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Creative Design Management

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How to reach and engage new and younger audiences on social media

– Case newspaper Karjalainen



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How to reach and engage new and younger audiences on social media

- Case newspaper Karjalainen

The objective of this thesis was to investigate and develop solutions for how a regional newspaper can reach and engage new and younger audiences on social media. This was pursued by creating a research-based social media strategy for the newspaper Karjalainen during a six-month development task.

The underlying cause for conducting this research and development task is the drastic change in the media landscape and the newspaper industry and the lack of research on journalistic social media strategies.

The development task was conducted by exploring different phases of a social media strategy framework, approaching the process through design thinking and action research, supported by research data. Central themes were continuous learning, inclusivity, audience engagement and value creation.

The thesis work demonstrates that improving and coordinating social media activities creates growth in reach and engagement. In this process it is essential to place the audience at the center. It is important to recognize and understand them, to learn to craft content that genuinely adds value to their experience and increase authentic communication with them.

Keywords:

journalism, social media strategy, audience engagement, media-audience relationship, content creation, value creation, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok

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Kuinka tavoittaa ja sitouttaa uusia ja nuorempia yleisöjä sosiaalisessa mediassa

- Case Sanomalehti Karjalainen

Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli tutkia ja löytää ratkaisuja siihen, kuinka maakuntalehti voi tavoittaa ja sitouttaa uusia ja nuorempia yleisöjä sosiaalisessa mediassa. Tavoitteeseen on pyritty luomalla tutkimuspohjainen sosiaalisen median strategia kohdeyritykseen. Taustalla on vuosia jatkunut ja alati kiihtyvä median murros, sekä journalistisia sosiaalisen median strategioita koskevan tutkimuksen vähäisyys.

Opinnäytetyössä käsitellään sosiaalisen median strategiaviitekehyksen eri vaiheita lähestymällä kehittämisprosessia muotoiluajattelun ja toimintatutkimuksen kautta tutkimustietoon tukeutuen. Keskeisiä teemoja ovat jatkuva oppiminen, inklusiivisuus, yleisön sitouttaminen ja arvonluonti.

Tutkimuksen lopputulos osoittaa, että sosiaalisen median toimintojen kehittäminen ja koordinointi luo kasvua sometavoittavuudessa ja sitoutumisessa. Olennaista on asettaa keskiöön yleisö: tunnistaa oikea kohderyhmä, ymmärtää heidän tarpeitaan, oppia luomaan sisältöä, joka tuo lisäarvoa heidän kokemukseensa, ja lisätä aitoa vuorovaikutusta heidän kanssaan.

Asiasanat:

journalismi, sosiaalinen media, sosiaalisen median strategia, somestrategia, yleisön sitoutuminen, yleisösuhde, sisällöntuotanto, arvon muodostuminen, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and develop solutions for how a regional newspaper can reach and engage new and younger audiences on social media. It is a deep dive into the strategic organization of social media activities through a case study.

The underlying cause for conducting this research and development project is the drastic change in the media landscape and the newspaper industry. Declining circulation of printed papers, the ageing of subscribers and the changes in the media and news consumption habits of people have made reaching new and younger audiences on digital platforms a necessity (see e.g. Newman et al. 2022; Peña-Fernández et al. 2022; Lintinen 2022).

Reading news has become more private: news is read on individuals' smartphone screens (Adornato 2022, 15; see also Newman 2023; Reunanen et al. 2023, 22). It is unlikely young people will be exposed to news in their everyday life unless it is online – and on social media. In the industry, social media is generally seen as an important tool, but utilizing it strategically is fairly new (Santapakka 2022, 3).

I conducted the development task for my employer, the newspaper Karjalainen, between December 2022 and June 2023. The decision to focus on social media rose from my background. I have worked at Karjalainen since 2010, taking on my current role as a graphic designer in 2018. I am also a member of a cross-department content marketing team that focuses on social media marketing. I am also a part-time content creator and micro influencer on Instagram.

During the development task, I created a social media strategy for Karjalainen. The social media strategy aims to optimize social media content creation processes. It lays down objectives and creates guidelines for the best practices in the chosen social media platforms and defines the visual style, tone of voice, target audience and goals for each channel. It provides tools for planning content and organizing workflow to maximize reaching and engaging target

audiences. It will also work as a template for further development and can be easily expanded to include any new platforms that might become relevant.

The thesis work follows the design thinking framework, utilizing core elements from action research and learning by developing. Different analytics methods and design-based ideation methods have been central in creating the outlines of the strategy and in formulating different areas of the development process. One central theme in the process has been inclusivity, which I have aimed to achieve by sharing information and by using collaborative learning methods like workshop facilitation. The results of the study are strongly grounded in materials and insights produced during the development process. Combining different methods has enabled me to take a comprehensive approach on the topic, promoting creativity, ongoing learning, and creating something that is not just theoretical but practical and adaptable.

In my thesis report, I first discuss the importance of social media for newspapers in the current media landscape and describe the existing practices in the newspaper Karjalainen. I then present the research and development methods used in the thesis work and describe the progression of the development process. The process has been characterized by an iterative development cycle where the various aspects, from ideation to content and audience analysis, have been frequently intertwined. I will discuss these areas in separate chapters, but they can't be clearly separated from one another within the development task.

The finished strategy itself is not attached to this thesis but I will describe the phases of the process in detail and share the insights gathered throughout the process, including my suggestions for further development, in the following chapters.

2 The changing media landscape

The media landscape has changed drastically in recent years both in Finland and internationally. The circulation of printed newspapers is declining, subscribers are getting older, and many media outlets are struggling to find new ways to exist (see e.g. Newman et al. 2022; Newman 2023). People's habits in consuming news are shifting towards mobile and social platforms (Adornato 2022, 15–17; Peña-Fernández et al. 2022, 2; Reunanen et al. 2023, 9, 22; Newman 2022), and new challenges are presented by the change in search engine -based internet, the rise of artificial intelligence, and the popularity of new social media platforms which are not link-based, like TikTok (Virranta 2023b). It is not about adopting the digital anymore, but about how to transform the digital content to meet the changing audience expectations and media consumption habits (Newman 2023, 40–41).

2.1 Newspapers and social media

Social media is increasingly the first point of contact with news, and people go less and less often directly to websites (Adornato 2021, 16–17; Peña-Fernández et al. 2022, 2; Reunanen et al. 2023, 17–19). This is prevalent in younger age groups where almost a third of 18–24-year-olds say they consume news mainly on social media (Reunanen et al. 2023, 9).

This is why many news organizations are focusing on generation Z – the zoomers. Born between 1997 and 2012, these social natives use social media very differently (see e.g. Newman et al. 2022; Newman 2022; Reunanen et al. 2023) compared to the digitally native generation of millennials (born between 1981–1996) preceding them. Both groups are important audiences, but they are hard to reach, and media organizations are trying to find new strategies to engage them.

Finnish news organizations like Yle and Helsingin Sanomat are investing resources on Instagram and TikTok, the most popular platforms among

millennials and zoomers (DNA 2022, 11), and they are experimenting with new storytelling formats. For example, Helsingin Sanomat established a dedicated editorial social media team in September 2022 in purpose of creating customized journalistic content directly on social media platforms (Virranta 2022). But in smaller organizations like Karjalainen it can be difficult to allocate resources to work that is not directly profitable.

The changes caused by social media on journalists' work have been studied quite extensively, but there is no broader research on journalistic social media strategies of editorial teams (Santapakka 2022, 7–8). Many studies focus on personal branding of journalists, instead of entire organizations (see e.g. Adornato 2022; Mustonen 2022, 20; Paaso 2021). Social media strategies are more commonly explored within the field of marketing, and less attention has been paid to journalistic approach (Santapakka 2022, 7–8; see also e.g. Kietzman et al. 2011; Effing & Spil 2016; Komulainen 2023).

But the business side and the editorial side of journalism are tied together (Adornato 2021, 46–49). Marketing journalistic content is a strategic move to help news organizations navigate the digital environment. By finding journalistically sustainable ways to market content, news organizations can reinforce their brand, protect journalistic integrity, and build a loyal readership that returns daily (see e.g. Adornato 2022; Santapakka 2022; Badham & Mykkänen 2022).

2.2 The digital journey of newspaper Karjalainen

Karjalainen is a Finnish provincial daily newspaper located in Joensuu, North-Karelia. Karjalainen has made many changes in the newsroom to embrace the digital change. The process started in 2019 and it has been documented by Marja Heinonen in her research *Towards a digital culture – newspaper Karjalainen lessons learned from a digital transformation* (2022). This thesis work continues the digital journey by including a strategic development of social media activities in the process.

When my thesis work began in December 2022, Karjalainen's analytics showed that 63% of the digital subscribers were over 60 years old. Even on Karjalainen's web page 45% of the users were over 50 years old. The need to reach new and younger audiences was evident.

On social media the numbers look different. Karjalainen's Facebook and Instagram analytics show that Karjalainen's followers' age profile is notably younger, 35–54 being the largest age-group on both platforms. On TikTok the age profile is even younger, the largest groups being 18–24 (48%) and 25–34-year-olds (27%).

Even though the numbers can't directly tell who consumes Karjalainen's content on social media, they indicate that there exists a younger demographic who is interested in the type of content Karjalainen provides. This thesis work tries to identify ways to convert this interest into engagement and commitment.

While I was initiating the study, Karjalainen was selected in the international Table Stakes Europe -development project. It is a coaching program aimed for regional and local news publishers to help establish and grow their online business in digital platforms. My thesis wasn't part of the project itself, but I utilized the project materials for reference and for gaining insight on experiences in other media organizations.

Recurring themes rising from the program were setting clear objectives, knowing your audience, experimenting, inclusiveness and information sharing (Table Stakes 2022), which resonated well with the principles of my development task, and I incorporated them throughout the process.

2.3 Karjalainen on social media: the starting point in December 2022

Karjalainen has active social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X (Twitter), and nearly obsolete accounts on YouTube and Pinterest. There is also a separate sports-oriented account on X, but less effort has been put on

the platform especially since Elon Musk bought the company and the future of the platform seems unstable.

Years of consistent activity and established working habits on Facebook and Instagram have allowed the accounts to expand significantly, attracting large audiences, but growth has become stagnant, and the full potential of social media has not been utilized.

