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MASTER THESIS

Transmediality of *The Voice Russia*

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To the memory of my grandmother, Zinaida Trofimova, who taught me to write. You passed away 20 years ago, but I can still hear the words you said to me that day, when I saw you for the last time in the hospital room. You've motivated me all this time. Thank you so much for everything you have done for me.

Transmediality of *The Voice Russia*

by Sergei Medvedev

Abstract

This thesis discusses transmedia storytelling practices followed by Channel One in the second season of *The Voice Russia* reality singing contest, an adaptation of *The Voice* format. In *The Voice Russia* case study, extensions, platforms, and audience engagement strategies among other characteristics employed by the second season of the contest are examined from the perspective of transmedia storytelling theoretical basics. The case study analysis is primarily aimed at exploring *The Voice Russia* advanced capabilities of enhancing its transmediality. Transmedia project design analytical model by Renira Gambarato (2013) is applied to *The Voice Russia* case study as the main research method.

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1. Introduction

Transmedia storytelling (TS) is the art of building a storyworld, which "unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins, 2006: 95–96). This thesis examines TS techniques applied by Channel One (Russia) in the second season of *The Voice Russia*, adaptation of *The Voice* international franchise. With this purpose, the extensions, platforms, and audience engagement strategies among other characteristics employed by the second season of the project, are explored in *The Voice Russia* case study. Supported by theoretical framework of TS and transmedia project design analytical model by Renira Gambarato (2013), the case study discusses the opportunities of TS taken by the project and indicates possible alternatives capable of enhancing transmedia practices of *The Voice Russia* in future seasons.

Ayn Rand once wrote in her *Atlas Shrugged* novel: "(...) when men got structural steel, they did not use it to build steel copies of wooden bridges" (1957: 157). The Hegelian dialectics of form and content, as demonstrated by Rand, is relevant to TS phenomena as well. It becomes more and more difficult for global media production industry to satisfy the nature of a new generation of media technologies which have advanced so far ahead in the last decade and changed the contemporary practices of media consumption irreversibly. Multi-screen media consumption requires new types of *converged* media content, whose inner characteristics are still to be understood. Moreover, the new media landscape, which includes social networks, made professional media producers to reckon with the army of

media *prosumers*[1] involved in the process of media production all over the world. Thus, in terms of Roger Silverstone, technologically intertwined new media platforms must be "domesticated" by contemporary content production practices (1994).

1.1. Significance of the Subject

Despite the fact that the Russian growing media market is still to face all the challenges and opportunities of media convergence, the realm of TS is not unfamiliar to the contemporary Russian media production. At least four major Russian TV channels - Channel One, CTC Channel, NTV and TNT - are skilled at utilizing TS in their projects. Transmedia advertising campaigns have been held in recent years by such corporations as MTS (major Russian mobile operator) and the Russian division of PepsiCo. The huge example of transmedia approach taken in Russian politics is Alexei Navalny 2013 Moscow mayoral election campaign.

With regard to entertainment, probably the most prominent case produced locally is the program *The Voice Russia*, a multiplatform format first developed in the Netherlands by the production company Endemol. The second season of *The Voice Russia* is highly relevant to the phenomenon of TS because the project unfolds across multiple media extensions and actively collaborates with online audiences. Since the project is a top-rated show on Russian television with high quality, *The Voice Russia* contribution to TS is of great importance for the future of Russian media production.

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1 The term *prosumer* was first coined by Alvin Toffler in his The Third Wave book (1980) in order to describe the roles of media producers and consumers merging in the modern society.

1.2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The object of the study is the extensions and media platforms of the second season of *The Voice Russia*. The subject is the TS techniques applied by Channel One to the second season of *The Voice* format adaptation. With regard to the subject, the second season of the project raised the following research questions:

1. Which TS techniques does the second season of *The Voice Russia* apply?

2. Can the popularity of *The Voice Russia* be somehow connected to the transmediality of the project?

3. What additional possibilities of TS could be applied to enrich the project?

4. Would the recent transmedia practices of the Channel One influence the future scenario of Russian media industry?

The overall aim of the study is to explore the structure of the project, identify its particular transmedia features and thus answer the research questions. The main research objectives are:

● to analyze and structure the most significant results of academic transmedia studies;

● to understand the specifics of transmedia approach when set under the Russian media market conditions;

● to explore the extensions, platforms and audience engagement strategies employed by the second season of *The Voice Russia*;

● to compare the project's practices with TS basics;

● to examine the opportunities of TS taken by the project;

● to explain why TS principles followed by Channel One are capable of facilitating the further progress of transmedia practices in the Russian media market.

In addition, the study is designed to assess the following hypotheses:

1. The second season of *The Voice Russia* does apply some principles of TS.

2. The popularity of *The Voice Russia* was favored by transmediation.

3. Although several aspects of TS are not part of the project, the initiative of Channel One could contribute to further development of contemporary media practices in Russia.

1.3. Thesis Structure

First the thesis discusses the theoretical considerations on TS. It starts focusing on transmedia narrative and introducing the deeper understanding of transmedia structure as a composition of intertexts. Subsequently, the chapter examines the meanders of transmedia narrative consistency and distinctiveness of extensions. Therefore the characteristics of transmedia canon and redundancy are explored. The chapter proceeds with defining extension-platform dualism of transmedia structures and comparing franchise, portmanteau and complex transmedia types. The role of TS in the culture of multi-screen media consumption is also considered and the meaning of *each-medium-does-what-it-does-best* principle of platforms selection is addressed. The *Synergy and Logistics* section focuses on the feature of transmedia structures which makes the entire project greater than the sum of its *texts* taken individually and describes how TS overcomes the difficulties of cross-platform transition and unites individual *texts* into a single storyworld. The

chapter deals with theoretical considerations on participatory culture basics, the power of engagement and the "free labor" issue. Finally, the description of The Voice format created in the Netherlands by Endemol is introduced. Short case studies are spread throughout the chapter in order to demonstrate how the theoretical principles are *incarnated* in particular transmedia projects by entertainment media industry, advertising business and politicians.

The third chapter is dedicated to the research methodology involved in the empirical analysis of *The Voice Russia* case study. The transmedia project design analytical model by Renira Gambarato (2013) is the main research method applied to the case study. While some alternative approaches related to analysis of TS are relevant only to some aspects of TS (narrative, business model, media platforms, etc.), the chosen model differentiates itself by being the only methodology specific for analyzing TS as a whole, considering the plural dimensions involved in transmedia projects. The analytical model has incorporated the results of the most significant academic studies of TS by Henry Jenkins, Geoffrey Long, Christy Dena, and Robert Pratten among others. The method allows exploring each transmedia component of *The Voice Russia* and overviewing the project as a whole.

Another qualitative method applied in the thesis is participant observation. Observation of *The Voice Russia* live shows provides the research with additional data on how producers of the project collaborate with audience on the set and reveal some hidden aspects of the production process. Method of expert interviews is employed to enrich the thesis with analytics from inside the show. Semi-structured interviews can supply a research with comparable data and still are flexible enough to observe the specificity of each respondent.

The fourth chapter applies the transmedia analytical model to the second season of *The Voice Russia*. The project is explored from the perspective of ten topics: Premise and purpose, narrative, worldbuilding, characters, extensions, media platforms and genres, audience and market, engagement, structure, and aesthetics. Theoretical considerations on TS are employed by the analysis in order to reveal the nature of the project and compare its features with TS basics. The results of participant observation and expert interviews supply the chapter with additional data.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Understanding Transmedia Storytelling

In 1983 Ithiel de Sola Pool described the concept of convergence in his *Technologies of Freedom: On Free Speech in an Electronic Age:*

A process called the 'convergence of modes' is blurring the lines between media. A single physical means - be it wires, cables, or airwaves - may carry services that in the past were provided in separate ways. Conversely, a service that was provided in the past by any one medium - be it broadcasting, the press, or telephony - can be provided in several different physical ways (De Sola Pool, 1983: 23).

As time went on, the convergence of media technologies predictably resulted in *transmediation* of content distributed throughout multiple media platforms. The term transmedia was introduced in media studies by Marsha Kinder in 1991. In her *Playing with Power in Movies, Television, and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* Kinder discusses "the intertextual relations across different narrative media" generally and "transmedia intertextuality among television, movies, and toys" in the U.S. media production in particular (1991). However the most significant step towards the current understanding of the phenomenon was made by Henry Jenkins in *Technology Review* in 2003:

Reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption. In a world with many media

options, consumers are choosing to invest deeply in a limited number of franchises rather than dip shallowly into a larger number... We need a new model for co-creation-rather than adaptation-of content that crosses media. (Jenkins, 2003)

TS, as a media production concept, facilitates the usage of the properties of present media landscape, which involves audience interaction and participation; crowdfunding and crowdsourcing; social media networks, multiple media platforms and multi-screen production, for instance. Nowadays it is widely utilized not solely by entertainment industry but by advertising agencies and political managers as well, which are all united by their willingness to engage with the audiences of different media platforms and make their contact with VUPs (viewers/users/players) more personal. Jeff Gomez, CEO of Starlight Runner Entertainment, the company which provides brands such as *Avatar*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Sony and Coca-Cola with transmedia production services, defines TS as "the vanguard process of conveying messages, themes or storylines to a mass audience through the artful and well-planned use of multiple media platforms. It is a philosophy of communication and brand extension that broadens the lifecycle and deepens the profitability of creative content" (2010). It does not matter for TS if the characters of transmedia narrative are fictional or not. Brands and products can be designed as characters of transmedia narrative as well. TS is the way to create a consistent storyworld, which will be welcomed by the audience.

2.1.1. Hypertextuality of Transmedia Narrative

The central question of transmedia narratives is how to tell a single story through several media platforms. Well known Henry Jenkins's description of TS reads as follows: "Transmedia story (…) unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (2006: 95–96). The narrative structure of transmedia project breaks a storyworld into a number of self-contained extensions or "units" (Dena, 2009: 167), *e.g.* show episodes, video game, ARG, movie, mobile application, etc., with each of them adding new value to the story.

While being split into the units of content, transmedia projects should still be integrated into a single storyworld, the universe of common places, aesthetics, characters, their inner motivations and outer purposes. However, the logical sequence of transmedia extensions is too complicated to be described simply in prequel/sequel terms. In order to solve the complexity, the relationships between extensions in transmedia narratives are most often discussed from the perspective of hypertextuality and transfiction. As defined by Gĭrard Genette, hypertextuality is "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (1997: 5). In contrary to a pre-post time scale, the system of hypo- and hypertexts represents the principle of semantic relationships between self-contained texts. Intertextual relationship between project's prequels, sequels, spin-offs, etc. enriches the knowledge of their common narrative in terms of facts, actions, and geographical boundaries of a storyworld as well as improves the understanding of characters' motivation. Moreover, after a person becomes aware of the future developments from

subsequent texts, the assessment of already processed texts tends to alter (Saldre & Torop, 2012: 30).

The ability of a fictional world of an earlier text A to be resurrected and enlarged in a later text B is highlighted by the theory of transfiction. Thus, the theory goes beyond the level of intertextual relation of transmedia extensions and states an ability of two texts to be interrelated with each other by their storyworlds more than by the texts themselves: "Literary works are linked not only on the level of texture but also, and no less importantly, on the level of fictional worlds" (Doležel, 1998: 202). Considering a storyworld as a character *per se*, it is important to understand that TS may not necessarily expand a single story but introduce the audience into the universe of multiple stories including user-generated content (UGC).

In 2000 Showtime cable and satellite television network started its expansion into an affinity market of gay/lesbian media content. On December 3, 2000 the first episode of *Queer as Folk* (*QaF*, see Figure 1) television series was aired on the network. The *QaF* logline presented on Showtime Website reads as follows: "Following the lives of five gay men in Pittsburgh, 'Queer as Folk' is a riveting drama full of sex, drugs, adventure, friendship and love. In addition to the usual sexual escapades and relationships of the five friends, [the show episodes] explore critical gay political and health issues" ("Queer as Folk: The Complete Series," n.d.).

