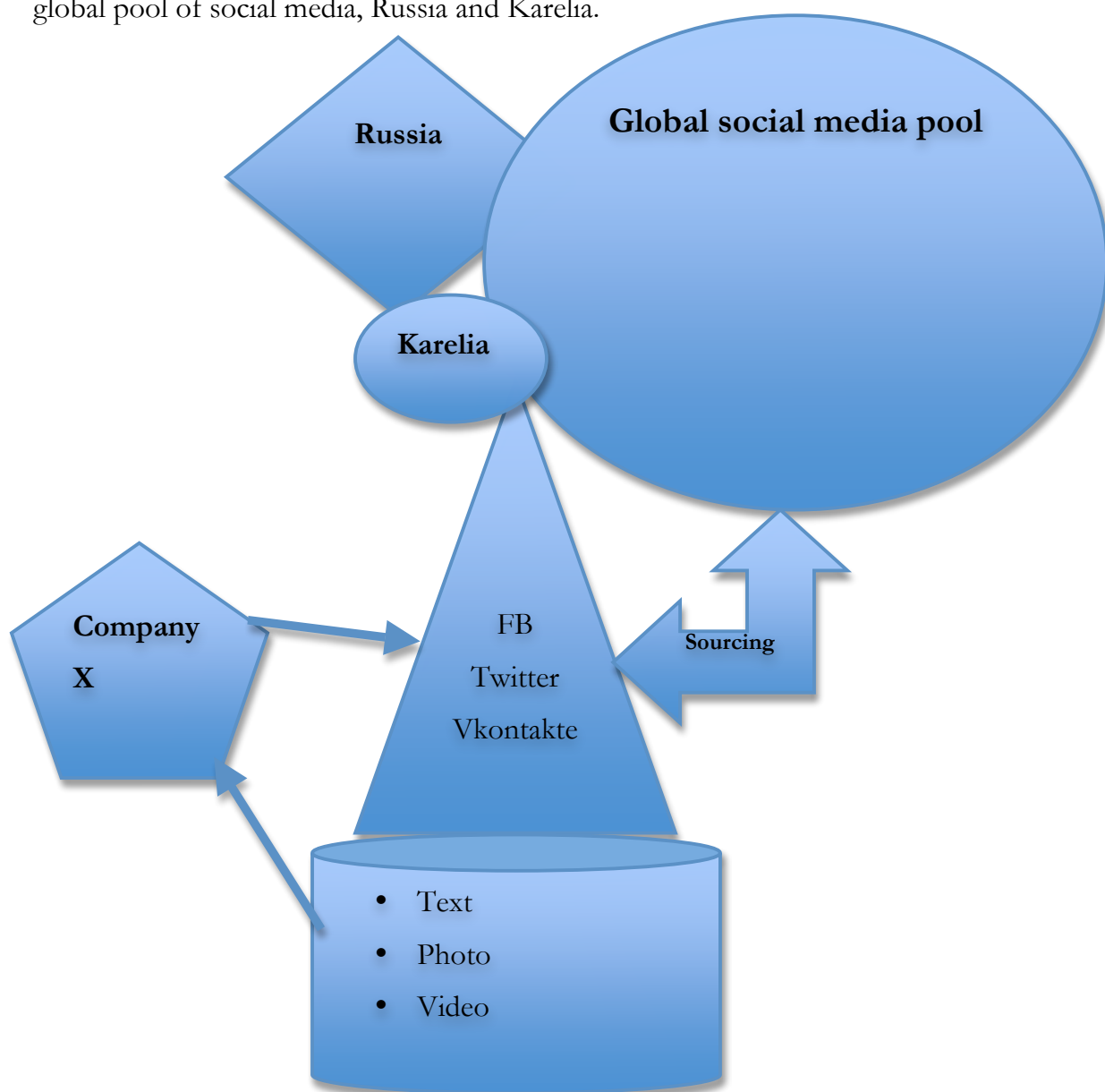

Figure 11. Social media in Karelia, a suggestion for company X. (figure by the author)

The Republic of Karelia, being part of Russian Federation, cannot be viewed as a separate entity – it is integral to Russian language and cultural environment and exchanges [mostly borrows from] content with the bigger body and notably, Russia is a

very centralized state. So the content, created in Karelia, as well as multiformal online interaction may and should be regarded as Russian with no mistake.

Given the fact that two out of three key identified social platforms originate from outside Russia and the third, Vkontakte, is created on the same idea and similar platform as Facebook, we can openly say that the tools i.e. platforms are being globally sourced.