Karjalainen doesn't have an official social media team or social media manager, but a cross-department content marketing team was established in January 2021. The team consists of two news desk journalists and a marketing director, and I am part of the team as a graphic designer. The primary function of the team is to improve and develop Karjalainen's social media marketing activities. The team initiated Karjalainen's TikTok account in 2021 and has encouraged the editorial staff to engage in making mobile videos. The team has crafted content publishing instructions and a visual guide for Karjalainen's Instagram stories.

Karjalainen's social media channels are managed by news desk journalists alongside their other duties. One journalist has taken on responsibility for creating customized content for TikTok. This has shown improvement in engagement, and growth has been rapid. Karjalainen doesn't have a social media strategy and responsibilities or roles for managing different social media actions are incomplete. Little resources have been put into research and analytics.

The standard practice has been to share an article as a link with a short caption and a prompt for action on Facebook, images or a video with a caption and sometimes a prompt for action on Instagram feed, and an image and a link with prompt for action on Instagram stories. Some of the short form vertical videos made for Instagram reels have been utilized on TikTok.

To create a solid base for the development process, I compiled an overview of Karjalainen's starting position and outlined the main objectives on social media in December 2022 (see Table 1 on page 14).

Table 1. Karjalainen on social media in November–December 2022.

Karjalainen's most essential social media channels and objectives at the turn of November and December 2022			
General objectives			
Branding: social media is brand work. The goal is to promote Karjalainen's brand and content, making it appealing to new audiences, while reminding the current audiences of the interesting content Karjalainen offers.			
Interaction: on social media it becomes possible to get close to the audience and this should be leveraged. Especially young people seek interaction.			
Engagement: social media is about storytelling. It's important to evoke emotions and prompt reactions, enhancing the appeal of Karjalainen's content encouraging users to come back.			
	Facebook	Instagram	TikTok
Followers	27 580	14 450	4 826
Description	<p>The largest age group of followers is 35–54.</p> <p>Most potential subscribers. A significant source of traffic. The goal is to drive traffic to Karjalainen's website. Content can be marketed with direct links to articles, which drives more traffic and helps reach new subscribers. Paid advertising.</p> <p>Steady rhythm in posting and common guidelines for posting content are established.</p>	<p>The largest age group of followers is 35–54.</p> <p>Potential subscribers. The goal is to arouse interest, engagement, and interaction. Content can be marketed with direct links to articles, which brings more traffic and helps reach new subscribers. Paid advertising.</p> <p>Steady rhythm in posting and common guidelines for posting content are established.</p>	<p>The largest age group of followers is 18–34.</p> <p>Goals: reaching young audiences, brand promotion, journalism promotion.</p> <p>Research indicates that most of generation Z use TikTok for searching information, and they prefer video format. 25% of 18–34-year-olds consume news from TikTok (Newman 2022).</p> <p>Active content creation since spring 2022. News content, local events, and local phenomena are popular. Content has also been requested in the comments.</p> <p>The growth of the account and the commenting indicate that there's a strong interest in the content and the audience wants to interact.</p> <p>The best-performing video (in late November) was a narrated news video about the condition of the local swimming hall. It has over 500 000 views.</p> <p>Over 50% of viewers of videos are 18–24 years old.</p>
Notes	Growth is slow, but engagement is good. Plenty of link clicks.	Growth is slow, engagement is low.	Growth is notably faster than on other platforms. Interesting: over half of the followers are men.

3 Research and development methods

Designing a comprehensive social media strategy has required using a variety of research and development methods. In its entirety the thesis work relies strongly on design thinking, action research and learning by developing methods. During the development process I have utilized design-based ideation tools like mind mapping and group ideation exercises. I have gathered and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data in the research-based segments of the development task. Beyond literature, I have utilized my personal experience as a designer and content creator and the actions taken on social media during the development task.

Design thinking is a non-linear, iterative design process consisting of five phases: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test, which alternate throughout the design process. It enhances a culture of experimentation and feedback, and an inclusive, human-centered approach to problem-solving, promoting continuous learning. (Plattner n.d.) The design thinking process has been central to my development task and I have moved through the stages multiple times, both within the specific sections and throughout the entirety of the development process.

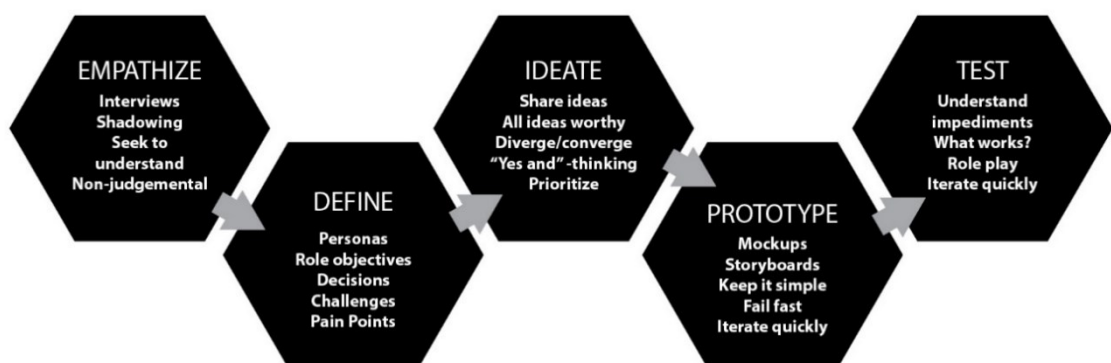


Figure 1. Design thinking process by Stanford University (Plattner n.d.).

Action research is a research approach that seeks to both explore and address a problem simultaneously (Gerone 2023). It has enabled me to conduct an agile

development process, starting quickly and improving actions as I have gathered more knowledge and gained insights. Very similarly to design thinking, action research involves phases of planning, action, analysis, and conclusion and then implements the changes based on gathered information.

Learning by developing is an action-based framework originally created in Laurea University of Applied Sciences for pedagogical purposes. It is well suited for developing and renewing operating processes and developing new working cultures, because it is a process of carrying out actions and continuous evaluation of what has been learnt. Learning by developing also emphasizes collaboration and sharing results (Raij 2007) – some of the central themes in my thesis work. By facilitating workshops, I have been able to collect information on staff's skills and knowledge and identify needs and areas of improvement, simultaneously sharing knowledge and developing ideation and collaboration skills.

I have also utilized qualitative and quantitative content analysis methods when analyzing the contents of Karjalainen's social media channels. Quantitative content analysis focuses on summarizing data by counting and presenting frequencies of key categories, often as percentages or actual numbers. Qualitative content analysis delves into words and themes, allowing for interpretation of results. (Bengtsson 2016.) I have utilized the methods to recognize recurring topics, themes, and numerical changes in Karjalainen's social media content.

In marketing, audience analysis is used for understanding what motivates people to support a brand or buy products by studying their interests, preferences, demographics, location and other aspects (Huddy 2019). To gain insights about Karjalainen's audience, I have collected data from social media analytics, research and statistics. I have utilized demographic and situational analysis and other marketing-based research methods like the innovation adoption theory and buyer personas (Komulainen 2023, 33–64) in defining target audiences for Karjalainen's social media channels.

Finally, I have conducted brand analysis and benchmarking (see e.g. Komulainen 2023; Ruokolainen 2020; Sahid 2023) to map out the operating landscape and to create an understanding of Karjalainen's position in relation to other news organizations on social media.

4 The development process of a social media strategy

This chapter and its subchapters describe the development process of the social media strategy for Karjalainen from ideation to a finished product. Each subchapter describes a different phase of the development task and represents the development process of the different components of the strategy.

Many activities of the development task were conducted simultaneously. For example, analyzing target audience was not separate from analyzing content and they both contributed to understanding the audiences' needs and what value the content can create to them. Likewise, gathering information on staff's skills and training needs was closely linked with sharing information and improving abilities through training.

The original objective of the thesis was to investigate the potential of TikTok in connecting with younger audiences and this emphasis is present in the preliminary overview (see Table 1 on page 14). After initial research, the new objectives set within the Table Stakes project, and given the importance of attracting new subscribers for Karjalainen's sustainability, I chose to take on a more comprehensive approach: developing a social media strategy. It was important to me to be able to develop social media activities holistically, so the methods and tools could be efficiently leveraged across platforms.

I began the development process by drawing out the starting situation and defining the development steps needed. I familiarized myself with different social media strategy frameworks and I began a closer exploration of practices within Karjalainen's newsroom. I also initiated the first benchmarking sessions to gather information and examples.

4.1 Social media strategy framework

A social media strategy refers to a comprehensive plan that outlines an organization's presence and goals on social media platforms and actions needed to achieve these goals.

I explored several social media strategy frameworks, which propose certain building blocks (Kietzman et al. 2011) and maturity levels (Effing & Spil 2016) for a social media strategy. Komulainen (2023, 77–91, 127) and Mustonen (2022, 9) stress the importance of a cohesive strategy and highlight the importance of direct communication among team members responsible for social media activities.

The framework I chose to use as a basis for developing Karjalainen's social media strategy was Ross Dawson's framework. The framework is aimed at journalists and incorporates all the central strategy elements defining them in more detail. It divides social media strategy into two main phases, strategy development and engagement, which are linked by on-going learning and developing actions (Dawson n.d.). The framework also reflects the chosen research and development methods, highlighting continuous, cyclic learning and development process.