Figure 1. *QaF* original poster. Image
source: ("Visual Section," n.d.)
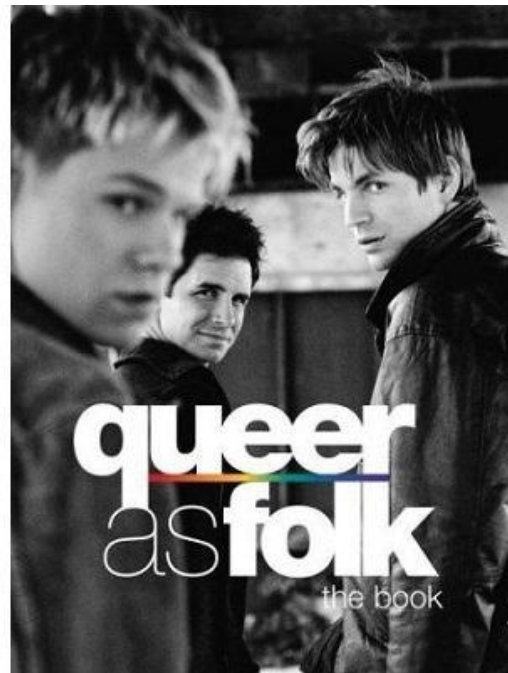
Figure 2. Book cover of *Queer as Folk:
The Book.* Image source: (Ruditis, 2003)

The month before the premiere of the second season, *Queer as Folk:
The Book* was published by Paul Ruditis (see Figure 2). The book discussed
the history of the series creation, provided details on audition process and sex
scenes filming, included interviews with the cast, for instance. On March 4,
2003, two days after the first episode of the second season was aired,
Showtime network published *Every Nine Seconds* book (see Figure 3),
extending the story of *QaF* characters back to 1989, to their high-school age.

Figure 3. *QaF* book series extended the narrative of the TV show. Image source: (Brockton, J., 2003; Brockton, Q., 2003; Brockton, Q., 2004)

The second season was preceded by a viral campaign, which won the Best Buzz Marketing award by CNN *Business 2.0* online magazine for best viral campaign of the year. Jordan Berman, the director of Online Marketing & Advertising at Showtime, describes the viral campaign experience of the network:

> We invited Websites serving the targeted gay and lesbian community to support the show by hosting a 'Countdown Ticker', an ad unit that counted the days remaining to the premiere episode. We had a tremendous response, with over 650 Websites participating during the month prior to the premiere, driving 10,000 click-throughs to SHO.com and over one million impressions. Showtime benefited from the free exposure while the sites gained a level of credibility and cool, given their association with the show. (Jaffe, 2003)

During the next seasons of the series, two more books were published by the network to expand the story of *QaF* characters: *Never Tear Us Apart* (2003) and *Always Have, Always Will* (2004). In addition, *RAGE Gay Crusader* superhero comic book (see Figure 4) was produced by Showtime as a bonus to those who pre-ordered the *QaF* DVD set (Mathews, n.d.). According to the plot of the second season, the comic book was created by Michael and Justin *QaF* characters in order to feature superheroic alter egos of *QaF* protagonists. Thus, the "mockumentary" story about the comic book origins was available through the second season of the show. The book itself was available to be *extracted* (Jenkins, 2009b) out of the *QaF* universe between the second and the third seasons of the series.

Figure 4. Covers of the original version and Russian localization of the comic book featuring *QaF* protagonists. Images sources: (Mathews, n.d.; Sinitsyn, 2014)

Tens of fan conventions with members of the *QaF* cast have been held all around the world since the series was first aired and are still to be held. Liberty Avenue of Pittsburgh, PA, which is portrayed in the show as the heart of gay nightlife with Babylon, Boy Toy and Meat Hook night clubs, The Bath house, Woody's Bar and Liberty Diner, became a place of worship for *QaF* fans despite the fact that the series has been shot in Canadian Toronto (Naham, 2002). Kinney's cowry shell bracelet became a symbol and is often worn by *QaF* fans. Fantasy Role Play games are played in *QaF* fandoms with respect to the canon of the story (http://libertyforum.rusff.ru/). The Internet displays plenty of *QaF* fanfiction and fanart.

Simultaneously in 2004, Showtime started broadcasting *The L Word* TV series, portraying the lives of lesbian LA community. *QaF* and *The L Word* TV shows provide an example of creating multi-dimensional transmedia narrative based on the unity of transfictional storyworld. The plot of *The L Word* was not associated with *QaF* characters but was chosen in order to take advantage of *QaF* success and direct the audience to the story of another part of the "queer" world. The narrative of *The L Word* itself was then followed by *The Real L Word* reality television series. Thus, Showtime provided its audience with immersive transfiction experience on the issue:

> [I]t was not entirely unexpected that Showtime would actively pursue these niche audiences by developing sexually provocative gay and lesbian-friendly programs like Queer as Folk and The L Word, and also creating an immersive transmedia experience replete with what Catherine Johnson has identified as "diegetic and pseudo-diegetic" merchandise (i.e. products that directly and

indirectly reference a program's fictional world). (Hanan, 2013: 158-159)

"Isomorphism between a part and the whole" (Saldre & Torop, 2012: 31) or "fractality" of transmedia narrative is another feature common to transmedia hypertextuality. The phenomenon of reproduction of the same meaning-making messages on the different levels of storytelling is originally discussed by Tartu-Moscow semiotic school, e.g. in *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures* (Uspensky et al., 1973). The general idea of hypertextual fractality is that "the same 'message' may appear as part of the text, or a set of texts, depending upon the framework utilized" (Portis-Winner & Winner, 1976: 109). "Yes we can" Barack Obama 2008 election campaign seems to be a good example of it. The transmedia nature of the campaign has been already discussed by Jenkins, among others:

> I've argued that Obama is as much a transmedia character as Obi Wan is. I do not mean by this simply that our everyday lives are conducted across multiple media platforms, though this is true. I also mean that we tend to connect those dispersed pieces of information together to form a story, that the story we construct depends on which media extensions we draw upon (Fox News vs. The Huffingston Post), and that there are architects who seek to coordinate and construct the range of meanings which get attached to that story. In that sense, the Obama story, as constructed by his campaign, includes both radical intertextuality and multimodality. (Jenkins, 2011)

Barack Obama's "Yes we can (change)" could be a slogan of any grassroots election campaign. On the local levels of particular volunteering activities, the motto articulates the general idea of democracy: Small actions of ordinary people do matter and can significantly influence the result of elections. On the level of the entire campaign, the slogan could be interpreted as the ability of American society to change and go ahead in its evolution.

2.1.2. Narrative Consistency and Extensions Distinctiveness

As transmedia narrative accumulates growing number of texts around itself, an issue of narrative consistency raises. "If we consider the story of a transmedia narrative to be the sum total of all the components in the franchise, then an extension's value is often directly proportionate to how well it adds to the story – the encyclopedia of the world – that audiences are building in their heads" (Long, 2007: 164). Long discusses the term "canon" in transmedia studies. Following the canon, each of multiple entry-points of transmedia narrative must stay coherent to each other and respect the consistency of a storyworld as a whole (ibid.).

As Aristotle states, "it is impossible for anyone to believe the same thing to be and not to be" (1005b 23). The Aristotelian law of noncontradiction is introduced into the field of personality psychology by Leon Festinger (1957), the pioneer of cognitive dissonance theory. According to the author, cognitive dissonance is a psychologically uncomfortable situation involving conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviors. The theory assumes that "the existence of dissonance will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance. [The] person will actively

avoid situations and **information** which would likely increase the dissonance" (ibid.: 3, my emphasis). With regard to TS practices, factual contradictions or inconsistency of characters' inner motivations and outer purposes have the potential to provoke a negative response from the audience and suppress its desire to continue exploring a storyworld.

Despite the fact that a transmedia storyworld must follow the canon and stay consistent, distinctive contribution to the story must be added by each extension of the transmedia narrative. Otherwise the storyworld would face the redundancy problem, the phenomenon that "burns up fan interest and causes franchises to fail" (Jenkins, 2006: 96). The process of adaptation is considered as a retelling by the majority of researchers, such as Jenkins (2006) and Long (2007) and thus is excluded by them from the set of transmedia practices. However, Christy Dena has an opposite viewpoint and states that adaptations are not "automatically redundant" (2009: 146). The researcher doesn't challenge that each text of transmedia project must supply a storyworld with a distinct value, but asks not to downplay "the semiotic role of the delivery technology" (ibid.: 98). Technological properties of different media can be sufficient - at least in some cases - in order to fill the same text with new values. Since the commonly accepted opinion on transmedia narrative expansion is that extensions are able to add new value to a project because of their textual distinctiveness, the question raised by Christy Dena reads as follows: *If a delivery technology brings an additional semiotic value to the adapted - but originally the same - text, can it be an alternative way of meaning-making expansion of transmedia narrative?*

Nevertheless, each-medium-does-what-it-does-best principle (Jenkins 2006: 96) has already included the semiotic role of media technologies in the

paradigm of transmediation. TS does not employ different technological solutions simply in order to engage the audiences of different media - the way cross-platform production does - but to reveal the nature of different story units in the best manner possible and thus give users something more valuable than they would get if the same units were placed on a single platform. If media technologies didn't have any semiotic role, then the audience would probably prefer a single platform project which doesn't involve migrating from one platform to another. However, if the semiotic role of media platforms is considered to be sufficient to call a project transmediatic, while the principle of distinctiveness is neglected, then any cross-media project *a priori* would be transmediatic. Transmedia production is included in the broader realm of cross-platform production but it is more specific concerning the narrative dimension.

2.1.3. Platforms

Inside transmedia projects, the units of content are spread over the technological platforms, *e.g.* television, social network community, mobile, Website, radio broadcast and offline events. The Producers Guild of America defines a transmedia project as "one that consists of three (or more) narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe on any of the following platforms: Film, Television, Short Film, Broadband, Publishing, Comics, Animation, Mobile, Special Venues, DVD/Blu-ray/CD-ROM, Narrative Commercial and Marketing rollouts, **and other technologies that may or may not currently exist**" (Producers Guild of America, 2010, my emphasis). Thus, there are no special restrictions on platforms to be utilized in transmedia projects. Despite video games being out of the items listed, the

Guild already recognized it was simply a lapse.

In regard to the extension-platform dualism, three types of transmedia project structures were classified by Robert Pratten (2011: 13-15). The first one is "transmedia franchise" which has each platform possessing a single self-contained extension. "Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa" (Jenkins, 2006: 96). *The Matrix* is an example. The storyworld of Wachowski brothers includes the feature film *The Matrix* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003) sequels, *Enter the Matrix* video game, *The Matrix Online* multiplayer online game, *The Animatrix* animated film, comic books, fan art, etc. Each of the extensions is an independent entry-point to the universe. The main characteristic of transmedia franchise is that it is not necessary to cross platforms to enjoy a single extension. Every extension is a self-sufficient text that functions as an entry-point to the project. Concomitantly, transmedia franchise gives an opportunity to proceed exploring the storyworld and find additional content in other platforms.

Another type of transmedia structures identified by Pratten is "portmanteau". Portmanteau project has a single story, a unique experience, spread over multiple platforms. Its instalments are dependent from each other. Alternate reality game (ARG) is a classic example of this type of a transmedia project. ARG employs media technologies such as mobile, augmented reality applications, QR codes, and e-mailing in order to assign various tasks to players and lead them through distinctive offline locations related to a single story. Finally, there is a type of franchise projects which include a portmanteau structure as one of the extensions. These transmedia projects are called "complex" or "portmanteau franchise".

As much as media platforms differ in their technological capabilities, one of the basic principles of TS is that "each medium does what it does best" (Jenkins 2006: 96). That's what *Track My Macca's* story is about.

Most people are concerned about the quality of the food they eat. The question has always been controversial especially in respect of fast food chains. Nevertheless, in January 2013, McDonald's Australia decided to dispel any doubts. Together with DDB Group Sydney it launched the *Track My Macca's* iPhone app (see Figure 5), which allowed anyone to track, regarding the Big Mac or McChicken, from where the ingredients came.