Obviously, the majority of Karelians, as well as Russians, join only the biggest and well known SM channels, because the people they know do the same. The less known networks lack attention in Karelia, because the value of joining a foreign network, even that which has gained popularity in the States, drops significantly. This happens ultimately because we do not care for a strangers' opinion, tag, poke, like or +1. It is all about being online with the ones you know and come across in reality. Therefore company X should establish presence on the same social platforms as the potential customers.

The most popular means of interaction are text and photo, and despite not being present in the figure, an application for posting images called "Instagram" is extremely popular among Karelians. While video content, created locally, seldom goes viral and is almost never viewed outside Karelia. Generally, video content is more eagerly consumed than created. Company X should consider creating a digital version of their pre-order catalogue online. At the same time, there are vast opportunities for customer engagement if the company is able to encourage people to share their experience on its social channels.

Overly, the Republic, being ranked fifth among the states under Russian Federation that use Internet with 60,7% users, should be concidered an active viewer and listener of the globall buzz, but by far not a contributor.

4 Research on Social Media in Karelia

The following chapter is a representation of the insights gathered during March and April 2013 in order to address the main research question: how is social media used by individuals in the Republic of Karelia?

4.1 Data collection

Most of the research and writing process of this thesis was prepared distantly in Helsinki, Finland and with all due respect to the Finnish authority, access to the Internet and various up-to-date literature on the subject had been consistently satisfying, fulfilling and openly accessible. A sufficient amount of time and megabytes have been spent on observation of Karelian social media environment and some interesting details that were noticed support the opinions and ideas of the people who were interviewed during the research.

A total of seven interviews were held through Scype and personal meetings with people of different gender, occupation, age group and background on the topic of social media usage in the Republic. These people, who agreed to be interviewed, were identified through social media as relevant to Karelian digital environment and with anticipation of a distinctive opinion on social media experience.

A list of eighteen open ended questions was arranged in order to gather information systematically, nevertheless, each interview was distinctive from the other and sub questions rose naturally during the conversations. At the end of each interview the prospect was asked to state his or her intention to promote social media to friends and family.

The author of the thesis is an insider into Karelian social media since 2007 and had been accustomed to the local linguistic, cultural, geographical and otherwise social implications, which made it a difficult task to try and not mistake the necessary for the

obvious and to avoid personalisation when it comes to describing one's native digital surroundings.

Table 3. Interviewees on social media in Karelia

	Gender	Age	Occupation
A	M	12	Pupil, 5th grade
B	M	17	Pupil, 50k group owner Vkontakte.ru
C	M	22	Internet appliances installer, Aalto University freshman
D	F	22	Tourism student, Petrozavodsk State University
E	M	23	Business Student, interested in communications
F	M	25	Company X manager
G	F	43	Deputy chief of the legislative assembly

4.2   Validity & reliability

As a business student I reviewed literature on research less than many, but several times and I believe it is quite common for a student to be concerned about this subject. The chapters, dedicated to explaining and reasoning the process of data collection and interviewing i.e. the steps and procedures are clear, while the more soft subjects, such as validity, reliability and objectivity are very difficult to understand the way they are expressed in academic literature. It seems common for authors to use profound language expressions and you get a sense that if the author were to explain it to an outsider, he would only feel comfortable speaking academically despite the possible misunderstanding.

Having such kind of experience I have chosen the book "An introduction to qualitative research" by Uwe Flick (2009), who refers to several authors and studies and gives a range of perspectives. The book has received good commentary since it was first

published in 1995 and is said to be "an essential introductory text for all students of qualitative research."

According to Flick (2009, 386), reliability is an important criterion "only against the background of a specific theory of the issue under study and the use of methods". All interviews were held in Russian, conducted either through Skype or a meeting in person and were recorded in mp3 format to ensure authenticity of results, usual methods of qualitative data collection. All respondents understood the questions clearly and were able to answer most questions lengthy and openly. According to Flick (2009, 122-123) there are several approaches to sampling, both for random and purposive. In the case of this work the chosen concept is purposive *maximal variation sampling*, i.e. to extract a small group of cases, different from one another as much as possible in order to obtain a range of perspectives different from one another.