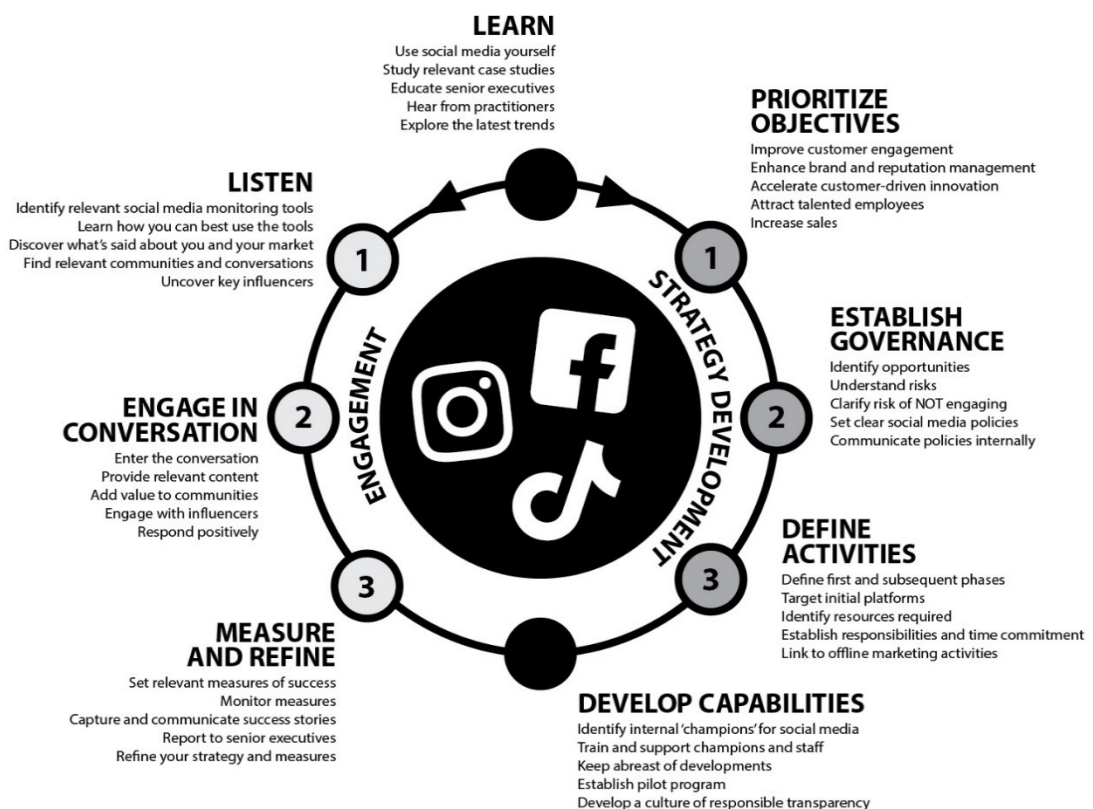


Figure 2. Ross Dawson's social media strategy framework (Dawson n.d.).

4.2 Ideation

To initiate the ideation process, I employed visual ideation techniques to conceptualize the key elements of the social media strategy. Based on the initial analysis and drawing from both literature and my personal experience, I collected thoughts and ideas in a mind map (Picture 3 on page 21) and structured the insights further with a bullet point list (Picture 4 on page 21).



Figure 3. Initial ideation session using mind mapping.

<p>Define brand values and brand message</p> <p>Select relevant social media platforms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which are the most relevant and why? • Target audience in each platform • Tone of voice in each platform <p>Define target audience and understand who they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your audience's wants and needs? • Who do they associate themselves with? • What do they aspire to? • What do they read? Listen to? Watch? • Who or what influences them? • What are their key characteristics? • What is likely to interest them, entertain them, excite them? <p>Content planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual clock of social media (events, holidays and other important dates that affect the lives of the target audience) • Content creation matrix (for each channel) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Developing relevant content topics • Theme words for reference: will the content reflect the defined engagement factors? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Based on content analysis/benchmarking, brand values and research • Identifying threats and opportunities in user-generated content. <p>What is said about Karjalainen?</p> <p>Value proposition what is the unique value Karjalainen can offer to its readers and audience?</p>	<p>Set goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall • Per channel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Reach ◦ Growth/followers ◦ Engagement ◦ Leads <p>Who does what? Organization and responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Creating content ◦ Managing content ◦ Monitoring, nurturing, and responding to the community. ◦ Visual appearance ◦ Analyzing data (performance, engagement reach etc.) from each channel. • Work culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Sharing information with all staff members: e.g., monthly analysis ◦ Ideating together • Training people to excel in their areas of responsibility. <p>Define policies for journalistic and marketing content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is all social media content journalistic? • Can there be sponsorship posts? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ If yes, can publishing posts with sponsorships affect journalistic credibility? ◦ What kind of sponsorships are acceptable? ◦ How are these posts marked to differentiate them clearly from journalistic content?
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Figure 4. Materials from the mind map organized into a bullet point list.

4.3 Creating outlines for the strategy

I reorganized the information from the ideation process using Dawson's social media framework to create an outline for Karjalainen's strategy, and to identify potential problems and primary areas that needed development. I followed the framework closely during the development process covering all areas from brand image to content analysis to communication policies.

LEARN

- Explore trends, both consumers and their relationship in news consumption in social media, and the social media trends. How information should be presented on different platforms.
- Learn from content creators: how they approach content creation, what are the latest trends according to them? (examples: Jade Beason, It's John Keeley, Katie Steckly)
- Benchmarking: Keskiuomalainen, Savon Sanomat, Etelä-Suomen Sanomat, Ilkka-Pohjalainen, Kymen Sanomat, Kouvola Sanomat, Turun Sanomat, Kaleva, Aamulehti, Yle, Hesari, Suomen Luonto, Ilta-Sanomat And Iltalehti. Washington Post, Sophia Smith Galer, Freda, National Geographic, BBC, Le Parisien, Czech News Center, Tageschau, Gary Vaynerchuck.
- Study and analyze your own content on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.
- Educate: share findings and ideas.
- Use social media yourself (know your platform).

LISTEN

- Identify relevant social media monitoring tools: Crowd Tangle, Meta Business Manager Bislenz, platform specific tools, others?
- Learn how you can best use the tools.
- Discover what's said about you and your market. Find relevant hashtags: #karjalainen #sanomalehtikarjalainen, others?
- Find relevant communities and conversations.
- Uncover key influencers.

ENGAGE

- Enter conversations.
- Start conversations. Put more emphasis on this.
- Ask questions. Put more emphasis on this.
- Provide relevant content: content analysis to understand and find target audience.
- Add value to communities.
- Respond positively and always respond. Interaction is the key!

MEASURE AND REFINE

- Set goals: overall, and for each channel.
- Monitor and measure progress regularly. Whose responsibility this is? Is there a need for a social media manager?
- Capture and communicate success stories to all staff regularly.
- Report to executives and inform staff.
- Refine strategy and goals constantly by learning from implemented actions.

DEVELOP

- Identify internal know-how and skills by facilitating workshops, and collecting information with questionnaires etc.
- Train and support staff with workshops, brainstorming and ideation sessions etc.
- Establish a pilot program. A social media team or a specific TikTok team? Position of a social media manager?
- Develop an inclusive work culture. Share knowledge and experience with everyone.

OBJECTIVES

- Enhance brand and reputation management. Define brand values and tone of voice.
- Improve customer engagement.
- Increase brand visibility, engagement, leads and sales.

GOVERNANCE

- Identify opportunities: potential subscribers can be reached on these platforms.
- Identify risks: reputation damage, account hacking, ignorance, no leads.
- Clarify risk of not engaging: less emotional connection with target audience: why would they want to consume the content and become subscribers? Keeping existing subscribers.
- Set clear social media policies: the social media strategy: responsibilities, tools, management.
- Communicate policies internally: suggestion: monthly update on social media activities and performance. Weekly update with key members: social team and managers.

ACTIVITIES

- Define different phases. What to do first? List activities from "urgent" to "can wait" or "do later".
- Target relevant platforms: research what platforms the target audience uses and make sure these are included in the strategy: Instagram, Facebook and TikTok.
- Identify required resources: look for pains: time vs. activities like posting, content creation and training.
- Establish responsibilities and enable time commitment. Communicate pains to management.
- Link social media activities to marketing activities and define the practices considering journalistic content vs marketing content.

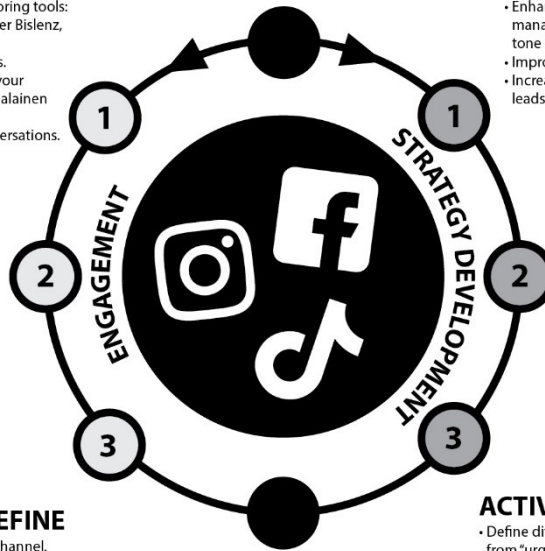


Figure 5. Karjalainen in Dawson’s (n.d.) social media strategy framework.

4.4 Choosing relevant platforms

Understanding where the target audience is spending their time and choosing the right social media platforms accordingly is one of the cornerstones of a successful strategy (Adornato 2022, 17; Komulainen 2023, 86).

I discussed the choice of platforms with the content marketing group and concluded that it would be best to focus on the three most potential and most relevant platforms to Karjalainen: Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. This

decision was based on Karjalainen's overall digital strategy and what was achievable within the thesis limits. Choosing these three channels offered a comprehensive approach and set a solid basis for future development without the amount of work being overwhelming.

4.5 Brand analysis

Creating a consistent brand message (Table Stakes 2022) and an impactful brand image across platforms should be one of the first steps when developing a social media strategy (see e.g. Komulainen 2023; Kietzman et al. 2011; Ruokolainen 2020). Increasing brand awareness is essential when targeting new subscribers, aiming to add value for both existing and potential subscribers (Table Stakes 2022).