Figure 5. An interface of *Track My Macca's* ARG mobile app.
Image source: ("Case: World Unique Promotion," 2013)

All a customer had to do is to scan a QR code on the side of a burger's container and 3D augmented reality application would turn the restaurant table into a farm with information to read, videos to watch, and games to play. Then it was up to people to discover the world of McDonald's food and share their experience via Facebook. Only in the first month, *Track My Macca's* was

downloaded 45,883 times. Why was the campaign effective in achieving its goals? Firstly, it didn't try to discuss the quality of beef or pickles in McDonald's products generally. On the contrary, the story of a particular product was available via the app. Thus a consumer was able to assure that the chain controls the quality of each single product it sells. Secondly, people could make sure of McDonald's products quality exactly when they needed it during the process of consumption. Thirdly, the campaign granted consumers with multisensory experience. It was able to see the product, explore it in a game, touch and taste it. The studies on multisensory integration state that any information is considered by a person to be more trustworthy when the different senses are involved in the process of reception simultaneously (Cohen, 2011; De Araujo, 2009; Kayser, 2005). Therefore the multisensory experience made the consumers more susceptible to the message of the campaign.

In a culture of multi-screen media, the features of everyday media consumption practices as well as the peculiar technological properties of media devices determine media production solutions (Medvedev, 2014a: 512). It is possible to spend an hour sitting in front of laptop screen, watching an episode of favorite TV series, but something different is required to be consumed via smartphone during a short trip in the metro. While spreading content over multiple platforms, transmedia projects can stay in touch with VUPs wherever they physically are. Moreover, spread across media, transmedia structure has the potential to congregate the traditional audiences of different platforms, *i.e.* video game players, consumers of TV evening shows, social media enthusiasts, etc., in order to stay in touch with different audience niches. This logic is valid not just in the realm of entertainment but

it is also valid in the scope of transmedia applications in branding, activism, journalism, and politics, for instance.

2013 Moscow mayoral election was shaken by grassroots election campaign of Russian opposition blogger and anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny. Television remains the main information source for the majority of Russians ("Issledovanie WCIOM," 2013). As long as Russian television is controlled by the government and the major Russian federal news channels are in practice of entering opposition leaders into so-called "stop-lists", it is almost impossible for an independent candidate to promote himself by means of the most influential media source. In order to promote the candidate among those who can be reached through television solely, Navalny's campaign had to go offline. The candidate team developed and implemented a communicative strategy which employed online tools in two major ways: Firstly promoting the candidate among Internet users, secondly directing Internet-active supporters to offline activities. "At the beginning our main objective was to turn supporters into volunteers", Navalny said in his post-campaign report (Navalny, 2013: 43). Thus, volunteers were to become a connecting link between the candidate and the voters who couldn't be reached online.

A number of online extensions were created by the campaign in order to recruit volunteers and direct them to offline activities. Soon the campaign turned to an extensive system, promoting Alexei Navalny with tens of Websites and thousands of volunteers. The candidate was advertised by "Navalny Team" communities in Facebook, Vkontakte, Twitter, Odnoklassniki and Instagram social networks. *Vooruzhaysya* (Russian: "Вооружайся", translated: "Arm Yourself") campaign video posted on

YouTube was viewed about 2,700,000 times ("Vremya Prishlo! Vooruzhaysya!," 2013). Those who were not involved in volunteering activities were contacted by the campaign through newspapers, radio and online outlets. It was possible to participate in daily election rallies of the candidate as well (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Alexei Navalny's rally at Semenovskaya metro station, Moscow. Image source: (Navalny, 2013)

It was demonstrated by Alexei Navalny campaign that grassroots campaigning are able to overcome the power of the state propaganda machine and lend effective help to an opposition candidate. According to official data, 27% of votes were cast for Alexei Navalny on the day of election ("Vibori Mera Moskvi," 2013). The result was hailed as a huge success, since Navalny managed to increase his rating by 20%.

2.1.4. Synergy and Logistics

In transmedia franchise, a VUP can stay at the same platform and still enjoy a single part of a transmedia project. But it is not exactly the intention of transmedia experiences. As Long notes on *The Matrix* franchise: "While each [extension of the project] could be experienced separately and still be enjoyable, each component became part of a single unified storytelling experience" (2007: 15). In order to take advantage of transmedia synergy effect, an individual would have to explore the project as a whole. However, the quality of a story is not a sufficient factor to raise the flow of people through a project. In addition, a transmedia structure must be *logistically* friendly, *i.e.* impose minimum transaction efforts on those migrating from one platform to another.

Negative capability and migratory cues are utilized in TS in order to raise curiosity in the audience and show the way to the next platform (Long, 2007: 53-60). Negative capability is "the art of building strategic gaps into a narrative to evoke a delicious sense of 'uncertainty, mystery, or doubt' in the audience." For instance, when taken from a dusty windowsill, a vase would leave a clean trace of itself having been there before. In the same manner, a gap of negative capability hints at something missed in the narrative. In order to be identified by audience as something potentially discoverable, a gap should clearly indicate the direction for search with migratory cues. According to Marc Ruppel, "a migratory cue is any sign in a transmedia fiction that assists an audience in making correspondences and connections between sites" (2012: 62). Intrigued by negative capability, audience then is guided by a migratory cue to the next extension, where the mystery is solved.

While negative capabilities and migratory cues may promise new, distinctive and valuable content to be found in a following extension, the

transition process may still put a "friction" or negative forces (Pratten, 2011: 34-35) on a VUP. The gravitation of negative capabilities forces the platforms of a storyworld together. In contrary, centrifugal forces such as "increased cost, additional keystrokes, diverted attention, low bandwidth" (ibid.: 34) tend to break a transmedia structure into discrete platforms. The ratio of the two driving forces determines if the line between two platforms is crossed by a consumer. Therefore, the sequence of platforms must be defined with respect to the issue of migration, in order to facilitate it.

Robert Pratten's idea of positive and negative forces as well as the concept of negative capabilities and migratory cues can both be understood better through Wilbur Schramm's Fraction of Selection, a well-known formula for determining which mass media outlet an individual would select.

$$\frac{Expectation\,of\,reward}{Effort\,required} = Frequency\,of\,activity$$

The more an individual is motivated to consume the media by expectation of reward and less effort are needed in order to reach the reward, the higher the frequency of consumption is expected to be for this type of media (Schramm, 1954: 19). In its turn, Schramm's Fraction of Selection is a replication of Profitability Index (PI) formula in microeconomics, which considers profit/costs factors in its fraction as well.

2.1.5. Participation and Engagement

Passive reception of information has long been the only way of consuming media content. In the search for his/her own "self" in the flow of media content, an individual has been following the principle of self-

affirmation. This principle is a direct consequence of the previously mentioned Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance. The self-affirmation principle of media consumption became the basis of "limited effects" approach to mass media studies introduced by Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G). Joseph Klapper's (1960) insights on the basics of U&G theory in the world of "traditional" offline media would contribute to understand the driving forces of contemporary culture of participation.

In 1960, just three years after *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* by Leon Festinger has been published, the theory was applied by Joseph Klapper to the problem of media content selection by audience. In his *The Effects of Mass Communication*, Klapper highlighted five major principles on how a person relates to mass media content (1960: 18-19): 1) Predispositions and the related processes of selective exposure, selective perception, and selective retention; 2) the groups, and the norms of groups, to which the audience members belong; 3) interpersonal dissemination of the content of communication 4) the exercise of opinion leadership; and 5) the nature of mass media in a free enterprise society.

These five principles have represented the reality of mass media in the middle of the 20th Century. However, the boundaries between consumers and producers of content were blurred by the reality of Web 2.0. At the present time, online media users are equipped with mechanisms for evaluating content and influencing its form and matter. Fifty years after the five principles were proposed by Klapper, Henry Jenkins introduced other five aspects relevant to the current reality of media-audience relationships. In the context of participatory culture, it is possible to notice how Klapper's factors of media consumption have transformed. According to Jenkins (Jenkins et al.,

2005: 5-6), participatory culture concerns to:

1. *Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement*. In Klapper's universe, selective exposure have been utilized by an individual to protect his or her self-integrity from disturbing information and find the content which represents him or her from the perspective of one's interests, culture and ideology (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). In participatory culture, defensive adaptation is replaced by offensive strategy: "The self" is encouraged now to produce itself in media reality.

2. *Strong support for creating and sharing creations with others*. As it follows from Klapper's "interpersonal dissemination of the content of communication," online social media don't have a patent for the phenomenon of sharing. However, online mechanisms made the viral power of interpersonal dissemination of content much stronger. Drillability and spreadability principles of transmedia narrative (Jenkins et al., 2013: 135-6) encourage fans to immerse deeper into the universe of story and share the texts found on different levels of the storyworld with each other. The phenomenon of online communities or fandoms is not an exceptional property of TS. Nevertheless, fandom-friendliness is definitely a strong feature of transmedia projects. Settled around a project, a fandom is driven by the willingness to immerse into a storyworld and explore a project as deep as possible. Transmedia production seems to be the best way to satisfy the demand. More than just supplying enthusiasts with additional content to be consumed in the market of each extension, transmedia projects create their narratives wide enough to be extended by UGC, fan fictions and mashups. The concept of extending transmedia narrative in-depth with UGC is defined by Jenkins as *multiplicity,* which "paves the way for us to think about fan

fiction and other forms of grassroots expression as part of the same transmedia logic – unauthorized extensions of the 'mother ship' which may nevertheless enhance fan engagement and expand our understanding of the original" (2009a).

3. *Some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices*. Since people started expanding their identities into media reality and functioning there, an issue of productivity turned Klapper's "opinion leadership" into practical mentoring. Mentors do not supply less-experienced users with opinions but with information valuable and useful enough to be employed by individuals in order to raise the productivity of their presence in media.

4. *Members who believe that their contributions matter*. "Nothing makes an audience more interested in a story than a feeling of ownership" (Phillips, 2012). Participatory culture has implemented the concepts of value and recognition into media practices. Inside "a free enterprise society" of interactive communities, people express themselves and can be granted for their accomplishments with recognition exactly like in offline interpersonal relationships. At the same time, some of Internet users' activities can be and are monetized by Websites and online businesses. "The provision of 'free labor' (...) is a fundamental moment in the creation of value in the digital economies" (Terranova, 2000: 36). Based on this premise, Terranova concludes that people's behavior in online reality does not fit into the concept of capitalistic behavior. However, people are not necessarily paid by money in their interpersonal communication. Sometimes they are paid by recognition, love, etc. There is a South Park episode called *Cancelled* in which it appears that the Earth is a TV reality show made by aliens to be broadcasted for extra-

terrestrial civilizations. If this was true, would all the Earth inhabitants become "free labor" even when making money in Internet or going for holidays? Surely it would not. South Park metaphor is a simple way to understand why so-called "free labor" still act in a capitalistic manner regardless of not being paid by Websites. Despite the fact that user-generated content may be considered as "free labor" from the outer perspective of media extensions as business enterprises, from UCG inner perspective, *prosumers'* online activities are leisure rather than economical actions. In a free enterprise economy, no value is paid twice and *prosumers* are already paid with their self-actualization in the process and results of creation. In Baudrillard's terms, while producing commercial value, which is utilized by media industry for its benefit, users consume their *statutory* values at the same time (Bolin, 2012: 157). Thus, the UGC production doesn't conflict with capitalistic approach to human behavior but in contrary confirms it.

5. *Members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (at least, they care about what other people think of what they have created).* Traditionally, television was a family entertainment. An individual consumption of video content was much more complicated than it is nowadays. Only three decades ago, streaming media were consumed mostly in groups. Gradually, the course of changes in media devices directed media consumption practices from public to private. The particular case on these developments is described by Sony Inc. co-founder Akio Morita in his *Made in Japan* (1986) memoirs. When Mr. Morita and his colleagues came up with the idea of the first *Walkman*, all the needed components have been already invented outside the company. The only component that has been missed was the understanding that sound quality degradation in a small audio system will

be compensated by the capability of accessing musical content individually. New audio technology was introduced in the place, where the problem of privacy protection was acute, since Japanese apartments are relatively small and sometimes have partitions between rooms, *Shōji*, made of paper. Thus, the evolutionary track of media devices was determined by and constituted the process of the emancipation of the individual from social frameworks. "The new knowledge culture has arisen as our ties to older forms of social community are breaking down, our rooting in physical geography is diminished, our rooting in physical geography is diminished, our bonds to the extended and even the nuclear family are disintegrating, and our allegiances to nation-states are being redefined" (Jenkins, 2006: 27). The nature of online media encouraged people to choose online communities according to their preferences and imitate social relations there, establishing the image of social hierarchy (mentors and novices) in particular.