Flick (2009, in Wolcott 1990, 127-128) outlined the concept of procedural validity, which concludes nine points that improve validity, which receives more attention than reliability in the discussions about grounding qualitative research:

> "(1) The researcher should refrain from talking in the field but rather should listen as much as possible. He or she should (2) produce notes that are as exact as possible, (3) begin to write early, and in a way (4) which allows readers of his or her notes and reports to see for themselves. This means providing enough data for readers to make their own inferences and follow those of the researcher. The report should be as complete (5) and candid (6) as possible. The researcher should seek feedback on his or her findings and presentations in the field or from his or her colleagues (7). Presentations should be characterized by a balance (8) between the various aspects and (9) by accuracy in writing."

Of these criteria points three and especially four were managed to a large extent based on the authors reflections of the interviews, and even though a few quotes appear in the following discussion, most findings are compressed to the scale of the work and grouped in such a way to provide for a variable picture. According to Flick (2009, 387) there are three types of errors, which make a work invalid: "to see a relation, a princi-

ple, and so on where they are not correct; to reject them when they are indeed correct; and finally to ask the wrong questions."

4.3 Findings

Social media had been around for less than a decade – and by this time an approximate 1 Billion people are involved in it. Despite the tremendous growth or maybe because of it, and in the face of changes that SM brought about, any results are interim and should be viewed as an opportunity to capture a moment in time. A moment, which already flew by and into vast archives of modern history. Not something to be worried about, though naturally, facts about history become such in the future, and the next decade will certainly allow us to better understand today – tomorrow.

As of today, the Republic of Karelia, as the interviews and secondary research have shown, is a geographic region, a municipally centralized entity, which is highly exposed to Internet and social media: 60,7% of Internet users, the third most online republic of the world's biggest country with over 380 000 connected individuals. What do they do online?

Contemporarily speaking, they follow trends, of which the most recent are "planking", "Gangnam Style" and "Harlem Shake" – all very infantile as you would expect from an immature industry, but never the less, are global publicly generated content: images and videos, accompanied with textual messages. Memes and comics are also generated in and about the Republic with both individuals and communities involved in exposing local news and stories, such as poor road conditions, to the internet community in a humorous, often sarcastic way. When did social media become popular in Karelia?

According to the interviews, it happened at the end of the 00's, five to seven years past, with four out of seven respondents having said to first experience SM five years ago and the access points were different: three individuals accessed SM through Vkontakte, two through Facebook, one through ICQ and various chats and one through "Album Karelia", which is a local database of images with 63 176 users registered to date (Al-

bum, 2013). Therefore, the majority of respondents accessed SM through Russian platforms. How did they use Internet before social media?

Surprisingly, no one mentioned e-mail as a reason to go online in the earlier days. On the other hand, everyone agreed that the old modem Internet connection was highly uncomfortable, so for many, the digital experience started with SM after all. How do Karelians define social media?

Clearly, to define social media was a difficult task and people generally stated that they do it for communication and for being informed:

> "Социальные медиа – это, с одной стороны, способ получения оперативной информации о том, что происходит вокруг. С другой стороны и в силу того, что жизнь сегодня такая насыщенная и интенсивная, и мало времени чтобы часто лично встречаться с друзьями и знакомыми, это конечно способ общения с людьми."

«Social media is, on the one hand, a mean of gathering operative information about what is happening around. On the other hand and in spite of life being today so rich and intence, and there is often few time to meet with friends in person, it is of course a mean of communicating with peole.» - say's respondent G and continues:

> "С точки зрения получения информации я выше всего оцениваю нахождение в Twitter, где информация часто появляется раньше официальных источников, иногда можно уловить как она искажается, например государственными средствами массовой информации."

«From the point of gathering information I give the highest grade to being present on twitter, where information often appears sooner than on official sources, sometimes you can sence the way it is distorted, for example by governmental mass media.»

The word «communication» was most frequently used to describe the concept: apart from the insight from respondent G, respondents B, D, E, F also stated communication as the main reason to enter social media.

The platforms in use are as follows:

Table 3.

Vkontakte	7
Facebook	5
Twitter	4
Instagram	5
Youtube	3

SM popularity in Karelia.

Among other platforms mentioned are Mail.ru, Thumblr, Odnoklassniki, Skype, Google+ and LinkedIn. These were the social platforms, that respondents were aware of, but not using. According to the results, the three most popular channels in Karelia are Vkontakte, Facebook and Instagram with Twitter in fourth, while still being third on the Russian scale.

The most popular platforms in Karelia therefore are not just the biggest, but also the most locally inhabited and the respondents were asked to provide an estimate of how many of their contacts are present in social media: the least mentioned amount is 70% (respondents A and G), while the rest came up with 90 to 100% estimate – two people (D & E) actually stated that all their connections have an online identity.