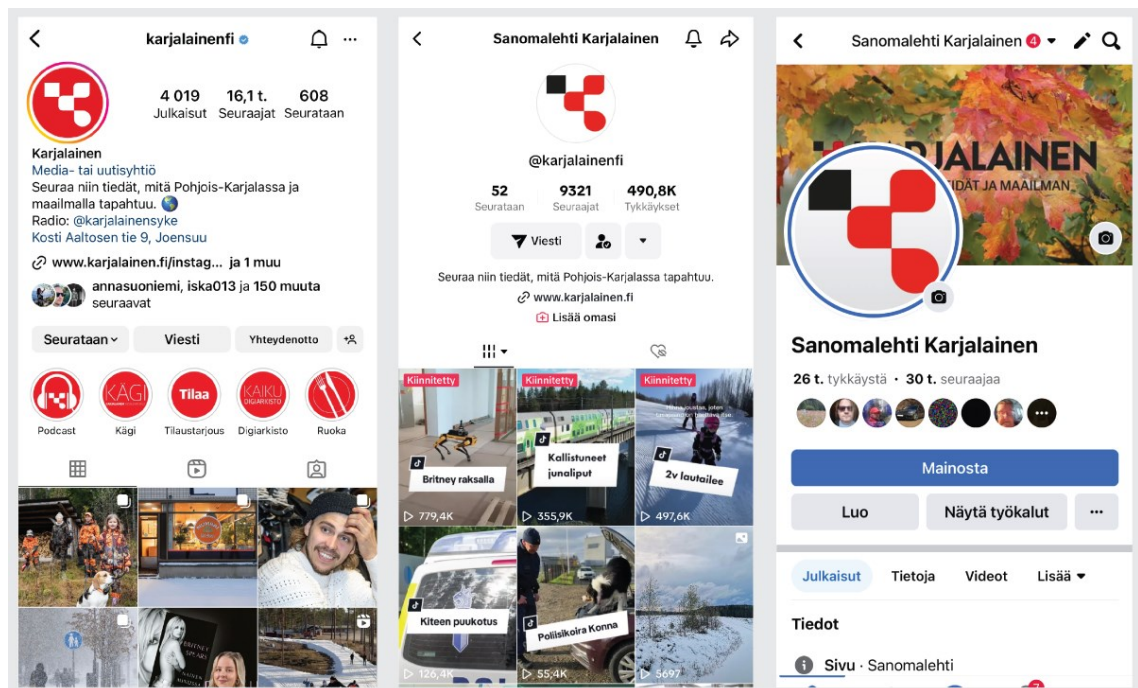
On average, a third of Finnish people follow businesses and brands on social media (Komulainen 2023, 10). This makes the platforms highly effective for building brand relationships and reaching new customers. The fastest-growing platform is TikTok, with 1,3 million Finnish users, of whom 68% are aged 18–34 and on average use 92 minutes a day on the platform (Komulainen 2023, 160). This makes TikTok appealing to companies who are trying to reach younger consumers.

4.5.1 The Karjalainen brand on social media

To create a clear understanding of Karjalainen's brand, I conducted a brief brand analysis utilizing Karjalainen's internal brand research materials, brand guidelines and Karjalainen's "reader promise", a promise-statement to the audience about Karjalainen's core values and functions: "The cornerstones of the Karjalainen brand are high-quality local journalism, comprehensive information distribution, and reliability. Karjalainen aims to be the voice of the local people".

Karjalainen leans heavily on its long history and has a strong brand image and good reputation among the older population in the circulation area. In many North-Karelian households, Karjalainen has been subscribed to for many generations, but the digital transition is breaking this tradition. This makes it essential to aim the brand message at newer, younger audiences.

The visual appearance of Karjalainen's social media channels matches the brand's visual identity. The logomark is used in the profile pictures, and the brand colors red, black, (and white), are prominent. The overall impression is professional and news-oriented, with a relatively modern feel. Visual guidelines for Instagram stories exist.



Picture 1. Karjalainen's visual appearance on Instagram (left), TikTok and Facebook.

The analysis resulted in defining Karjalainen's brand message and core values on social media and enhancing the visual identity by updating the visual instructions for Karjalainen's Instagram stories and creating visual instructions for Karjalainen's mobile videos. These instructions were reviewed and discussed with staff in workshops during the development process.

4.5.2 Tone of voice

Part of branding includes defining a tone of voice for social media channels. Each channel should have a unique tone of voice, but as Lieb (2011, 168) reminds, language and expression must be consistent across platforms and reflect the brand message and values.

Based on content captions and profile pages, Karjalainen's tone of voice on social media is formal and informative and reflects the brand image and values as a reliable news organization. The language on Instagram and TikTok is more relaxed compared to Facebook, being suitable for these platforms and for the younger audiences.

The tone of voice of each channel was also discussed in the workshops. Based on the findings, I created detailed descriptions for Karjalainen's tone of voice on each of the three channels.

Table 2. Tone of voice for Karjalainen on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

Facebook	Instagram	TikTok
Professional and news-like, but not stiff or too formal.	Professional and informative, but more relaxed than on Facebook.	Relaxed and humorous, but not clownish.
Expression is grammatically correct and clear.	The expression is grammatically correct.	The expression is grammatically correct but can be conversational and slightly dialectal.
Encourages interactivity. Promotes discussion. Asks for opinions.	Highlights people and humanity.	Easily approachable: encourages discussion, urges participation. Like a "knowledgeable friend."
Highlights people and humanity.	Interactive: responds and answers. Asks for opinions.	Interactive: responds and answers. Asks for opinions.
Emojis can be used according to the spirit of the post.	Easily approachable: encourages discussion, urges participation.	Wondering together: "What the heck is going on in here?"
	Emojis can be used according to the spirit of the post.	"Only in Joensuu."
		Emojis can be used freely.

4.5.3 What is said about Karjalainen on social media?

Social media monitoring and listening are an important part of social media strategy and can be utilized to understand and investigate customers' relationship to the brand and the terms with which they search for information on a specific subject (Komulainen 2023, 33–35).

Effective monitoring and listening starts with listing words that describe the products or services and checking how well they match the terms used by customers (Komulainen 2023, 33–35). This can be done by using the analytics tools of social media platforms or by conducting surveys on social media. Joining groups and communities on different platforms and following and participating in discussions can also provide vital information. (Komulainen 2023, 33–35.)

I created a section for social media listening for the strategy, but in the scope of the thesis I didn't have time to delve very far into the subject. I conducted a brief social media search to serve as an example for further development.

I searched for different hashtags and search words on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok. I made notes about how many results each search produced and what kind of content it brought up.

Examples of hashtags and mentions I used: #karjalainen
#sanomalehtikarjalainen @karjalainenfi #karjalaisenkuvakisa

Examples of search words: uutiset (news) Joensuu, uutiset (news) Pohjois-Karjala, paikallisuutiset (local news) Joensuu, paikallisuutiset (local news) Pohjois-Karjala, sanomalehti (newspaper), paikallislehti (local newspaper), Sanomalehti Karjalainen.

A challenge faced during the search was that the name Karjalainen has multiple meanings. For example, it is a very common surname, and it also means Karelian culture in general. This makes finding relevant results with hashtag

search difficult. The term uutiset (news) is also very general, so more descriptive search terms should be examined.

The search resulted in observation that mentions about the printed newspaper are prominent. This might partly be the case because in visual platforms people want to share images, and the image of a newspaper page rather than a screenshot of an online article is often more visually appealing. But it is also a reminder that Karjalainen is still seen as a printed newspaper rather than a multichannel digital publication.

The largest number of username mentions, tags, were found on Facebook, often in connection with reference to the print. Mentions were fewer on Instagram and there were no mentions on TikTok which indicates that Karjalainen is less familiar to the audience. It is important to note that on Instagram, tagging in stories can't be monitored afterwards.

More mentions and tags usually indicate increased engagement, and as I suggest in the strategy and posting instructions, this behavior should be encouraged among the audiences.

For the best results, monitoring and listening should be an integral part of social media management and should be conducted regularly. It is worth emphasizing that beyond just social media, monitoring and listening should be employed more broadly to gain a deeper understanding of the audiences and potential subscribers.

The conversation culture on social media can be brutal. This is clearly prominent on the comments of Karjalainen's Facebook and TikTok posts. Attention should be paid to the tone of the conversation. Is it inappropriate or offensive, or is it aimed at the person appearing on the video?

The Journalistic guidelines (2014) by the Council For Mass Media In Finland dictate that news publishers have the responsibility to moderate user generated content like comments on their website. This is generally applied also to social

media posts, but it would also be advisable to create a clear protocol for situations related to bullying or targeting on social media.

On a more positive side, monitoring conversations in the comments can lead to ideas for a follow-up story or a new topic.

4.6 Benchmarking

It is important to observe what others are doing on social media (Komulainen 2023, 77) and learn from their successes and failures. The objective of benchmarking is to understand the competitive landscape, find insights and best practices in the field, and learn how to stand out from the competition. (See e.g. Komulainen 2023; Sahid 2023).

The most significant regional competitor to Karjalainen, offering similar content to audiences, is the national public service media company Yle. Also Helsingin Sanomat has a substantial number of subscribers in Karjalainen's circulation area. Both media outlets offer a wide range of digital content, and both have strong social media presences, but neither of them focuses specifically on North-Karelia on social media. Yle has an Instagram page called Yle Joensuu, but it is not updated anymore. Yle Itä-Suomi (Yle Eastern Finland) is active, but notably less than Karjalainen.

I began benchmarking in preparation for the first mobile video workshop. The objective of the first session was to find examples of both successful and unsuccessful video content. I conducted searches on Google, TikTok, and Instagram, making use of hashtag and username searches to find relevant examples. The videos were used to inspire discussions in workshops and to shape the visual guidelines for Karjalainen's social media videos.

The second benchmarking session took place in May 2023 (see Table 3 on page 30). I compiled a list of operators in the Finnish media field including their follower counts on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. It led to some surprising findings, like the fact that Karjalainen ranks so high on TikTok compared to its

competitors and that many similarly sized media organizations in Finland do not yet have accounts or have very little activity on the platform. Another surprising observation was that Karjalainen's follower count on Facebook is relatively small compared to other same sized Finnish news organizations.

Similarly, I mapped some foreign media operators. Utilizing the Table Stakes report (2022) and learnings from trainings I had participated myself, I identified relevant companies and collected information of their follower counts (see Table 4 on page 30). The main reason for benchmarking the foreign companies was collecting examples of videos, which were then analyzed and discussed in an ideation workshop.

Based on the results, I suggest that Karjalainen keeps on exploring and experimenting with finding their own style and developing it further rather than drawing too much influence from others. The direction is right, and the basic blueprint is established in the social media strategy.

I also recommend a more comprehensive benchmarking on Facebook, to recognize the cause of Karjalainen's smaller follower count compared to similar news organizations and what could be done to change that. The benchmarking should include studying the competitors' most popular posts and mapping out why they are popular, and what is said in their comments.

To find inspiration and examples, especially for TikTok content, I suggest looking towards larger media houses abroad and preferably benchmarking operators outside the media sector. Benchmarked pages should be revisited regularly making notes of possible changes and reasons behind them.

Table 3. Benchmarking Finnish media organizations.