The principles of participatory culture have represented the modes of the most usual relationships between people, such as the desire for self-actualization through creative activity, the need for social recognition, free exchange of values held by all the members of community. Interactive online reality has not created "a new way of living" and has not changed the patterns of relationships between people, or between people and media, but simply extrapolated those patterns to another way of communication, a mediated one. All those mechanisms allowed a personality to be presented in a medium. As a consequence, they made a medium more comfortable to be utilized and became the indicators of market attractiveness of media platforms.

Engagement is "the emotional connections between viewers and desired content" (Jenkins et al., 2013: 140). TS capability of establishing

emotional connections between an audience and content makes the concept highly suitable for advertising products. In 2013 Japanese Toshiba Corp. and American Intel Corp. launched *The Power Inside* social film which became their third joint advertising project after *The Beauty Inside* (2012) and *Inside* (2011). Intel Corp. released on August 14, 2013, the first episode of *The Power Inside*, which collected about 2,5 million views on YouTube. The six episodes of the series garnered over 60 million views total. Partner marketing manager, Billie Goldman, stated:

> We are always looking at new ways to engage and entertain consumers in a brand experience – in particular younger consumers – and this idea is a good way to do that... Social, real-time co-creation with the audience gives us the opportunity to push the boundaries creatively and tell immersive stories that the audience is truly invested in. (Zacchia, 2013)

The story is about the invasion of monster moustaches and unibrows called Uricks to the Earth and the group of Guardians who try to save the humankind from the aliens. The narrative of *The Power Inside* unfolds across weekly film episodes on YouTube and the Website of the project. A new level of insight could be reached by the audience through interpersonal communication with the film characters via additional videos, animated stories, documents, comments and questions posted by film characters on their Facebook timelines. Moreover, a VUP was engaged with the story by having an opportunity to choose a side to stand for in the project. Depending on the side chosen, anyone was able to take a picture with moustache added

virtually to his/her face on *The Power Inside* Website or upload a video of him/her shaving face. The ones selected by film producers appeared on the film episodes. New Toshiba ultrabook with Intel processor inside acted as a character of the film. In a crucial moment, the laptop helped the protagonist to defeat the Queen of Moustaches and save the world. Thus, an interpersonal contact between the audience and the product was established by the story. Similar trick was applied by NASA to its Curiosity Mars Rover program. The Rover has its own timeline on Facebook and posts photos from the Mars surface with first-person comments.

2.2. Context: Transmedia Storytelling in Russia

Within transmedia experiences, a story takes advantage of different media platforms to be developed in an effective way. However, the approach requires a prepared target audience. If the audience doesn't have technical access to the platforms involved in the project, if the audience is not ready to migrate from one platform to another, be active in the process of consumption and generate content inside the universe of transmedia narrative, then the project will face difficulties.

According to FOM data ("Internet v Rossii," 2014), at the end of 2013 half of the adult Russian population regularly consumed media content online. About 46% of Russians aged above 18 used the Internet daily and 57% went online at least once a month. The analytical report by iKS-Consulting ("Rossiyane Stali Rezhe," 2013) states that 59% of Russians aged over 45 years-old consume video content exclusively on television, while the same is relevant only for 5% of Russians aged 15 to 24. Moreover, the report notes that the cross-platform video consumption is detected first of all among those

respondents who do not consume video content on television (ibid.).

Thus, the Internet penetration in Russia is deeply generalized but significantly differs in various age groups. Television remains the main information source for the majority of Russians but its regular viewer is aged above 45 and is not inclined to cross-platform media consumption. In these circumstances, Russian TV channels would exclude the substantial part of their regular audience from their projects if the audience was forced to go beyond the platform of television broadcast. Meanwhile the younger audience does give TS an opportunity to be employed in Russian media market.

2.2.1. Who is John Galt? Red Quest, Season One

John Galt is a protagonist of Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), the designer of revolutionary motion machine powered by ambient static electricity, almost limitless source of energy. As a symbol of Rand's rational individualism, the engineer refused to proceed with a prototype of the motor and left the company when the new owners proclaimed the socialist principle"from each according to his ability, to each according to his need". He took his knowledge of the motor into a secret place in the mountains of Colorado, where he was then joined by other genius scientists, businessmen and artists who escaped from the collectivist society where the products of their intellect and talents would be and were declared a public property. And the world started collapsing as the society of expropriators was left with nothing new to expropriate. Dagny Taggart, the operating vice president of Taggart Transcontinental, who desperately struggled with the socialist government to save her railroad company, accidentally found the drawings of the motor, and then started searching for the mysterious inventor and

everyone who could help her to fight, but had already decided to escape.

The story of John Galt and Dagny Taggart is an intertextual background of the pioneer Russian transmedia project *Red Quest*. In September 2010, the project was launched by MTS Company, the major Russian mobile operator. The project was planned as a marketing campaign of *Red Energy* mobile tariff targeted to the younger audience. During the quest, players had to search for one of the Guardians - who know the secret of unlimited energy source - in order to persuade him that the world deserves to be saved.

In the first "teaser" phase of the quest, preliminary games were held in five major Russian cities (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Kazan, and Novosibirsk) to spark people's interest in the project and direct them to the official Website of *Red Quest*. The phase lasted for a month.

In the second "reveal" phase, the big game was held all over the country. Firstly teams of participants had to register on the Website. Each day from September 20 to December 3, 2010, two tasks were posted on the Website and its mobile version to be performed by teams. One of the tasks could be completed online. In order to perform another one, teams had to go offline. Generally, the players were asked to find hidden codes or objects in the streets of Russian cities, shoot photos or videos of the items and upload them to the Website as a proof that the task has been completed. The Website provided users with the capability of generating personalized videos and sharing them with social networks users, which worked out to promote the project online. While performing tasks, teams got game points. As long as it mattered how quickly the tasks are performed, players were motivated to use *Red Energy* plan with unlimited Internet traffic for uploading the content. Moreover, clues and additional points were received by the calling plan users.

TV broadcast and social networks were involved in the transmedia structure of the project as well. The Guardian's messages were aired on TNT channel. Communities and applications of *Red Quest* were created in the most popular Russian social network, Vkontakte. The application was installed by over 800,000 users and the number of the community subscribers exceeded 318,000 people.

During the game, about 3,500,000 unique users have visited the official Website of the project and its mobile version. More than a million players registered. The sales of *Red Energy* mobile tariff plan have increased by 20% and the churn rate decreased by 15% ("V MTS rasskazali o keise Red Quest," 2011).

2.2.2. The Second Season of Red Quest: Transformation

In April 2011, the second season of *Red Quest* started as Decepticons from the fictional universe of the *Transformers* declared war on the human race. At this time, the advertising campaign of *Red Energy* tariff plan unfolded through offline quest activities, Websites, social networks, a movie and TV show. Firstly about 20,000 players were asked to find the fragments of decepticon mask in the streets of nine Russian cities to stop the invasion of *Transformers*. However, when put together, the mask activated Decepticons' sparks that spread all over the country. The players had to proceed with fighting on the platform of *Red Quest* application in Vkontakte social network. Simultaneously, the Website of the project informed players about new tasks to be performed in city space. The mobile geo-location app of the quest was utilized in city streets in order to find the sparks, which could be deactivated in MTS stores. During the quest, the movie of *Transformers:*

Dark of the Moon was premiered with a secret message included. The message was another task the players had to complete during the quest hunt. Lastly, 12 episodes of *The Game* TV show were aired on NTV Channel. In the show, two teams were "armed" with MTS mobile capabilities to guide guest celebrities like characters. With the team's help, celebrities had to perform extreme tasks in locations such as a military range, a warship, and an abandoned factory.

The second wave of *Red Energy* advertising campaign resulted in 2,6 million registered players from 209 cities, one million active players and 26,561 UGC units. MTS network traffic increased by 20%, year to year revenue increased by 12% and ARPU (average revenue per user) increased by 40% among the registered users (Smirnov, 2011).

2.2.3. True Love

True Love became the next noteworthy transmedia advertising campaign in the country. The joint project of CTC Media Inc., Russian mass media corporation specialized in entertainment content, and *Lubimy* (Russian: "Любимый", translated: "Beloved", "Favorite") brand of juice drinks by PepsiCo, was launched in October 2012 and applied platforms such as online communities in Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki (popular Russian social networks), a channel in Videomore video aggregator, and CTC and Domashny TV channels.

First *True Love* communities in social networks aggregated users' personal love stories. About 2,000 video, photo and textual stories available for commentaries and discussion were posted by users on the platforms of *True Love* during this phase of the campaign. In the next phase, 50 stories

were chosen by *True Love* producers to be shot by the crew of the project. One minute versions of the episodes have been aired on CTC Channel daily from November 17 to December 12, 2012. The full versions (four minute videos) of the episodes were available on the Web-sources of the project. As a result of the advertising campaign, 15 million contacts with target audience were received by *Lubimy* brand through online and TV extensions of the advertising campaign.

Besides *Red Quest* and *True Love*, there are other transmedia projects implemented in Russia. As mentioned earlier, TS capabilities were utilized by Alexei Navalny grassroots election campaign in 2013, in order to gain access to different groups of voters. In Bashkortostan (a Russian federal subject), *Big Bag* transmedia project was performed in 2013. The narrative of the show unfolds across social media platforms, YouTube channel, local TV and radio broadcast. In addition, TS was applied by Channel One, major Russian TV broadcaster, to the second season of Russian adaptation of The Voice international franchise.

Thus, during the last years, a growing interest in transmedia practices was evinced by Russian media production. Yet there are factors constraining the development of the tendency. Firstly, the Russian online media market is relatively immature. "Traditional" media are still utilized by the substantial proportion of Russians as the only source of information. Secondly, the growth of the Russian online media market is restricted by the government policy, which has been drastically tightening control over the Internet in the last years. In December 2013, Russia's major news agency RIA Novosti, a pioneer of many multimedia innovations on the Russian media market, was reorganized. The editor-in-chief of the agency was replaced by Dmitry

Kiselev, the Russian infamous TV propagandist. In January 2014, the four main cable providers cut *Dozhd,* the largest Russian independent channel, from their packages. The channel lost advertisers, and now is trying to apply crowdfunding techniques in order to survive. In March 2014, Galina Timchenko, the editor-in-chief of Lenta.ru, the most prominent Russian online news media, was fired once the Website published an interview with the leader of Ukrainian "Right Sector", which displeased the government officials. In April 2014, Pavel Durov, the founder of Vkontakte social network, had to step aside as CEO of the company due to the Russia's Federal Security Service pressure, stating that "unfortunately, the country is incompatible with Internet business at the moment" (Lunden, 2014).

2.3. *The Voice* Format

The Voice format was originally created by John de Mol and first aired from September 2010 to January 2011 on national Dutch television. The first season of *The Voice of Holland* evolved through several rounds. During the five *Blind Auditions* episodes, the five famous Dutch musicians (Roel van Velzen, Jeroen van der Boom, Angela Groothuizen and Nick & Simon), who worked together in the project, selected the singers that would participate in their teams. Compared with widely known singing contests such as *The X Factor* and *American Idol*, the distinctive feature of *The Voice* format auditions was that the *coaches* could not see the contestants, and had to rely exclusively on how they sound. As the teams of each coach had been formed with 14 singers, the show proceeded with *Battle* rounds. During these rounds, pairs of singers were competing in duets. Thus, half of the contestants had

been eliminated. *The Sing Off* round was designed to follow *Battles* and cut the number of contestants from seven to six in each team. With this purpose, only two singers of each team had to get through this additional round. *The Sing Offs* were followed by seven *Live shows*. This time, solos had to be performed by each of the remaining contestants. The winners were determined by public votes via telephone and SMS, and by the coaches' vote. Semi-final and Final elimination episodes concluded the first season of *The Voice of Holland*.

Besides TV broadcasted episodes, the capabilities of iTunes platform were utilized by the first season of *The Voice of Holland.* During the whole season, studio versions of the songs performed by the contestants were available to be purchased on iTunes online store. In total, 30 of the show's singles reached the Top 100 download charts ("And the voice of Holland is," 2011). Ben Saunders, the winner of the contest, had "two of his singles peaking at number one; being the first Dutch artist to do so" (ibid.).