Also surprisingly and ahead of overall Russian statistics [63% mobile access], all seven interviewees access SM through mobile phones, five on a daily basis and four rather use phone than PC saying it fits better in daily routine. As a result, the respondents prefer the compressed format of content and communication, which fits the mobile screen more easily – that is to say microblogging is prior to blogging: five interviewees never or almost never use blogs, one individual runs a blog about cars and racing and

the other used to present financial market analysis, but discontinued. Also, none of the respondents use RSS as a mean to arrange incoming information and only two respondents new clearly what it is. Hence the popularity of Twitter exceeds that of Blogger. Instagram, being initially designed for mobile software, is among the most relevant mobile applications in Russia and even exceeds the popularity of Twitter among the contributors to this study.

4.3.1 Brand perspective

Six respondents follow the news media, and only one of them, respondent G, follows Karelian local media, which does not exceed a thousand followers on Twitter for any identified account. Among the news sources mentioned are the biggest Russian media: Lenta.ru, RIA Novosti and Vesti24, and also international, such as BBC News and Bild.de.

When the respondents were asked to give a free commentary about their experience with brand pages, they mostly lost enthusiasm: Russian corporate brands were not mentioned at all, while the international were a few: Coca-Cola, Adidas, Nike and Jordan: mostly clothing and footwear. No remarkable social media campaigns or even presence of Karelian (Russian) companies was mentioned by the interviewees. On the other hand, people do search for information and opinions about consumer goods. Respondent B describes his experience:

> "Да, несомненно, обращался и не раз. Впринципе, помогает сделать выбор. Можно прочесть мнение других пользователей и задать свой конкретный вопрос, в тот же день отвечают, при чем не один человек, а несколько – и так можно за день собрать примерную картину о продукте: нужен или нет, где и по какой цене его можно приобрести, где будет выгоднее."

«Yes, surely, addressed several times. Usually it helps to make a choice. You can read opinions of other users and ask your own concrete question, and to receive answers on the same day, even several respondents – and so in a day you can gather a meaningful

picture of the product: is it necessary or not, where and at what price it can be purchased, where at a good rate.»

Interviewees C, D, E, F and G also clearly stated to have entered social media for purchase and usage experience related information, which makes it 5 out of 7.

For Mr. Le and his company it means both opportunity and uncertainty. The more general statistics from chapter 3.1.2 on corporate presence draw an overall perspective and show few competitors in the clothing industry, which is easily and well understood by the consumer. The experience of Russian corporate-social is on an early stage of development and the process will probably take more time in Russia than in the western world.

The question about the suitability of different social media platforms for a dialogue with corporations was difficult to understand and largely misinterpreted for either corporate internal communications or a case of online recruitment i.e. Skype interviewing of job candidates. Facebook and Vkontakte were chosen as options prior to Twitter, which is numerically true for companies. Two respondents out of seven (B & E) have read theoretic literature on SM. One of them, B, being a high school pupil, runs a 50 000 group on Vkontakte, dedicated to a popular cartoon series, and read literature on group promotion, while the other writes a diploma on the topic of corporate communications and takes social media into account.

The last question to each respondent was aimed at understanding their intention to promote social media to their acquaintances on a scale from one to ten, where 10 would mean to never miss a chance. The results are a perfect statistical sequence: three people (A, C & E) gave a three, D gave a five while B, F & G gave a seven, which seems to be a liberal, optimistic and open attitude towards the issue.

4.4 Conclusions

This chapter reflects on the research aims and questions and concludes the research findings.

People of Russia, who use Internet actively [25 mln], are highly interested in social media: 89% have at least one account on social networks. Karelia is the fifth most connected subject of the Russian Federation with 6 out of 10 people accessing the Internet.

Interview results among Karelians show that it is typical for a user to be registered to 3-4 social networks. And so a typical user of social media in Russia is a typical user of the Internet – anybody, but only one out of six.

Social media became popular in Karelia around 2007 and the fore mover of Karelian social media buzz was Vkontakte.ru. There are currently 207 113 pages registered with Petrozavodsk, the capital of Karelia with a population of 271 000, as the birthplace.

The four most popular social networks are Vkontakte, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Karelians are ahead of overall Russian statistics of mobile Internet usage, 4 out of 7 respondents access social media through their mobiles more often than through a PC, thus the popularity of applications, which fit to a small screen. And contrarily, blogs and other rich-text format applications account for fewer users.