Benchmarking Finnish media organizations May 17 th , 2023 (The table is sorted based on TikTok followers)			
	FB followers	IG followers	TikTok followers
Ylemix	No account	1 105	147 700
Iltalehti	430 000	96 600	94 400
MTV uutiset	203 519	82 100	93 100
Ilta-sanomat	412 642	93 700	59 800
Helsingin Sanomat	252 000	202 000	45 400
Yle kioski	214 207	71 200	40 400
Yle uutiset	275 888	274 000	21 700
Hs nyt	125 000	82 800	10 900
Yle urheilu	2 763	112 000	8 467
Karjalainen	28 845	15 267	7 717
Hs lasten uutiset	No account	3 200	1 975
Hämeen Sanomat	10 000	3 319	1 097
Kaleva	40 000	13 900	186
Keskisuomalainen	45 543	11 400	141
Sunnuntaisuomalainen	1 300	61	60
Etelä-Suomen Sanomat	23 596	7 393	48
Turun Sanomat	49 000	17 000	16 (account, but no content)
Aamulehti	70 965	16 000	No account
Ilkka-Pohjalainen	42 417	9 622	No account but has mentions.
Savon Sanomat	38 000	9 173	No account but has mentions.
Kouvolan Sanomat	15 000	8 145	No account
Yle Itä-Suomi		5 631	No account
Kymen Sanomat	8 366	3 853	No account

Table 4. Benchmarking media organizations outside of Finland.

Benchmarking media organizations outside Finland 17.5.2023			
	FB followers	IG followers	TikTok followers
Washington post	7 322 378	6 500 000	1 600 000
Sophia smith Galer	668	26 200	489 800
Freeda_en	692 861	506 000	641 700
National geographic	50 000 000	276 000 000	2 900 000
BBC	6 000 000	5 000 000	4 600 000
BBC news	60 000 000	25 400 000	1 500 000
Le Parisien	4 251 638	623 000	581 300
Czech news center (isportcz)	127 000	47 500	8 523
Relevo	No account	90 100	524 700

4.7 Target audience analysis

On social media the audience should be at the center (Adornato 2022, 6–7). It is not enough to share links or expect users to actively seek news anymore, but many news organizations still use their social media accounts to distribute their content rather than engage with their audiences (Badham & Mykkänen 2022, 55). The interactive nature of social media encourages two-way communication (Adornato 2022, 6–7), and the role of interaction and building relationships is increasing (Komulainen 2023, 11, 33; Santapakka 2022, 8). Companies should be prepared to respond to questions and feedback thus aiming to become trusted advisors (Lieb 2011, Xiii).

Badham and Mykkänen (2022, 56) highlight that media companies should pay more attention to developing closer relationships with their audiences and in finding innovative business models that focus on building value-creating relationships with readers.

On social media, a follow typically indicates interest: user sees a post they like, checks the profile, and taps to follow. By taking this step, they indicate a preference to receive more from that creator, increasing the chances of that content reaching them. Social media platforms use algorithms to determine which content appears on user's feed based on their actions on the platform. The success of a post is influenced by factors such as the chosen publication format, presentation style and tone of voice, what is said in the description text, and even the time of publication.

High follower count doesn't automatically guarantee that the content reaches the followers. This is why it is important to get people engaged: the more time they spend on a post, the more they like, comment, and share it, the more people the post reaches. It also increases the chances of similar content being recommended to them. Engagement builds relationship with the audience which is integral in ensuring their return.

To get the audience engaged, it is essential to know who they are. It requires listening to the customer, learning what they dream of and what they need (Komulainen 2023, 33–34).

4.7.1 Finding recurrent themes

Included in Karjalainen's brand research materials was a customer survey, where the respondents described in open questions what they would like Karjalainen to be in the future. I summarized the answers into a list of words based on their recurrence and similarity and entered the list into a word cloud generator (see Picture 2).

The idea to approach finding recurrent themes with a visual tool rose from design thinking. Word cloud is a visual tool for analyzing text data to recognize themes or patterns. The frequency of each word is indicated by its size and/or color. The more frequently words appear the larger they are.

I found this to be an excellent tool for recognizing the audience's needs, and highlighting what value they might expect from Karjalainen. The most frequent terms rising from the material were local, versatile, current, reliable, independent, objective, digital, people, journalism and on social media.



Picture 2. Word cloud: What would you like Karjalainen to be in the future?

The terms align well with Karjalainen's brand message and brand values and show an inclination towards digital and social media content. This further strengthened my conviction to design a social media strategy.

4.7.2 Understanding the audience

Any experienced content creator will say you have to know your audience and it is often recommended to specialize in one to three core subjects to succeed on social media (See e.g. Peña-Fernández et al. 2022). But especially for a regional newspaper this can be difficult because it can lead to accidentally excluding important audiences. This is also the reason why I chose not to create specific buyer personas (Komulainen 2023, 50–56), but instead create buyer or, in this case, audience groups, which can be specified later as more information is collected.

Based on Karjalainen's location, brand research and core values the optimal target audience is local people i.e., people living in North-Karelia. Studying the group further can give more insight into who they are and what they care about.

Karjalainen has set an overall age-based target audience of 30–50-year-old people, with emphasis on those younger than 45. Based on this, and the analytics of Karjalainen's social media channels, I defined the ideal target audience for Karjalainen on social media to be 25–45-year-old people who are subscribers or potential subscribers or are otherwise likely to consume Karjalainen's content. To get to know the audience better and pinpoint some universal characteristics I asked questions such as: Who are the people who follow Karjalainen? What is their age and gender, what are they interested in and what is their phase of life? How do they use digital platforms and what is their relationship with technology?

To answer these questions, I analyzed Karjalainen's existing audiences by utilizing analytics tools of the social media platforms, data from DNA (2022), statistics from Tilastokeskus (2022) and the innovation adoption cycle. The ideal target audience was also discussed with staff in the workshops.

The innovation adoption cycle describes the sequence in which distinct groups of people adopt or accept new innovations or technologies (Komulainen 2023, 61). This helped to recognize some of the characteristics of Karjalainen’s audience and on which platforms to approach them. Innovators or early adopters are the most digitally oriented people who most likely adopt recent technologies and move to new social media platforms. They spend their time on TikTok and Instagram and use mobile devices exclusively. Reaching and engaging them differs from reaching and engaging for example the laggards, who are the least willing to try new social media platforms, applications, and subscription models, for example.

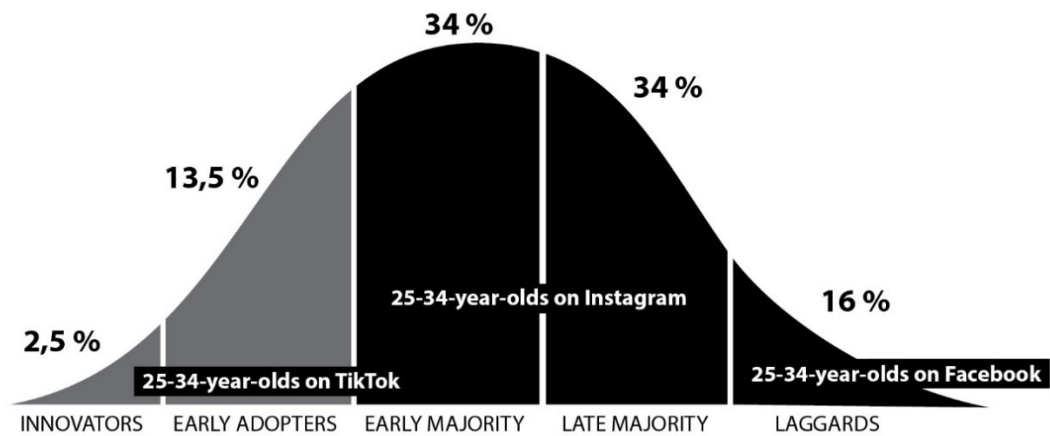


Figure 6. Example of platform preference of 25–34-year-old people on the innovation adoption cycle.

Table 5. Karjalainen’s audience based on social media analytics.

	Largest follower group by age 25.11.2022	Gender	Pains: needs, interests, problems	Other
TikTok	18–24 and 25–34	Women 34% Men 66%	Want to be the first to know about local events and incidents. Peculiarities.	Finnish, North-Karelians, innovators, early adopters.
Instagram	35–44	Women 65% Men 35%	Lifestyle, nature, cafes, and restaurants.	North-Karelians, early majority and late majority.
Facebook	35–44 and 45–54	Women 64% Men 36%	Want local information.	North-Karelians, late majority and laggards.

Table 6. Target audience analysis based on data from DNA (2022) and Tilastokeskus (2022).

Target audience analysis, April-May 2023			
Ages 16–24	Ages 25–34	Ages 35–44	All age groups
<p>TikTok's daily and weekly usage has notably increased.</p> <p>Most used: Snapchat, WhatsApp, TikTok.</p> <p>72% have resolved matters with companies/authorities on social media.</p> <p>Value automation/outsourcing of daily routines.</p> <p>Desire personalized recommendations.</p> <p>92% use YouTube.</p> <p>Find it challenging to disconnect from the internet or phone and have limited their time spent on them.</p> <p>Are keen and quick to adopt new digital services.</p> <p>Have distinct digital behaviors, such as online studying, digital movie rentals, resolving issues on social media, online entrepreneurship, and online home and shared-car rentals.</p> <p>They use online fitness services, ready-made food packages, and recipes most frequently.</p>	<p>91% have made online purchases.</p> <p>Are inclined to use paid streaming services.</p> <p>68% have resolved matters with companies/authorities on social media.</p> <p>92% use YouTube.</p> <p>Shows significant interest in solutions designed to reduce carbon emissions.</p> <p>Are keen and quick to adopt new digital services.</p> <p>Find it hard to disconnect from the internet or phone and have hence limited their time on these platforms.</p> <p>Frequently use online fitness services and buy ready-made food packages and recipes.</p> <p>69% use streaming services, audiobooks, online video services and podcasts and shop online.</p>	<p>79% have purchased products online.</p> <p>89% of them use YouTube.</p> <p>58% have resolved matters with companies/authorities on social media.</p> <p>Are more inclined to order telecom services or purchase mobile phones/tablets online.</p> <p>46% use streaming services, audiobooks, online video services and podcasts and shop online.</p>	<p>Daily use of Instagram reels is growing, approaching the daily use of TikTok.</p> <p>Weekly usage of Instagram, twitter, TikTok, and Twitch is growing.</p> <p>Facebook (52%) and WhatsApp (62%) are the most used apps daily. The use of TikTok has increased among the 16–24-year-olds.</p> <p>Women use more often WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, men tend to use YouTube and X (Twitter).</p> <p>Younger generations believe they will use digital services more often than older age groups.</p> <p>Following the news and the importance of fast and reliable internet have increased. Over 95% have read news on websites in the past 3 months.</p> <p>Over 85% search for information about diseases, nutrition, and health online.</p> <p>Search for information on goods and services online.</p>

4.7.3 Summary of Karjalainen's target audience

Combining the information from the audience analysis, the terms in the Karjalainen's customer survey and the recurring themes in the content analysis (see chapter 4.8.), I created specified target audiences for each of Karjalainen's social media channels. They represent the people who are most likely to

consume Karjalainen's content, describe who they are, what their life situation is and what they are interested in, thus opening possibilities for value creation.