The show demonstrated its ability to deal with the changes, which had already occurred in global media consumption by the end of the first decade of the century. A few days after the final episode had been aired, the broadcaster stated that *The Voice of Holland* was "the first show in the world where online and offline tools were used so extensively, largely contributing to the success of the show. Radio, social networks such as Hyves, Facebook, Twitter or even YouTube, iTunes and of course the show's own website were all used to provide fans with the latest news, developments, videos, singles and gossip" (ibid.). Indeed, the growing power of social media communications, multi-screen media consumption and the increasing number of digital sales in music industry were took into account by the original

format. Social networks communities, YouTube channel and iTunes online digital media store as well as "traditional" TV and radio broadcast were designed to be the basic platforms of the format. *The Voice of Holland* resulted in extremely high ratings (the final episode attracted about 3,744,000 viewers) and gave the status of "the best watched talent show on Dutch TV ever" to the show ("Rating Record 'The Voice of Holland'," 2010; "'The Voice of China'," 2012).

Nowadays the show has turned into the wide franchise network of local adaptations with as many as 49 national versions presented all over the world. The basics of *The Voice* narrative, dramaturgy, characters and aesthetics are under the protection of *the Bible* of the show. Nevertheless, the adaptations differ in the number of episodes and contestants, particular rules, platforms and extensions.

The Voice USA is probably one of the most innovative adaptations of the format. In addition to telephone and Website voting capabilities, it is possible for the audience of *The Voice USA* to vote for their favorites by buying the contestants' songs on iTunes. Moreover, if a contestant rises to the tops of iTunes charts with his or her song, the votes casted on the online store multiply by five. This helps *The Voice USA* to boost people's voting activities, and gives priority to those contestants, who will actually sell.

Facebook's timeline app of *The Voice USA* is another platform of the show, which not just encourages fans to vote, but gives them an opportunity to explore the project in-depth. According to Vivi Zigler, president of NBC Universal Digital Entertainment, the broadcaster of *The Voice USA*, "This app gives (...) fans another way to connect and share. From declaring their favorite artist to discovering friends' preferences to interacting with more content, the

app creates a fully social online voting experience" (Murphy, 2012). In the sixth season of the contest, the visitors of *The Voice USA* Website were provided with opportunity to choose which songs the finalists of the contest should sing. In order to pick the song, it was required to login to personal Facebook account and post a link to the Website. Thus, the Website polls were capable of engaging the audience with the show and promoting *The Voice USA* in social media.

Social media activities play an extremely important role in *The Voice USA* adaptation of the format. All the coaches - even if they are global stars such as Christina Aguilera or Shakira - are obliged to have and regularly update their Facebook timelines and Twitter accounts with the posts featuring *The Voice USA* developments. As of the end of May, 2014, the Facebook page of Christina Aguilera ("Christina Aguilera," n.d.), the long-time coach of *The Voice USA*, is liked more than 23,000,000 times, and this huge army of fans is now available to the show. The Website also supports the show's social media strategies. The latest posts and tweets of the show coaches and contestants are aggregated in *The Home of The Voice Family* page of *The Voice USA* Website (http://www.nbc.com/the-voice).

The Great Britain version of *The Voice* format provides fewer capabilities of voting. Nevertheless, both more "traditional" telephone vote and online vote are supported by the adaptation. In order to facilitate the users' experience, new interactive functions were designed in the mobile application of the last season of *The Voice UK*. By means of the app, it was possible to rate *The Voice UK* performances with the "rate-o-meter" function, vote in the polls, join the fan walls, and play *The Voice UK* trivia quiz ("The Voice UK App," n.d.). Social networks are also utilized by the *The Voice UK*.

Interestingly, Kylie Minogue, the coach of 2014 season of *The Voice UK*, acts as a coach of Australian adaptation of the format simultaneously. Thus, her Facebook official page ("Kylie Minogue," n.d.) accumulates the fans of both Britain and Australian versions of the show, and creates *The Voice* international fan community. As mentioned before, the faithful fans are always inclined to extend the boundaries of their favorite storyworlds. Therefore, *The Voice* fans do not necessarily stint themselves with their national versions of the show. Even in Russia, *The Voice USA* fan community in Vkontakte social network is followed by more than 24,000 users. There are several English-language adaptations of *The Voice* currently existing, and social media are capable of combining their audiences together.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Methods & Rationale

Primary data collection is a crucial aspect of this research project. According to the objectives of the thesis, the following qualitative methods were applied: Method of participant observation, semi-structured expert interviews, case study and transmedia project design analytical model. The first two research methods are capable of enriching *The Voice Russia* case study with relevant data on the subject of the research. Transmedia project design analytical model is applied to *The Voice Russia* case study in order to summarize and analyze the data previously collected with the other methods.

The term "participant observation" was coined by Bronislaw Malinowski (1920) and first applied by the researcher while studying indigenous culture of Melanesian tribes. Thus, the method of participant observation is rooted in the early 20th Century ethnographic researches. Malinowski had spent years living on Trobriand Islands with natives, trying to immerse himself into the flow of their daily lives and properly document what he could see, avoiding his own preconceptions. As defined later by Hargreaves:

> The method of participant observation leads the investigator to accept a role within the social situation he studies: he participates as a member of the group while observing it. In theory, this direct participation in the group life permits an easy entrance into the social situation by reducing the resistance of the group members; decreases the extent to which the investigator disturbs the 'natural'

situation, and permits the investigator to experience and observe the group's norms, values, conflicts and pressures, which (over a long period) cannot be hidden from someone playing an in-group role. (1967: 193)

In order to see what one of the main advantages of participatory observation research method is, it is relevant to consider the so-called *Hawthorne effect*. The term was coined by Henry A. Landsberger, who has conducted the widely known experiment in 1924–1932 at *Hawthorne Works* electric factory. The experiment was to show if the factory workers' productivity will rise or fall depending on the light intensity. According to the experiment, it was found that the productivity tends to rise for those, who worked in higher levels of light. Surprisingly, the effect vanished as the experiment had been closed. Landsberger concluded that the changes in productivity occurred "due to the subject's knowledge that he or she is being studied" (Fox et al., 2008). Eventually it can become difficult to be natural in front of photo or video camera. It takes time to get used to and forget about being observed. That is what the method of participant observation is about. It makes an observer "invisible" for the object of observation, and therefore makes it easier for the object to act naturally in front of the observer. As a result, the authentic, unbiased information about the object of study can be documented by the researcher.

The method of participant observation is applied in the thesis in order to provide the analytical model with additional data on how producers of the project collaborate with the audience on set and in social networks, as well as reveal some hidden aspects of *The Voice Russia* production practices. During

the process of collecting data, the rehearsals of the second season of *The Voice Russia* were observed from December 5th to December 26th, 2013, and the Live shows on December 13th and on December 20th, 2013.

The Voice Russia rehearsals occurred on set of Live shows on Thursdays and lasted all day long until night. The day of rehearsal was divided in four periods of two hours. Each out of four coaches had to participate in the rehearsal of his or her team members within a certain time frame. Valeria Buravina and Maria Morozova, who are the only two managers of Channel One Internet Department communicating with the audience of the broadcaster on the Internet, attended the rehearsals in order to take pictures and post them in the social network communities of the show, to talk with the contestants and get informed of the news and developments on the show. For them, the presence on set was also a participatory observation.

As reported by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 93), there are four *stances* of the observer involved in participatory observation: Complete participant; participant as observer; observer as participant; and the complete observer (Kawulich, 2005). Regarding to the stances, the rehearsals of the show were observed by me from the complete participant's and participant-as-observer's perspectives. In the first stance, my research activities were concealed. It was possible for me to act on set like an Internet Department employee, take pictures and upload them to the Vkontakte timeline of the show (with the assistance of Valeria Buravina and Maria Morozova), attend the meetings of *The Voice Russia* producers and the contestants, talk to the crew, etc., preserving my incognito. The rehearsals disclosed how much attention was paid by *The Voice Russia* director, Ildus Kurmaleev, to the visual part of the show, for instance. Visual themes for large LED displays

were selected according to the spirit of each particular song. The contestants had to be on set dressed in what they would be wearing during the show.

At the same time, Valeria Buravina and Maria Morozova were informed about my research objectives. Therefore, I was capable of introducing myself into the process and clarifying some questionable aspects of the production practices with their assistance.

In addition, the two *The Voice Russia* Live shows, one quarter-final and one semi-final, were observed by me as complete participant. A live broadcast is rare on the Russian federal channels. Therefore, it is always a challenge for a broadcaster to air live programs. Nevertheless, Channel One demonstrated to be highly qualified in live format. The first season of *The Voice Russia* is well remembered for having remarkably proven the fact that the first live episode of the season was actually live. The process had been managed so well that Ksenia Larina (2012), one of the best Russian TV critics, questioned on her Twitter timeline if this was a live broadcast. Just in a few minutes her doubts were swept away, when Dmitriy Nagiev, the host of the show, had responded to her on the air.

During the participant observations of the Live shows, the focus was in exploring how the broadcaster communicates with spectators on set. Fans had to be on set two hours before the show went live. Then there was a period when the spectators were taught how to participate in the process, what the countdown on large LED displays means, when it is needed to start applauding, etc. Before the show started, the audience on set was warmed up by entertainers supported by the orchestra. However, taking photos of themselves sitting in the famous red chair seemed to be the main

entertainment that the audience was interested in. That was the way how *The Voice Russia* fans could follow the TS principle of *extractability*.

Unfortunately, it was prohibited to use mobile during the show. Therefore, I could not compare the Twitter live report on the episode webcasted by *The Voice Russia* social media marketing manager Valeria Buravina, with what was happening on set. However, the tweets of *The Voice Russia* fans had been shown on LCD monitors on the balcony of the contestants during almost the whole semi-final episode. Then this observation was compared with video of the aired episode. It was found that the tweets were not shown on TV. In the final episode, they were aired just a couple of times.

Semi-structured expert interviews were also applied in the thesis. Generally, interviews are "discussions, usually one-on-one between an interviewer and an individual, meant to gather information on a specific set of topics. Interviews can be conducted in-person or over the phone. Interviews differ from surveys by the level of structure placed on the interaction" (Harrell & Bradley, 2009: 6). There are three types of interview modes with regard to the amount of control put on the respondent (see Table 1).

With unstructured interviews, the conversation is free to go in any directions preferred by the respondent. The researcher has a minimum control over the track of interview. For instance, in personality psychology, the method of unstructured interviews can be applied in order to explore free associations of the patient inner world. By contrast, the method of structured interviews is the most controlled type of interview. As Harrell and Bradley note, "In structured interviews, the questions are fixed and they are asked in a specific order. Multiple respondents will be asked identical questions, in the

same order" (ibid.: 28). The problem with this mode of interviews is that the personality of the respondent, his or her attitudes and motivations remain unobserved. In addition, structured interviews are not capable of recording unique knowledge of a particular respondent. It cannot explore the answers in depth as well. That is the reason why the method of semi-structured interviews was chosen to be applied to the research.

Table 1 – Amount of control exercised determines place on interview continuum (Harrell & Bradley, 2009: 25)
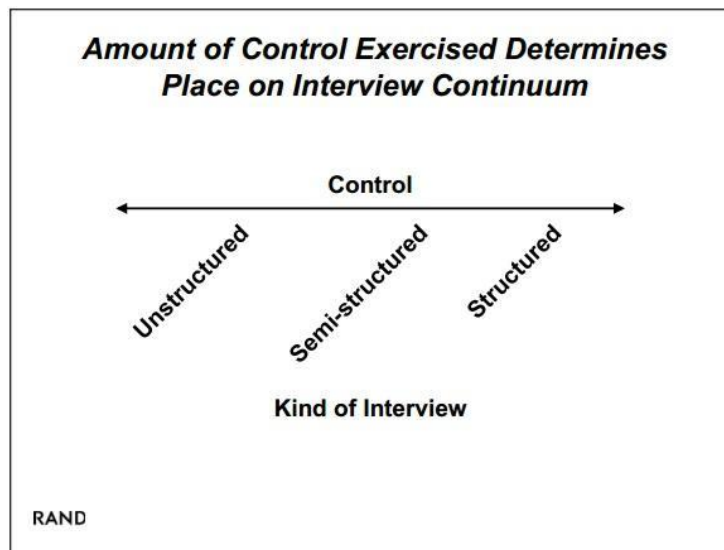
Semi-structured interview is a particular mode of interview, in which "a guide is used, with questions and topics that must be covered" (ibid.: 27). With semi-structured interviews, the conversation is guided by the researcher according to the prearranged plan of topics. *Probing questions* are utilized in order to direct the respondent to specific fields, the researcher is interested in. Therefore, the method is flexible enough to observe the specificity of each respondent and enrich the thesis with distinctive information and relevant data on the second season of *The Voice Russia*.