Karelians, as 25% of Russian Internet users generally, do think that their purchase behaviour is affected by social media. Never the less, respondents could not recall any memorable SM campaigns or Russian brand pages that caught their appeal.

Of all Russian corporate pages on all social media only one company, Vimpelkom Telecommunications Services, is about to reach a million subscribers on Vkontakte. While the individual with most followers is Pavel Durov, the creator of Vkontakte.ru with three and a quarter million subscribers. Individuals do fare better on Russian SM.

Russian companies seldom act voluntarily towards exposing their routines to the general public, while the publics' curiosity towards CSR is not excessive this far. Respondents tend to lose interest talking about the corporate part of Russian social media.

Karelians follow global trends, which emerge in or with the help of social media, such as planking, Memes and Angry Birds. Locally generated public content has word-of-mouth exposure within the Republic and comes in the form of images and text more often than video. Karelian social media is unsaturated and follows the global trend.

5 Discussion

Social media is here to stay. It is young and highly unpredictable. To an extent it concludes human knowledge – in that sense that the increasingly social Internet has become a container of literature, music and arts and otherwise important issues of our life experience. An opportunity to share, but even to record and revise. To learn the lessons of the past and to shape the world of today.

5.1   Suggestions for company X

Mr. Le's company is operating in an industry, which is well understood and easily related to by consumers. Clothing is a pleasure and a necessity, and we are really fond of searching for options. It has become habitual for many to shop for clothing and footwear in the web, or at least to do search for images and ideas for our wardrobes – ladies first.

A good option to start social interaction might be the Trinity of social media: Social networks, blogging and microblogging, allthough blogging could be exempted in favour of Instagram, when it comes to Karelian local circumstances. More over, presenting clothing visually is more appropriate than text, even though a blog could be arranged for questions and answers.

Since the company is managing pre-orders through catalogue it seems reasonable to transfer it to Vkontakte. That way customers could order, as well as make themselves aware of new arrivals – all at their homes and without the necessity to visit a physical location. It is also a way of attracting new clients with virtually no cost of customer acquisition.

Twitter can be used for various purposes: it is an opportunity to talk to customers and stakeholders, to present interesting facts about the company or clothing brands in stock and especially to listen to and review the commentary. And of course, it is highly

recommended to promote social media channels through one another as well as in stores.

Social media is not a promise of sales growth or customer acquisition. It can bring those desirable features with itself if integrated into companies' daily efforts and managed in a customer-friendly way and with patience.

5.2   Further research opportunities

We definitely do not know what is coming – we only know that some changes are happening, and they seem positive for consumers: corporate activity has suddenly become much more visible and carefully observed by the community – and the global Internet community is increasingly more informed, intelligent and influential. It is also a fact that corporate entities, especially brands with reputation understand the potential value of creating and maintaining a meaningful interactive dialogue with stakeholders online.

There seems to be endless opportunity to do research on social media, especially in Russia. Statistics on the corporate presence in Russian SM, at least those openly available on the web, have only been prepared for two previous months. The transition from corporate communication to dialogue with the public is recognised now by key players, which are Gazprom and Russian Central Bank. Not to say that they are the only ones, nor were they the first movers, but none the less, the majority of big companies from various industries are ignorant or concerned with opening up to the public.

Those, who are considering entry opportunities to social media, especially in case of big companies, are likely to be interested in listening first to what is being said about them online and to later merge into the conversation. How to do it naturally and with benefit for the company and stakeholders – is a unique challenge for any company.

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Attachments

Attachment 1. Outline of interview topics

1. Experience with Internet before social media

2. First experience of Social Media

3. How would you define SM?

4. Which SM channels are you present at?

5. How many of your contacts are using social media in % approximately?

6. Which SM channels do you use frequently (daily/weekly basis)?

7. Usage of blogs and micro blogs

8. Which SM channels do you know about?

9. Access to social media from mobile device

10. RSS usage (really simple sampling)

11. News media on the web

12. Brand/Company/Product/Celebrity pages on SM channels

13. Is SM incorporated in your professional activity?

14. Have you read any books/blogs/news on SM?

15. Expectations from socialisation on the web in the future

16. Usage of Wikipedia

17. Which SM channels are most suitable for interaction among individuals and which are best for a corporate dialogue?

18. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1=I would never & 10=I would never miss a chance, please state your intention in promoting SM to your friends/co-workers/family. [Net promoter's score]