It can be concluded that Karjalainen reaches 30–45-year-old potential subscribers most efficiently through Facebook posts and Instagram stories. Both post types allow sharing links, which continues to steer users to the publication's website. But this age group is quite diverse: Some of them are very digitally oriented, some notably less. They are accustomed to using digital services, and the innovators and early adopters in this group are moving to short-video platforms while the late majority and laggards prefer more "traditional" social media channels like Facebook and vertical YouTube videos. More effort should be put into experimenting with content directed at this group and best channels to reach them. Considering 92% of 25–34-year-olds and 89% of 35–44-year-olds use YouTube, utilizing the platform should be considered. I also recommend focusing on the more digitally oriented individuals within this group, because they are more open to new storytelling formats. This way the most can be made of the efforts to connect with younger demographics.

TikTok videos, Instagram picture posts and Instagram reels are most successful at building brand awareness and improving brand image. Moreover, TikTok videos and Instagram reels are effective in reaching totally new, and especially younger, 18–30-year-old audiences. Across all platforms, there is a consistent interest in local content, human stories, and local businesses.

There is still much to learn about audiences and this study is just a starting point. I recommend diving deeper into audiences' interests by finding groups on Facebook and communities on Instagram or TikTok and following the conversations there.

4.8 Content analysis

The volume of content Karjalainen creates for social media daily varies from platform to platform, but it is substantial. On Facebook, for example, there can be over 10 posts per day.

Deciding what data to collect and how to analyze it was essential. I aimed for the data to encompass approximately the time span of the active development process, so that possible changes and effects could be tracked. The data consists of four datasets: 1) Instagram posts and reels, 2) Facebook posts, 3) Instagram stories, and 4) TikTok posts. The data was collected from the first and second quarter of 2023. Each dataset covers two periods, the first from January 1st to March 30th (Q1) and the second from April 1st to June 30th (Q2).

For collecting the data from Facebook and Instagram, I used Meta Business Manager, which enables a collection of datasets based on date and content type. The tool has some limitations and sometimes the data can be incomplete. For example, topics of Instagram stories are not shown in the data. From TikTok I collected the data by hand, writing up the relevant metrics in a table.

I categorized the data according to various metrics, including views, link clicks, likes, comments, shares, and saves. To recognize common factors within the content, I picked out the top-performing posts based on views and engagement and identified common factors in them: local, real, surprising, nostalgia, inspiration, information, current, people and stories.

Kuvaus	Julkaisuaika	Julkaisutyyppi	Näyttökerrat	Kattavuus	Facebook	Jaot	Seuraajat	Tykkäykset	Komr	Tallenn	TEEMAT: PAIKALLINEN + AITO, Y
Heimo Sotilla on edessä 03/04/2023	IG-video	243 969	224 827	97 776	5	74	6 109	71	173	PAIKALLINEN, AITO, INSPIRAATIO, IH	
Kaikkiaan Törrö kerrytti oi 02/13/2023	IG-video	146 780	140 004	140 787	1	25	1 944	11	65	PAIKALLINEN, AITO, INSPIRAATIO, YL	
Kaksi vuotta järven pohjas 02/12/2023	IG-video	23 840	20 822	85 389	0	3	202	1	20	PAIKALLINEN, YLLÄTÄ, NOSTALGIA, T	
Karjalainen pääsi kurkista 02/17/2023	IG-video	16 089	12 068	24 070	0	3	328	7	15	PAIKALLINEN, NOSTALGIA, TARINA	
Näin pyörähtelivät vanhat 02/17/2023	IG-video	15 521	14 889	3 340	0	3	466	3	10	PAIKALLINEN, AJANKOHTAINEN, INSI	
JoKP:n Mestis-miehistö he 02/23/2023	IG-video	15 151	12 740	22 116	0	1	208	0	2	PAIKALLINEN, INSPIRAATIO, NOSTAL	
Kahvila Mank on avautun 03/16/2023	IG-video	13 698	10 711	149	4	1	380	5	12	PAIKALLINEN, AJANKOHTAINEN, INF	
Konsan avoimet ovet - tap 03/25/2023	IG-video	13 625	10 455	864	3	0	220	1	4	PAIKALLINEN, AJANKOHTAINEN	
Valtimolaiset Venla Laukk 03/13/2023	Instagram-kuva	13 508	13 145	0	0	2	149	1	3	PAIKALLINEN, INSPIRAATIO	
Kyllähän sitä aina yhden n 02/20/2023	IG-video	13 281	10 993	76 346	0	3	281	6	38	INFORMAATIO, INSPIRAATIO; YLLÄT	
Nurmeksen Jurttivaara on 02/11/2023	IG-video	12 302	9 872	13	0	1	535	4	30	PAIKALLINEN, INSPIRAATIO, INFORM	
Mikä on hyvä ikäero sisart 03/21/2023	Instagramin karus	12 187	9 860			1	281	2	6	PAIKALLINEN; IHMINEN; INSPIRAATI	
Pohjois-Karjalan pienissä l 02/18/2023	IG-video	12 051	8 735			1	316	0	7	PAIKALLINEN, ISPIRATIO, INFORMAA	
Miltä näyttää Markku Def 02/09/2023	IG-video	11 906	9 071	11 811	0	0	231	0	7	PAIKALLINEN, IHMINEN, TARINA, INS	
Kuuluuko napakelkan kyyt 03/09/2023	IG-video	11 905	8 954	11 841	0	1	171	1	5	NOSTALGIA, INSPIRAATIO, PAIKALLIN	
Satu Piiparisen hirsitälo or 03/09/2023	IG-video	11 830	9 096	9 879	0	0	218	1	11	PAIKALLINEN, INSPIRAATIO, TARINA	
Joensuulainen opiskelija N 01/20/2023	Instagram-kuva	11 568	11 067			1	659	10	6	PAIKALLINEN, INSPIRAATIO, IHMINEN	
Kilpailu Ice & Poems - runi 03/19/2023	IG-video	11 253	10 326	20	7	1	241	1	5	PAIKALLINEN, INSPIRAATIO, YLLÄTÄ	
Jäättä pitkin pääsee esime 03/09/2023	IG-video	11 129	8 191			1	0	256	1	15	PAIKALLINEN, INSPIRAATIO
Näin alkoi kontiolahtelaist 01/15/2023	IG-video	11 101	10 065	21 733	0	0	190	1	4	PAIKALLINEN; AITO, INSPIRAATIO, IH	
Vanhassa puutalossa sijait 02/27/2023	Instagramin karus	11 088	9 010			0	499	1	20	PAIKALLINEN; INSPIRAATIO; INFORM	

Picture 3. An example of the data collected from Instagram in Q1: Top-performing posts by views and the themes (teemat) represented in them.

Video	Julkaisuaika	Näyttökerrat	Koko video	Tykkäykset	Kommen	Jaot	Tallennukse	TEEMAT: PAIKALLINEN, AITO, Y
2-v lautailee	7.4.2023	496 000	29,30 %	20 000	127	1 665	814	PAIKALLINEN, IHMINEN, TARINA, Y
Luokkaretikkeräys	6.5.2023	442 000	40,75 %	26 000	818	1 352	1 628	PAIKALLINEN, YLLÄTÄ, INFORMAAT
Kallistuneet junaliput	23.5.2023	346 000	25,40 %	15 000	509	3 590	768	PAIKALLINEN, YLLÄTÄ, INFORMAAT
Fribarata Polvijärvellä	29.5.2023	156 000	27,55 %	3 149	61	621	194	PAIKALLINEN, INSPIRAATIO, INFOR
Mopokoe	22.5.2023	129 000	15,01 %	5 229	11	438	601	PAIKALLINEN, INFORMAATIO, INSP
Big D/ täydellinen burgeri	27.6.2023	24 000	9,43 %	203	11	15	24	PAIKALLINEN, INSPIRAATIO, NOST/
Takkukamapaaja	8.6.2023	22 000	33,09 %	437	1	41	12	PAIKALLINEN, YLLÄTÄ, INSPIRAATI
Käärjä nevä forget	14.5.2023	18 000	39,06 %	735	13	43	31	NOSTALGIA, INSPIRAATIO
Opiskelijavapun avaus	21.4.2023	16 000	25,61 %	544	5	43	20	PAIKALLINEN, IHMINEN, NOSTALG
Nightwish palasi Kiteelle	17.6.2023	15 000	6,52 %	298	14	21	8	PAIKALLINEN, INSPIRAATIO, NOST/
Mullet cutin sm	17.6.2023	15 000	34,83 %	645	6	99	44	PAIKALLINEN, YLLÄTÄ, INSPIRAATI
Junaliikenne katkeaa	22.4.2023	10 000	28,87 %	381	6	75	19	PAIKALLINEN, INFORMAATIO, YLLÄ

Picture 4. An example of the data collected from TikTok in Q2: Top-performing posts by views and the themes (teemat) represented in them.

4.8.1 Value creation

Being able to create engaging content which creates value for the target audience is one of the keys to success on social media, and it is one of central concepts I present in the social media strategy. Learning which topics evoke responses and why, is the key to improving content value creation (Komulainen 2023, 12–13).

On social media, value creation drives engagement and engagement creates relationship and commitment. But in exchange for their time, people expect to get something valuable in return. What is valuable is decided by the individual (Lintinen 2022, 6). It can be entertainment like funny cat videos, information about current events, education on how to crochet or cook, for example.

Authentic engagement provides greater visibility and a possibility to reach larger audiences, and it helps build commitment, strong brand relationship and trust. To optimize chances for value creation, social media should be approached holistically, investigating various points where value creation occurs and weaving these points into the social media strategy.

Based on the content and target audience analyses I formulated theme words which highlight value creation in Karjalainen's content. Locality and people stood out in the materials and attracted most engagement on all three platforms. I pinpointed other value creating theme words that resonated with audiences across platforms. These were authentic, current, information, inspiration, nostalgia, stories, and surprise. Especially locality combined with people's stories and current topics of discussion create a very clear point for value creation that prompts engagement in Karjalainen's audiences.