Semi-structured *expert* interviews are the subclass of semi-structured interview as a general concept. For the thesis, two expert interviews were conducted to gather background information on the second season of *The Voice Russia*, *i.e.* expert knowledge, facts and descriptions of *The Voice Russia* production processes. Firstly, the structures of the interviews were designed with specific topics and questions to be observed (see Appendices A & B). The specificity of each respondent was taken into account by the topics and questions prepared for the interviews.

In the first semi-structured interview, Mauritz Briet, Talpa Media Holding consultant, acted as a respondent. Talpa Media Holding holds the rights to *The Voice* international franchise, and provides local production companies with the range of services, aimed at facilitating the process of adaptation and protecting the basics of *The Voice* format. Mr. Briet participated as an advisor in the process of the second season of *The Voice Russia* adaptation. Therefore, he is a unique interviewee, who is aware of both the story of *The Voice Russia* creation and the particular features of the format, which the Russian adaptation is based on.

Mr. Briet is not a permanent Russian resident and could not be reached in Moscow since the second season of the show has come to an end in December 2013. Therefore, after a short email exchange with Mr. Briet, it was decided to conduct the interview via Skype video chat. The video chat conversation started at appointed time on March 23, 2014 and lasted for an hour. The conversation was recorded using specific software dedicated to this purpose. The main topics of the semi-structured interview were designed to compare TS features of the second season of *The Voice Russia* with the basics of *The Voice* franchise format, to explore the role of online extensions in the

second season of *The Voice Russia,* and to clarify how the show unfolds across different media platforms, among other charactistics (see Appendix A). The results of the interview are utilized in *The Voice Russia* case study presented in the thesis.

Valeria Buravina, Social Media Marketing Manager of Channel One, participated in the second semi-structured interview conducted for this thesis. Mrs. Buravina manages all the social media platforms of *The Voice Russia*, *i.e.* social media communities of the show in Facebook, Vkontakte, Twitter and Odnoklassniki. Her main task is to communicate with the audience of the show, posting official information, photos and videos on the timelines of *The Voice Russia*, designing online vote polls, and collecting fan art, for instance. Therefore, she is qualified to answer questions about the specificities of the social media extensions of the show. She is familiar with particular features of *The Voice Russia* online audiences as well. The structure of the interview (see Appendix B) included the major topics to be discussed. It was important to get the information on how online platforms of the show enrich the project with content, who is the audience of *The Voice Russia* online platforms, and how online media audiences of *The Voice Russia* relate to the audiences of "traditional" media extensions of the project. The interview was conducted in Mrs. Buravina's house on April 10, 2014. It lasted for one hour and a half, and provided the research with accurate information and analytics from inside the production.

The transmedia project design analytical model by Renira Gambarato (2013: 89-95) is applied as the main research method of *The Voice Russia* case study presented in the empirical part of the thesis. While several alternative approaches related to the analysis of TS are relevant only to some aspects of

TS (narrative, business model, or media platforms, for instance), the chosen model differentiates itself by being the only methodology specific for analyzing TS as a whole and considering various dimensions typical for transmedia projects. The results of the most significant academic studies on TS by Henry Jenkins (2006), Geoffrey Long (2007), Christy Dena (2009), and Robert Pratten (2011), among others are incorporated in the model. The method allows exploring each transmedia component of the second season of *The Voice Russia* and overviewing the project as a whole. Table 2 presents the structure of the applied analytical model:

Table 2 – Concise description of the transmedia project design analytical model (Gambarato, 2014)

Nr.	Topic	Practicable questions
1	**Premise and purpose** State clearly what it is about and the reason why the project exists.	What is the project about? Is it a fiction, a non-fiction or a mixed project? What is its fundamental purpose? Is it to entertain, to teach or to inform? Is it to market a product?
2	**Narrative** The structure storyworlds evoke in the transmedia milieu.	What are the narrative elements of the project? What would be the summary of its storyline? What is the time-frame of the story? What are the strategies for expanding the narrative? Are negative capability and migratory cues included? Is it possible to identify intermedial texts in the story?
3	**Worldbuilding** A storyworld or story universe should be robust enough to support expansions, going above and beyond a single story.	When does the story occur? Which is the central world where the project is set? Is it a fictional world, the real world or a mixture of both? How it is presented geographically? Is the storyworld big enough to support expansions?
4	**Characters** The features of the characters and the way they appear across all the platforms should be in unison.	Who are the primary and secondary characters of the story? Does the project have any spin-offs? Can the storyworld be considered a primary character of its own? Can the audience be considered a character as well?
5	**Extensions** Transmedia storytelling involves multiple media in which the storyworld will be unfolded and experienced.	How many extensions does the project have? Are the extensions adaptations or expansions of the narrative through various media? Is each extension canonical? Does it enrich the story? Do the extensions have the ability to spread the content and

		also to provide the possibility to explore the narrative in-depth?
6	**Media platforms and genres** A transmedia project necessarily involves more than one medium and can also embrace more than one genre (science fiction, action, comedy, etc.).	What kind of media platforms (film, book, comics, games, and so forth) are involved in the project? Which devices (computer, game console, tablet, mobile phone, etc.) are required by the project? How does each platform participate and contribute to the whole project? What are their functions in the project? Is each medium really relevant to the project? What is the roll-out strategy to release the platforms? Which genres (action, adventure, detective, science fiction, fantasy, and so forth) are present in the project?
7	**Audience and market** Scoping the audience is fundamental to more appropriately deliver the transmedia experience. TS involves some level of audience engagement.	What is the target audience of the project? What kind of "viewers" (real-time, reflective, and navigational) does the project attract? Do other projects like this exist? Do they succeed in achieving their purpose? What is the project's business model? Revenue-wise, was the project successful? Why?
8	**Engagement** All the dimensions of a transmedia project, at a lower or higher level, are implicated in the experience people will have when engaging with the story.	Through what point of view (PoV) does the audience experience this world: First-person, second-person, third-person, or a mixture of them? What role does the audience play in this project? What are the mechanisms of interaction in this project? Is there also participation involved in the project? Does the project work as cultural attractor/activator? Are there UGC related to the story (parodies, recaps, mash-ups, fan communities, etc.)? Does the project offer the audience the possibility of immersion into the storyworld? Does the project offer the audience the possibility to take away elements of the story and incorporate them into the everyday life? Is there a system of rewards and penalties?
9	**Structure** The organization of a transmedia project, the arrangement of its constituent elements and how they inter-relate to each other can offer concrete elements to be analyzed.	When did the transmediation begin? Is it a pro-active or retroactive project? Is this project closer to a transmedia franchise, a portmanteau transmedia story, or a complex transmedia experience? Can each extension work as an independent entry point to the story? What are/were possible endpoints of the project? How is the project structured?
10	**Aesthetics** Visual and audio elements of a transmedia project should also contribute to the overall atmosphere and enhance the experience spread throughout multiple media platforms.	What kinds of visuals are being used (animation, video, graphics, a mix) in the project? Is the overall look realistic or a fantasy environment? Is it possible to identify specific design styles in the project? How does audio work in this project? Is there ambient sound (rain, wind, traffic noises, etc.), sound effects, music, and so forth?

3.2. *The Voice Russia* **Case Study & Rationale**

The Voice Russia is a reality singing competition, an adaptation of *The Voice* international franchise. The second season of the show was presented by Channel One on air, in social networks, and on the Website of the show in the autumn 2013. The narrative of the second season of *The Voice Russia* unfolds through weekly episodes and documentaries aired by the broadcaster. The online extensions of the project include online conferences on the Website, additional videos, reports and spoiler discussions in social networks, for instance.

In order to capture the complexity of the second season of *The Voice Russia*, the project is analyzed in the case study. The case study as a method is highly relevant to this research, which is aimed at exploring specific transmedia features of *The Voice Russia*. According to Susan K. Soy, "Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research" (1997).

The research follows a *deductive approach* (Schutt, 2006) to the case study as a method. First, the hypotheses were proposed in the introduction of this thesis, and then the data was collected and analyzed in order to justify the hypotheses or reject them. In order to perform *The Voice Russia* case study, particular research questions were determined and defined, preparations had been made before collecting the data (e.g. the guides of semi-structured interviews were designed), the data was collected through interviews and participant observation, the analysis of the data was performed through the instrumentality of the transmedia project design analytical model by Gambarato, and the research findings were defined.

As mentioned before, there are just a few Russian media projects applying TS techniques, *e.g. Red Quest*, *True Love,* and *Big Bag*. Among them, the second season of *The Voice Russia* distinguished itself by being one of the most successful TV projects of the last years in terms of viewing figures. The show received positive publicity and attained the highest rating among other programs ("Samie Reitingovie, 2013") on the Russian television, which makes it even more relevant to analyze *The Voice Russia* transmedia experience. Importantly, the show was adapted by Channel One, which is believed to be the most popular national TV channel[2] and a standard-bearer for the Russian television of high quality. Therefore, TS practices of the broadcaster have the potential to affect the generally accepted practices of the overall Russian media industry.

Significantly, compared to the first season of the show, transmedia practices were intensified by *The Voice Russia* producers in the second season of project. For instance, online conferences were introduced into the structure *The Voice Russia* extensions. The first *behind-the-scenes* documentary episode of the Russian adaptation of the show was aired on Channel One the day after the final episode of the first season. During the second season, documentary episodes have been aired on Channel One regularly. In addition, fan art aggregation was arranged by social media communities of *The Voice Russia* only in the second season of the show.

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2 The coverage of Channel One is 98,8% of total Russian population ("Sotsialny nefinansovy otchet," 2013).

4. Empirical Study

4.1. Transmedia Analysis of *The Voice Russia*

The second season of *The Voice Russia* is a reality singing contest, adapted by Channel One from *The Voice* format in 2013. The project managed to build on the success of the first season and to improve its TS practices from the perspective of extensions and platforms involved in the show. Since Channel One is a leading broadcasting TV channel in the country, its contribution to the progress of TS production in Russia is highly pertinent to be analyzed.

4.1.1. Premise and Purpose

In June 2013, Konstantin Ernst, CEO of Channel One, reported that the major TV broadcaster is planning to launch *First Digital* online channel that would meet the needs of the younger audience for non-linear and interactive TV broadcasting format:

> In the process of developing the project, we are going to use all modern media technologies in order to build direct and inverse connection with the younger audience addicted to innovations. It is not enough for this audience to simply receive streaming content, the audience wants to immerse deeper into a segment it is interested in. The audience wants to participate and have an impact. This will be television for people shaped by the Internet culture. ("Perviy Kanal," 2013)

As mentioned earlier, the average age of broadcast TV viewers in Russia is about 45 years-old. Since younger audience prefers online media in

detriment of "traditional" media, the audience of Russian TV channels is expected to get even older in the nearest future, and the number of viewers will start declining. In order to improve the situation, means for attracting younger audience has to be found by Russian broadcasters. On the other hand, the regular audience of major broadcasters migrates to online media. This follows from the data on the average age of Russian online media users that has been increasing significantly over the last years ("Internet-auditoriya v Rossii", 2014). Thus, it seems to be an appropriate time for Channel One to expand the business to online media platforms. *The Voice Russia* franchise serves to the purpose of reaching the younger audience, since the project embraces a variety of platforms.

The Voice Russia is a reality singing contest, which is aimed at finding young and talented Russian singers and giving them an opportunity to show their talent in singing competitions during the episodes of the show. In virtue of its nature, the project aims at entertaining, if taken from the perspective of the audience. Nevertheless, the significance of educational and enlightening function of the project has been frequently emphasized by the coaches of *The Voice Russia* contestants. According to them ("Golos. Vipusk", 2013), the show managed to share knowledge on musical compositions of high cultural value, *i.e.* widely known jazz standards, American oldies, Broadway hits, etc., with the audience.