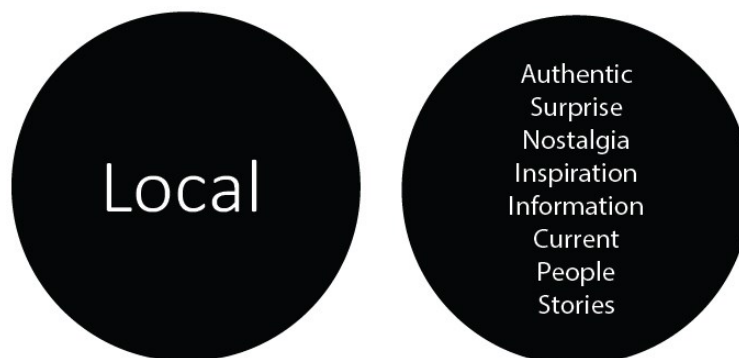


Figure 7. Value creating theme-words for Karjalainen.

Recognizing the recurrent topics and formulating them into themes offered plenty of insight into what creates value for Karjalainen's audiences on social media platforms. Some of the themes are more impactful on Facebook and Instagram, some more on TikTok, but they all drive engagement across platforms.

I evaluated the themes in practice in the workshops and assessed their comprehensibility and relevance in accordance with Karjalainen's content.

Discussing the themes also created learning paths for the editorial staff for finding points of value creation in various stages of social media activities.

The themes are meant to be used in deeper learning of what value Karjalainen's content can offer to its audiences on social media and in understanding how to present the content to evoke most reactions in the target audience. The themes can be utilized even further, developing value creation in Karjalainen's digital content outside of social media.

Another important point for value creations is interaction. Interaction is a key element across platforms to strive engagement. Karjalainens' most engaged audiences can be found on Facebook posts, TikTok videos and Instagram stories. Based on my experience, Instagram users typically watch the stories of the people and companies they are most interested in. Watching a story requires conscious act of clicking into the story, instead of passively receiving it in the feed. Clicking the link or a sticker in the story requires yet another action. This suggests that value creation happens in the stories. To further understand what the value creating elements are and how to use them better, the engagement in stories should be monitored regularly.

It is evident in the data that creating and choosing specific content on TikTok has boosted engagement with younger audiences. Answering questions using platform specific tools like video answers on TikTok is an authentic and efficient way to engage with them and encourage them to come back. The requests of content in the comments, and the conversations aroused by asking the opinion of the audience on videos show that responding to comments and initiating conversations effectively increases engagement.

Putting more effort to starting conversations and answering and asking questions in the captions, in the stories or in the videos (see e.g. @karjalainenfi 2023a; @karjalainenfi 2023b) is the most efficient way to improve reach and engagement, but it has to be planned and executed well and based on monitoring the conversations in the comments.

4.8.2 What the metrics show

The numbers show positive change in many areas during the development process and also afterwards. The follower count on each platform has grown. More moderately on Facebook and Instagram, more steeply on TikTok. By the time of finalizing this thesis report, the number of followers on TikTok has almost doubled compared to the starting situation.

Table 7. Karjalainen's follower count progress from the initial overview until the writing of the thesis.

Karjalainen's followers				
	December 2022	May 2023	October 2023	Change
Facebook	27 580	28 850	29 930	+ 2 350
Instagram	14 450	15 270	16 100	+ 1 650
TikTok	4 826	7 717	9 111	+ 4 285

Comparing the data from Q1 to the data from Q2, the average growth in views, likes, and saves of Instagram posts and reels is evident. The data from Instagram stories indicates a slight increase in average views and link clicks. Similar growth can be seen on TikTok, where the data shows growth in average views, likes, comments, saves and shares between Q1 and Q2 (see Table 8 on page 42).

On the other hand, on Facebook, the data shows a decrease in almost all areas, except for the follower count. This might partly be influenced by the decline of the platform, but it is also important to note that less effort was put into developing Facebook activities during the process. The reason behind this was that it seemed the actions taken on the platform were already sufficient and in line with the strategy, and because the user profile of the platform is growing older, and it is quite evident that younger audiences are moving to newer video-based platforms.

Six months is a relatively short time to draw definite conclusions, because the changes in algorithms can affect the data quickly. I suggest that to get more comprehensive results of the progress in the long term, the data collection and analysis should continue actively for at least the next six months, and the numerical changes should be monitored regularly after that.

Table 8. The average reach and engagement in Q1 and Q2.

IG posts and reels 2023, average					
	Views	Likes	Comments	Saves	Shares
January-March	11 387	276	2	6	0
April-June	17 485	393	3	13	1
FB posts 2023, average					
	Views	Likes	Comments	Shares	Link clicks
January-March	20 784	189	19	3	1 047
April-June	18 422	158	15	3	962
TikTok posts 2023, average					
	Views	Likes	Comments	Saves	Shares
January-March	40 693	1 711	42	82	117
April-June	54 687	2 315	51	132	252
IG stories 2023, average					
	Views	Link clicks			
January-March	2 764	43			
April-June	2 961	59			

4.9 Workshops

The development process included three workshops of which two were conducted twice. The idea to include workshops in the development process originated from the chosen methods, which highlight participation and learning together. Another major influence was the Table Stakes program. Experiences

of several news organizations in the program had demonstrated that including people in the process either participating in action or receiving information is crucial to success (Table Stakes 2022). Recognizing the potential of every team member can boost team spirit and lead to producing new ideas and innovations.

The first workshop, focusing on mobile video, was requested by the editorial staff in fall 2022, and I facilitated it twice in January 2023. It was received well in the newsroom, and the feedback and results convinced me to include more workshops in the process. The second workshop, revolving around how to make posts on social media was facilitated twice in April 2023 and the third, mobile video ideation workshop, was facilitated in May 2023.

I designed the workshops to support the development of the social media strategy by promoting mutual learning between participants: the workshops enabled me to share knowledge gathered throughout the process with editorial staff, and it enabled the staff members to share knowledge, experience, expertise and skills as well as ideas for improvement with me.

4.9.1 Workshop 1: mobile video

- 2 workshops with same content, duration of each approximately 1,5 hours.
- Voluntary participation, open to everyone in the newsroom.
- 15 people in total from different teams participated.
- Materials were made available for everyone in the newsroom through Microsoft Teams after the workshops.

The main objectives of the first workshop were to help integrate social media content creation into the daily routines of the newsroom and increase visual storytelling skills of the editorial staff. Other objectives were to introduce a consistent look and uniform production culture for social media videos, learning together and collecting information of staff's knowledge and expertise and identifying problems and training needs. For this workshop, I created a mobile

video 101 guidebook that defines the visual style of Karjalainen's videos and contains practical instructions for crafting and editing the videos.

The theme of the workshop was "know your audience". The workshop focused on the importance of storytelling on social media and an audience-centric approach. Participants were taught how to create content that resonates with audiences, evokes emotions, and drives engagement. Emphasis was placed on thoughtful planning and visual execution of mobile videos, with tips on shooting techniques and composition. The practical task was to analyze selected social media videos from benchmarked companies, drawing attention to production aspects and content engagement.

The video workshops had a big positive effect on the visual style and the quality of Karjalainen's videos. It unified the visual appearance, improved storytelling, and increased the number of mobile videos created across the newsroom. Having unified visual instructions was perceived helpful by the staff. Feedback on the videos and the quality of the content has been positive also from outside the organization.

4.9.2 Workshop 2: posting guidelines for social media

- 2 workshops with same content, duration of each approximately 1,5 hours
- For members of the staff whose job description includes social media posting. Participation by invitation.
- 8 people in total participated.
- Materials were made available for everyone in the newsroom through Microsoft Teams after the workshops.

The main objectives of the second workshop were similar to the first one, but it was aimed at a select group of staff. The objectives were to help integrate social media content creation into the daily routines of the newsroom, establish common ground rules and define and clarify Karjalainen's objectives on social

media. Other objectives were collecting information about staff's expertise and knowledge, challenges faced, tools used, and training needs.

The learning materials of the workshop were partly based on the instructions created by the content marketing team and partly on my research within the development task. I updated the instructions twice during the development process, to make sure they would align with the social media strategy.

The workshops were discussion-based sessions, where the main topics revolved around content posting like selection of topics and value creation. Participants discussed brand message, the tone of voice on different platforms, identifying the target audiences and topics of interest, and the importance of themes in value creation.

Examples of posts on each channel were reviewed and discussed. The practical task was to analyze selected social media videos and place them into the themes I had formulated in the content analysis phase.

The posting workshops were essential for collecting information on the workflow, staff skills and knowledge and developing the strategy further. They sparked conversation and improved understanding of common goals and operating models in the newsroom.

4.9.3 Workshop 3: ideation

- 1 workshop, duration approximately 2 hours.
- Voluntary participation, open to everyone in the newsroom.
- 10 people in total from different teams participated.
- Materials were made available for everyone in the newsroom through Microsoft Teams after the workshop.

Main objective of the third workshop was to learn creative brainstorming and applying ideas for different purposes. Other objectives included developing Karjalainen's content production with a focus on TikTok and mobile videos, but

not limited to them, and integrating social media content creation even deeper into the daily routines of the newsroom.

The workshop began with a summary of the theme-words and learning about the core elements of successful social media videos. As a practical task, several types of videos were watched and discussed, providing inspiration and a foundation for ideation.

Artificial intelligence tool chat GPT was introduced as an innovative tool to aid the ideation process, and its application was demonstrated by developing example concepts for social media videos.

The workshop included two brainstorming activities where participants were encouraged to focus on generating ideas without worrying about their feasibility.

The first activity was a warm-up exercise challenging participants with a prompt "50 ideas in five minutes." The ideas created were private which aimed to foster a free-flowing, uninhibited ideation. Following this, a collaborative exercise was introduced. Participants were asked to write down three ideas in five minutes after which they swapped papers. They were then asked to write three more ideas per each of the three ideas on the paper, having five more minutes to do so. This led to a dynamic idea exchange and resulted in a collective generation of 120 ideas in ten minutes.

The workshop concluded with a group discussion. All the brainstormed ideas were laid out, and participants were invited to mark their favorites. Ideas that got the most markings were then discussed in depth, resulting in approximately 20 feasible concepts.

The ideation workshop was received with enthusiasm and positivity. It introduced a more creative way of collaborating across teams, which was a new working method in the newsroom. There was a unanimous agreement about the benefits of these ideation sessions and a strong desire to continue them in the future. Many of the ideas were taken into production and the workshops

contributed to individuals utilizing the presented ideation methods in their own work.

4.10 Organizing the workflow

A big obstacle for effective social media activities in Karjalainen has been a lack of resources, time, and communication. There haven't been clearly set goals, or responsibilities, let alone a comprehensive strategy.

Effective social media activities can be executed with small resources if the activities are well structured and organized. The minimum should be making sure everyone responsible for the content in some way is familiar with the key areas of the strategy and is able to implement it according to their responsibilities. It is also important to ensure that responsibilities are clearly assigned during vacations and other absences.

During the development task, I have created a proposal for better management and organization of social media activities in Karjalainen, keeping minimal organizational changes and costs in mind. It includes a social media pilot team consisting of three people at minimum: a social media manager and two content managers. The social media manager would be responsible for the strategic development of social media activities and communicating them to the staff. Responsibilities would include organizing work, setting goals and objectives, and analyzing metrics and adjusting the strategy accordingly. The content managers would be responsible for the management of social media accounts including content planning, posting, monitoring conversations and trends, and optimizing content performance. One manager would be responsible for Facebook and Instagram and the other for TikTok. Depending on the prioritization of social media activities, dividing Facebook and Instagram responsibilities should also be considered.

Based on the activity and engagement levels of younger audiences on the platform I also suggest that a dedicated team or group for TikTok content creation is created. This team would include several people to enable consistent

content production and interaction. The team would be supervised by the TikTok content manager.

It is also important to note that social media is very visual, and it requires understanding of different visual styles, visual storytelling, videography, composition and editing skills, which is why a visual journalist should be an integral part of any social media team and more effort should be put in training staff's visual skills.

To keep everyone in the newsroom up to date, the social media manager should prepare a monthly update on social media activities and performance for all the editorial staff and set up weekly update sessions with the news chief and the content managers.

4.11 Content creation

The user's assessment of whether the social media content is worth their time i.e., whether it is valuable to them, is made in about two to three seconds. This is common knowledge among content creators and social media professionals, but it can also be seen in the platforms' video analytics where the views often drop notably after the first seconds. Therefore, there must be something in the content that encourages the user to engage: to continue watching, and ideally to react. If not, they'll quickly move on to the next post. This is why careful content planning plays a central role in a social media strategy.

The social media strategy includes outlines for Karjalainen's content creation. They are based on the insights gained during the research and development process. In the center is the audience and the value creating themes discussed in chapter 4.8.1, They are the foundation upon which content production should be built and how it should be formulated for the target audience to maximize value creation and engagement.

On a practical level, I recommend increasing systematic content production so that for example timeless articles can be utilized more efficiently in making

social media content that can be scheduled, ensuring constant and reliable content production. To aid planning, I have introduced an annual clock for overall content planning (see e.g. Aalto University 2016; Innokylä n.d.) and a content matrix (see e.g. Dhankar 2023; How To Create a Content Matrix 2023) for channel-specific content planning.

It is relatively easy to test what subjects interest audiences on different platforms by simply posting different topics and monitoring at analytics. However, topics should not be chosen only based on their previous success on social media. It can be easy to fall into “popularity trap” and pursue content that draws most engagement. The fact that a post did not succeed based on views or reactions is not necessarily a sign that the topic itself isn't interesting. Adjusting the point of view and presentation style of the topic should always be considered.

Taking a new point of view on content, as a unique article format rather than a promotion of a previously written article and embracing the opportunity to communicate with audiences directly can open up new possibilities to engage desired audiences.

On social media anyone can publish anything, and misinformation can spread rapidly (Mustonen 2022, 19–20). This is why content should be especially well-checked and well-researched. The internationally rising trends of news avoidance and distrust, which, though not yet as common in Finland, are trends to be recognized (Reunanen et al. 2023, 45–47; see also Newman et al. 2022). Because algorithms have a strong effect on the spreading of content, correcting an error can be difficult, if not impossible. To protect journalistic credibility and reliability, rules should be established for situations where there's an error in a journalistic social media video.

Social media platforms are built on virality, and in hopes of “getting viral”, content is sometimes made without consideration of its truthfulness. Denisova (2023) has studied viral journalistic tactics in engaging audiences on social media but highlights that using these tactics can blur the line between

journalism and marketing and it is generally not seen as a sustainable approach in news organizations, because it undermines journalistic integrity. While virality can temporarily increase visibility and help reach new audiences, it can cause reputation damage by undermining trust. Peña-Fernández et al. (2022, 9) conclude in their study that the search for virality leads to enhancing the trivial even on accounts belonging to media. Lintinen (2022, 14) discusses the risks of how new entertainment-oriented engagement tactics, like gamification, can cause journalistic content to become too commercialized and entertainment-oriented, not fulfilling the objectives of journalism anymore.

Journalistic ethics also stress the importance of being neutral and impartial. This is why news organizations struggle in producing successful content, especially on TikTok. The style of expression and language used on the platform differs remarkably from Instagram and Facebook. The way information is presented is unconventional and often veiled in humor, which traditionally doesn't match well with journalism.

But to effectively engage with younger audiences on platforms like TikTok, news organizations should express themselves more boldly, finding ways to stitch together reliable journalism with new presentation styles and formats. Given that TikTok encourages sharing of opinions and emotions, for example editorial opinion pieces could transition well to this platform.

5 Place the audience at the center – conclusion and future visions

To reach new audiences in the digital age, it is necessary to find ways to create brand awareness and make a positive impact where people spend time. Since younger people especially spend more time on social media and access news most likely through these platforms, creating a social media strategy for a news organization should be self-evident.

Over the span of six months, I have collected a wealth of numerical and practical information offering valuable insights into the topic. New skills and competences across Karjalainen's newsroom have been achieved, and I have designed a research-based social media strategy customized to Karjalainen. The strategy includes all the components outlined in the development task and described in this thesis report, including posting guidelines and social media video instructions.

The thesis work has demonstrated that improving and coordinating social media activities creates growth in reach and engagement even though all the things included and proposed in the strategy have not yet been utilized. It would be interesting to see what could be accomplished with fully executing the strategy over a longer time span.

The answer to the question of how to reach and engage new and younger audiences is to place the audience at the center: To recognize and understand the target audience, learn to craft content that genuinely adds value to their experience and increase authentic communication with them. It is not a simple answer, and it needs long-term work and study and an innovative mindset in the newsroom. It requires investment of time and resources and professionally conducted development work.

Growing an audience around certain topics and engaging them successfully on social media is possible – and quite easy after the groundwork is done. But for

sustainability, news organizations need to find ways to turn this engagement into revenue.

Spanish sports media *Relevo* has found ways to attract large young audiences only on social media, and 30 percent of their revenue comes from commercial content on the platforms. The condition for this has been accepting the fact that young people won't come to the website, and most likely never will. (Virranta 2023a; see also Newman et al. 2022; Newman 2022). This is something that should be explored more, especially as a backup to other revenue solutions, though it is yet to be seen if it can be profitable.

The recent changes in Finnish copyright legislation that came into effect in early April 2023, allow for contract negotiations with tech giants such as Google and Meta regarding potential compensation to news media for displaying their content on these platforms. If realized, this might bring in notable compensations for news organizations (Tuomasjukka 2023).

News organizations are very much tied to the changes social media companies choose to make, and those changes can happen quickly. The latest trend is an advertisement-free paid subscription, which for example TikTok has recently tested. Elon Musk has also announced that X (Twitter) is becoming a paid service (Kokkonen 2023). It was reported in October 2023 that Meta will release paid versions of Instagram and Facebook in the EU (Peltonen 2023), and the change came into effect in November. By paying a monthly fee, users can consume content free from advertisements (Peltonen 2023). This can notably affect the social media activities of news organizations. It can, for example, lead to users fleeing from the platforms, making it harder to reach new audiences or it can make paid advertisements on the platforms less effective.

The impact of artificial intelligence, AI, should also be considered in future development and utilization of the social media strategy. During the span of this thesis work, the number of AI-tools accessible to everyone has increased dramatically. In the industry, AI is already seen as a significant factor in

changing the way news is made and distributed and it can be a disruptor in the value chain (Henriksson 2023).

As demonstrated in the ideation workshop in chapter 4.9.3, AI-tools can be useful in ideating content. They can also be useful in transforming content from one platform to another – if you know how to use them effectively. In September 2023 Meta announced that they are enrolling generative AI tools, AI image editing tools and an AI assistant on their platforms in selected areas of the world (Meta Connect 2023). If, or rather when, these tools become more widely available, new skills will be needed. Thus, training of staff should be encouraged.

Mediahuis's change director Ezra Eeman recommends getting started with AI by utilizing it in the daily workflow of the newsroom (Henriksson 2023). Social media platforms contain vast amount of data, but it is time-consuming to collect, and AI could help leverage the data more efficiently. Resources and effort should be put into investigating and developing AI-tools to help content personalization and recommendations, for example.

Social media challenges journalism in many ways but it also offers new kinds of opportunities. Especially in audience-centric strategies, social media can be central in finding and recognizing dedicated audiences, understanding their needs and most importantly in creating and fostering direct and authentic communication and relationship with them. By experimenting with different topics and exploring new visual presentation styles it is possible to highlight recurring themes that speak to larger audiences.

It is essential to decide what is intended to be achieved with social media activities and set goals and allocate resources accordingly. The importance of communicating goals clearly and getting everyone in the newsroom onboard and involved can't be stressed enough.

My professional growth during the thesis work

Working on my thesis has improved my professional skills significantly and I have found a passion for development work. Developing the social media strategy has taught me plenty about strategic thinking and project management. It has strengthened my skills in developing an idea into a concept and taking the concept into production. During the process I have also learned to utilize creative development methods more systematically.

I have demonstrated my ability to organize and lead extensive development work that yields results, and my competence in working with social media professionally and in a goal-oriented way has grown. I have gained new knowledge about current topics and research related to social media in the news industry and can utilize it efficiently in my work.

My expertise, especially in customer-centric design, has grown significantly. In the final stages of the thesis work, I came across the concept of behavioral design. It is a field of study which combines design and behavioral science aiming to affect the behavior of users/audiences/customers with design decisions. It is something I wish to study further, and hopefully utilize in my profession in the future.

Overall, the skills and knowledge I have accumulated during the thesis work are applicable to my position as a designer and a content creator and enable me to aim for new goals and responsibilities.

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