Despite the fact that the Russian pop music industry faced criticism from the coaches for producing low-quality songs, far more Russian songs were used in the second season of the project compared with the first season. At *Battles,* a single-elimination phase of the contest, at least one of two songs was performed in Russian by each pair of contestants. At this phase of the contest, 14 out of 22 songs were performed in Russian. In quarters and semis,

half of the songs were performed in Russian: 12 out of 22 and 4 out of 8 songs respectively. One song in Russian was presented by each pair of contestants. Thus, the second season of *The Voice Russia* may be said to be aimed by Channel One at promoting Russian national culture as well. Mauritz Briet, Talpa Media Holding consultant who worked together with Channel One, gave reasons for having this kind of changes in the second season of the show:

> Channel One decided to increase the number of Russian songs in the second season of the project. Talpa always enforces *The Voice* format. At the same time, we are sure that a production company is more familiar with some national peculiarities of its audience. It has emerged from the talks that fifty-fifty ratio is optimal. (Briet, 2014)

The name of the project was translated into Russian for the adaptation of the show. Therefore, in the country *The Voice* project is known as "Golos" (Russian: Голос; translated: Voice).

If taken from the perspective of the broadcaster's marketing goals, the second season of *The Voice Russia* was aimed at boosting Channel One's rating. Therefore, the project was designed to get the regular audience of the channel interested in the show, at the same time drawing attention of the younger audience of online media to the project. As it appears from rating figures, the goal was achieved. The second season of *The Voice Russia* managed to become one of the most significant shows on Russian television of 2013 in terms of rating figures. The final episode of the show had a share of 55,9% according to STI-rating ("Dannie STI," 2013).

Despite the fact that the show was not designed to market any products, the contestants were kind of products by themselves. *The Voice Russia* gave them access to the large audience of the show. Thus, those contestants, who became popular due to the contest, could expect their careers to develop successfully after the show. Official online communities of *The Voice Russia* have been collaborating with their fan communities during the season and still announce their concerts. Moreover, it was decided by *The Voice Russia* producers that the contestants will participate in an official concert tour of *The Voice Russia* after the show.

4.1.2. Narrative

The narrative of the second season of *The Voice Russia* starts with four coaches auditioning tens of male and female singers during the six weekly *Blind Auditions* episodes. Sitting in chairs with their backs to contestants, the coaches select singers to their teams. In the episodes of the next rounds (*Battles*, *Knockouts*, Quarter-finals, Semi-finals), teammates compete against each other in singing competitions in order to become the sole remaining contestant on his or her team. In the *Battles* and *Knockouts*, the winner was decided by the coaches. In Quarter-finals and Semi-finals the results of public vote via telephone and SMS were combined with the percentage given by the coaches. In the last episode, the four best singers (one of each team) competed to become "the voice" of the project and win the contract with Universal Music Russia ("Pobeditelem vtorogo sezona," 2013). In the home stretch, the winner was decided by telephone voting. In contrast to the last season of *The Voice USA* and *The Voice UK,* online vote was not practiced by the Russian adaptation. Also, the Russian adaptation did not employ any iTunes tools to

provide users with additional capabilities of influencing the results of the show.

The timeframe of the story was not restricted by the period of the show. The first TV episode of the second season of *The Voice Russia* was aired on September 6th, 2013. Nevertheless, the show started communicating with future audience of the season earlier than that date. Firstly, official social media communities of the first season were used by the second one. A few months before the first episode of the second season was broadcasted, the subscribers of *The Voice Russia* communities had been informed that it was possible to apply for having a preliminary audition for the forthcoming season. According to Valeria Buravina (2014), a substantial part of applications were received via social media communities of the show. As the show had come to an end, the social media communities proceeded to inform the audience of the contestants' concerts.

Despite the fact that the narrative of the show includes a single linear story tending to the final episode, the narrative exploits multiple extensions in order to extend the story beyond TV episodes. Between the episodes, the audience could stay in touch with the story and gain insights into *The Voice Russia* narrative watching *behind-the-scenes* weekly episodes and participating in the activities of fan communities. In addition, it was possible to communicate with the contestants during online conferences and learn the news of the project from online V-reports, for instance. The contestants kept in touch with their fans through online fan communities posting tweets and photos, and promoting their concerts. Personal profiles in Vkontakte and Facebook were utilized by some contestants in order to answer their supporters directly.

On the one hand, the second season of *The Voice Russia* has some of its extensions connected to each other by advanced advertisements and notifications, *e.g.* announcements on online conferences were reported directly by Channel One newscasts and *The Voice Russia* social communities. On the other hand, according to Valeria Buravina, no mention to *The Voice Russia* online communities was ever made by Channel One until the very last episodes of the show: "We failed to arrange a settlement with Facebook, Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki social networks. They are ready to exchange advertising space but not ready to pay" (2014). However, it was mentioned in the last episodes of the show that it was possible to watch the developments of the project in social networks via *голос* hashtag. Thus, migratory cues were implemented by the project as direct invitations to the other extensions rather than intriguing messages on how the narrative gaps can be closed. No deliberately hidden *negative capabilities* were designed by the project.

Intermediality of the second season of *The Voice Russia* involves a variety of intertexts. The second season of the show maintained the basic features from the previous season. The coaches and the host remained the same. The basics of the first season's rules, dramaturgy and aesthetics were abided. In order to take an advantage of the first season's success, its contestants appeared in the second season as reporters and guest stars. Despite being distinguished from the other adaptations of the format by some particular rules and the practices of communicating with audience, *The Voice Russia* originates from the same format and has much in common with them, *e.g.* fundamental purposes, basic storyline, aesthetics, etc.

Due to the language barrier, it is less probable for the Russian adaptation of the show to take an advantage of *The Voice* projects adapted abroad. However, *The Voice of Ukraine* is presented both in Ukrainian and

Russian, and performs Russian-language songs occasionally. Also, the second season of *The Voice Russia* is intermedial towards the pop music industry. Tens of widely known musical hits have been performed during the second season of the show. The repertoire of each contestant expressed his/her individuality and affected his/her own image.

4.1.3. Worldbuilding

The inner world of the second season of *The Voice Russia* consists of multiple extensions designed to support the storyline of the contest. But the universe of the second season of *The Voice Russia* goes far beyond the boarders of the project. Firstly, the outer universe of the project includes the previous season of *The Voice Russia*. The connection can be clearly seen in the example of *The Voice Russia* social media communities, which combined the audiences of both seasons. The social media communities of the first season of the show were used by the second one. As a result, the total number of subscribers of *The Voice Russia* official community in Vkontakte, for instance, has been increased by around 250,000 newcomers during the second season, and exceeded 400,000 users.

As mentioned earlier, a wide range of adaptations of the format are performed in tens of countries all over the world. The original show of the format is the first season of *The Voice of Holland* aired in 2010. Since then, another four seasons of *The Voice of Holland* were designed by Dutch television. Six seasons and three seasons of *The Voice* show were performed by American NBC and British BBC respectively. A total of about 56,000 users of Vkontakte social network are the members of Russian fan communities of *The Voice USA* and *The Voice UK*. Geographically, the universe of *The Voice* format includes 53 local adaptations covering more than half of the earth,

including China and Islamic countries such as Indonesia and Afghanistan (see Figure 7).
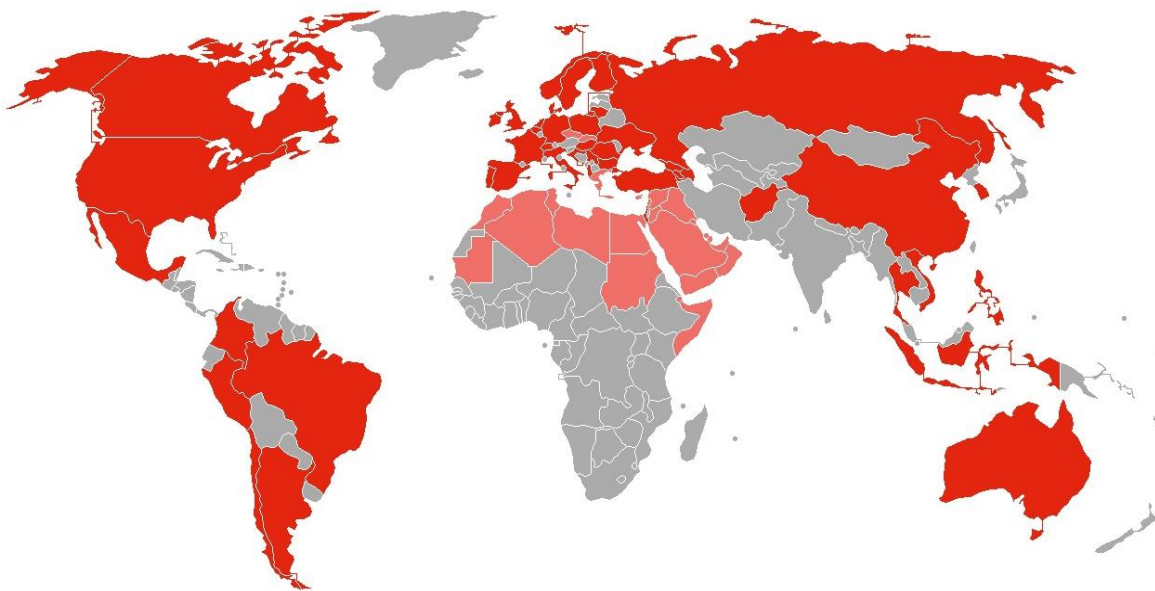

Figure 7. Location of different confirmed franchises of *The Voice*. Image source: ("The Voice World Map", n.d.)

The Voice Kids format is another extension of *The Voice* universe. The first season of *The Voice Kids Russia* was aired on Channel One in 2014 winter/spring season. The show was a spin-off of *The Voice Russia* and adhered to the rules and aesthetics established by *The Voice* franchise.

Since the end of 2013, fan adaptation of *The Voice* contest has been hold by The Faculty of Psychology in Higher School of Economics, Moscow ("Golos PSY," 2013). About 30 students participated in the contest, performing solo and duets. Vkontakte community of *The Voice PSY* was involved in the enterprise posting photos, videos and announcements.

The universe of *The Voice* is non-fictional. Moreover, the Russian version of the show was designed to affect the real life. The project was announced by Channel One to be "the main vocal show of the country" and

intended to introduce a new generation of pop stars. Thus, it was created to challenge no less than the whole Russian musical landscape.

4.1.4 .Characters

The primary characters of the project are Dmitriy Nagiev, who was the host of the show, four coaches (Dima Bilan, Pelageya, Leonid Agutin and Alexander Gradsky), 56 contestants distributed in each coach's team, and each team taken as a unit.

Figure 8. The four finalists of the second season of *The Voice Russia*: Gela Guralia (upper left), Nargiz Zakirova (upper right), Tina Kuznetsova (lower left), and Sergey Volchkov (lower right). Image sources: ("Gela Guralia," 2014; "Golos," 2013b; "Tina Kuznetsova," 2013; "Sergey Volchkov," n.d.)

However, the characters' activities were not equally distributed within *The Voice Russia* extensions. In opposition to some other adaptations of the format such as *The Voice USA* and *The Voice UK*, the coaches of *The Voice Russia* had no obligation to update their timelines in social networks with the posts picturing the project. As a result, Dima Bilan was the only coach who posted photos and messages on his Instagram account, while the personal pages of the other coaches were not involved in the process of sharing *The Voice Russia* content at all. By contrast, social media capabilities were

actively utilized by contestants. In order to be noticed by the audience, the singers shared their compositions and photos from shooting area and reached out to their fandoms asking to be voted for.

On February 28, 2013, the first season of *The Voice Kids Russia* debuted on Channel One. The show is a spin-off of *The Voice Russia* project. During the nine episodes 54 kids aged from seven to 14 years old competed against each other to pass through the elimination rounds of the singing contest. Based on the rules, aesthetics and previously known host and coaches of *The Voice Russia*, *The Voice Kids Russia* provided the enthusiasts of *The Voice* format with new experiences in the universe of the franchise. Besides TV episodes, the show was presented in Vkontakte. *The Voice Kids Russia* Vkontakte community entertained its audience with vote polls, posted episodes and photos the way *The Voice Russia* did. As by the end of May 2014, the community is subscribed by more than 200,000 users. Online communities of *The Voice Russia* were involved in sharing the content related to *The Voice Kids Russia* as well.

Online fandoms can be considered to be characters of the project as well. United by their enthusiasm for a contestant, fans discussed plans for forthcoming telephone voting, acted together to vote for their favorite singer in social media polls, etc.

4.1.5. Extensions

The second season of *The Voice Russia* consisted of the following extensions: Weekly TV episodes of the show, weekly TV documentary episodes, online conferences webcasted on the Website of the project, V-reports in social communities and on the Website of the show, spoiler

discussions in Vkontakte community of *The Voice Russia,* and Live reports on the episodes in Twitter and Vkontakte.

The first TV episode of the second season of *The Voice Russia* was aired on Channel One on Friday evening September 6th, 2013. The episode was the first of the six episodes of *Blind Auditions* shot previously in August. They were broadcasted on Channel One weekly from September 6th to October 11th, 2013. Each of the episodes lasted for almost two hours. The storyline of all the *Blind Auditions* episodes was similar. Firstly, a contestant presented oneself in a backstage room. Then s/he walked through the door to the stage and started singing a well-known song supported by an orchestral accompaniment. The four coaches had a couple of minutes to press the red button and turn in order to face the contestant. If no one turned, the contestant is not qualified for the project. Selected contestants go through to the next round of the show as members of one of the teams headed by the coaches.

Battles round was aired on Channel One from October 18th to November 8th, 2013, always on Friday evenings. The contestants were paired off and had to sing duets. Only one out of two duelists could remain in the project after the battle. However, new rules of the second season enabled each of the coaches to "steel" two contestants eliminated by their coach. Thus, by the end of the round, each of the four teams consisted of nine contestants. In opposition to some adaptations of *The Voice*, studio versions of the songs performed by the contestants during the *Battles* round were not recorded to be presented on iTunes. In the next rounds, iTunes capabilities were not utilized by the show as well.

Three episodes of *Knockouts* have been aired by the broadcaster during three weeks on Fridays from November 15th to November 29th, 2013. The nine contestants of each team were divided in triplets. The trios presented a

song each and waited for the decision of their coach, who had only two spots to be fulfilled. The six singers of each team, who have survived the *Knockouts,* went through to the quarters.

Two live quarter-finals of the second season of *The Voice Russia* were aired on December 6th and 13th, 2013. Again, the teammates were divided in triplets, but this time two out of three contestants had to be eliminated. The round of quarter-finals was the first one using public telephone vote. The coach had to divide 100% among the three contestants. Fifty, thirty and twenty percents were the options. The final result of each singer consisted of the sum of the percentage obtained from the coach and the percentage of telephone votes casted individually.

The live semi-final episode was aired on December 20th, 2013. In this round, one song was performed by each of the last two contestants of each team. The same voting system as the quarter-finals was applied, but the coaches had to divide 100% between two contestants of their teams, casting 60% to one of them and 40% to another. Thus, the best singer of each team could participate in the final.

The live final episode was aired on December 27th, 2013 and lasted for two hours and a half. During the marathon, two solos and one duet with the coach were performed by each of the four finalists. The final was the only episode of the second season of *The Voice Russia*, whose result was settled by the audience solely. About 1,000,000 votes had been cast for the four singers during the final. Sergey Volchkov became the winner of the contest with 75% of votes.

Each TV episode was supported with Live reports on Twitter and Vkontakte. While broadcasting the episodes, Channel One updated its timelines in Twitter and Vkontakte with videos of the performances, photos

and quotations taken from the episodes. Thus, the details on the show were available immediately. It was not necessary to watch the episodes in order to be informed of the last developments of the contest.

The first documentary episode of *The Voice Russia* was aired on Channel One right after the final episode of the first season of show, and was welcomed by the audience. In addition, during the first season, the audiences of the project in social networks have been asking *The Voice Russia* representatives to explore the backstage life of the show deeper, Valeria Buravina (2014) notes. Therefore, it was decided to proceed to shoot the documentary extension of the project in the second season. During the whole second season, *behind-the-scenes* weekly episodes have been aired on Channel One on Saturdays, the day after original episodes of the show were broadcasted. The extension shed light upon the off-screen production process and satisfied the curiosity of the viewers about the contestants' backstage life (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Nikolay Viktorov, the director of *behind-the-scenes* episodes of *The Voice Russia,* shooting an episode on set. Image source: (Medvedev, 2014b)

Seven one-hour live online conferences have been held during the second season of *The Voice Russia*. The extension was webcasted on the

Website of the Channel One on Thursday mornings. The participants of the show, Sergey Volchkov, Nadar Reviya, Tina Kuznetsova, Sharip Umkhanov, Gela Guralia, Nargiz Zakirova and Anton Belyaev, were the guests. Online conferences provided the audience with the possibility to explore the narrative in-depth discussing the personal life of the guest, his or her plans for the future, details on the show, etc. The format of online conferences is unique among the extensions of the other *The Voice* franchise adaptations.

Introduced to *The Voice* format by its *Bible,* V-reports were probably the most common extension of the franchise besides the TV episodes. During a short video, V-reporters conducted interviews with several contestants. Typically, the reports demonstrated a contestant having just performed a song and come to the next round or been eliminated. These most emotional moments revealed the character of the singer and provided the audience with opportunity to experience the emotions the contestant felt. V-reports appeared in social media communities of *The Voice Russia* several times a week.

Spoiler discussion was arranged by the administrators of Vkontakte community of *The Voice Russia* in order to manage spoiler information, which was posted by fans in the community occasionally. Spoiler discussions are considered to be a type of UGC. They provided fans with valuable and distinctive information about the episodes, having been already shot but still not broadcasted. As by the end of May, 2014, there were about 24,400 messages in the spoiler discussion of the second season of *The Voice Russia.*

TV episodes were the tentpole of the second season of the show, offering the audience a self-contained story. Documentary episodes, V-reports, online conferences, and spoiler discussions provided the audience with insights and supplementary data on the main story, encouraged fans to

generate content and share their feelings and knowledge about the project. All the extensions followed the cannon of the story.

The Voice Russia episodes were broadcasted simultaneously on Channel One and on the Website. The mobile application of the broadcaster also provided users with possibility to watch the episodes. In addition, the TV episodes of the show were posted on official social media communities of *The Voice Russia*. Webcasted episodes were no different from those aired on TV. Advertisement was removed from the episodes uploaded to online communities. Thus, webcasted episodes of the second season of *The Voice Russia* and the videos of the episodes were rather adaptations than expansions of the project.

4.1.6. Media Platforms and Genres

With regard to media platforms, the second season of *The Voice Russia* unfolds across TV broadcasting and several Internet platforms distinguished with their technological properties and capabilities, *i.e.* the Website of Channel One, the Website of *The Voice Russia*, the official channel of the project on YouTube, social communities in Vkontakte, Facebook, Odnoklassniki and Twitter, and mobile application of Channel One. Technological capabilities of each platform were utilized by the project in order to create a variety of distinctive units of content and engage the audience in the process of generating content. Mauritz Briet describes the strategy of the format on using multiple platforms:

> Our experience demonstrates that the combination of broadcasting television, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other platforms enriches the project. All these platforms are the basis of

The Voice format. We live in the era of social media and it's highly important to employ their capabilities. However, things change in time, new trends rise and every country has its own traditions of media consumption. We take into account when adapting *The Voice* and always introduce something new to the national versions of the show. (2014)

Among the other social media networks, *The Voice Russia* community in Vkontakte played a crucial role in online activities of the project. Vkontakte is the most popular in Russia and eighth most popular social networking Website in the world ("Top 15," 2014) with 60 million daily users ("LiveInternet Statistics," 2014). Among other functionalities, the network offers an opportunity for users to participate in open communities. Over 380,000 fans were united by the *group* of *The Voice Russia* in Vkontakte, which entertained the members with daily vote polls and spoiler discussions, aggregated fan art, posted video reports about the project and music videos of the contestants, and announced online conferences and TV episodes. Thus, Vkontakte community of *The Voice Russia* was used in two major ways. First, its capabilities were utilized to create a variety of distinctive content, including UGC. Second, the members were directed to the other platforms by announcements posted in the group.

Although television is an originally passive media (McLuhan, 1964) and there is no much room for activities in the most usual TV broadcasting, linear narrative and passive perception were exactly what was needed by the regular audience of Channel One. As mentioned before, regular audience of Russian national TV channels are neither inclined to migrate from one platform to another nor actively participate in TV shows. Therefore, the major

portion of *The Voice Russia* audience was composed of those who were involved in consumption of TV episodes only. According to Mauritz Briet, all the media types of *The Voice Russia* produced a perceptible effect on the show:

> Is the TV platform of *The Voice Russia* the basic one? Yes and no. Of course, it is hard to imagine the other platforms of the project functioning without TV broadcasted episodes. However, this is not to say that the other platforms have an auxiliary function. For instance, Facebook community of *The Voice Albania* has hundreds of thousands of subscribers. And this markedly affects the whole project indeed. Social media are the powerful tool for communicating with audience. Through the use of social media communities, the project is capable of creating a lot more content and entertainments than if it was presented on TV solely. This is true that *The Voice Russia* is better aimed at TV broadcast than the majority of European adaptations of the format. However, even now social media extensions play an important role in the project. (2014)

A variety of platforms involved in the second season of *The Voice Russia* were designed to distribute distinctive extensions of the show and attract the audiences of different media to the project. Since TV episodes were the tentpole of the show, television was meant to be its basic platform. However, the tentpole extension was available via both "traditional" television and new media platforms. Thus, it was possible for the audiences,

devoted to online media consumption, to engage with the main storyline of the contest.

As mentioned in the analysis of *The Voice Russia* narrative, the roll-out strategy of the second season of the show started before the first TV episode was aired. In *The Voice Russia* social media communities, the audience of the first season was warmed up and prepared for the second one. Simultaneously, *The Voice Russia* Website informed users about the forthcoming casting for the second season of project.

Surprisingly, the second season of *The Voice Russia* refers to the action genre. This is not coincidental that rounds of the singing competition were named *Battles* and *Knockouts.* For these rounds, the square-shaped stage was equipped with barriers, and reminded a boxing ring. In addition, aggressive red color was utilized by *The Voice Russia* as the basic color. The show also has much in common with the format of sports events or elimination tournaments. At the same time, the show is melodramatic. A valedictory speech of eliminated contestants was one of the most touching elements of the show. It made viewers to empathize with the contestants even more.

TV set, computer and mobile phone were required to consume all the project content. TV episodes were broadcasted in-parallel on Channel One and the Website of the broadcaster. Thus, TV set and computer were interchangeable for having access to the tentpole. TV episodes were available via the mobile application of Channel One as well. In addition, the extensions presented in social networks communities (V-reports, spoiler discussions, live Twitter reports, for instance) were available via the applications of relevant social networks.

4.1.7. Audience and Market

Despite online platforms being involved in the structure of the show, *The Voice Russia* is targeted to regular Channel One viewers primarily. Since the basic revenue of Channel One is derived from TV advertising, broadcast figures are the key performance indicator for the channel. Online platforms are deemed merchantable if they are reasonably fit for attracting new audiences to the programs broadcasted by Channel One.

Regarding the purpose of attracting and retaining the audience, *The Voice Russia* is aimed at *real-time viewers* (Murray, 1997), who are involved in the project constantly and enjoy each single episode; and at *reflective long-term viewers*, who wait for the story to go on. In the case of *The Voice Russia*, people's expectation for the final episode was the strongest motivator for proceeding with the project.

The regular audience of Channel One was to become the customer base of the show, while online extensions such as Web-conferences, V-reports and spoiler discussions were designed in order to get new audiences interested in the main narrative and entertain fans in between the TV episodes. As Valeria Buravina notes, it was also taken into account that the coaches have fandoms in social media: "When seeing the photos of their idols participating in *The Voice Russia*, the fans probably will try to know the project better" (2014).

According to Valeria Buravina, there are three key publics of *The Voice Russia* social media extensions: 1) The customer base of the project's social media extensions is built on the users who actively participate in the discussions in social networks. Most often they are inhabitants of Russian provinces. Usually it is difficult for them to get to the set of the program in Moscow. Therefore they put effort to find as much information about the project on the Internet as possible. As a consequence, this type of fans know about *The Voice Russia* more than anyone else; 2) the second kind of public

consists of those users who regularly take part in shooting episodes in the capacity of a live audience and share information with the others in spoiler discussions. Eventually they *broadcast* the event right from the set during the process of shooting; and 3) social media extensions of the project were utilized by its audience as a second screen as well. The largest part of the users was involved in social media activities visiting *The Voice Russia* group in Vkontakte mainly during and right after the TV episodes, willing to share emotions and opinions (ibid.).

Female users are the overwhelming majority of members of *The Voice Russia* social media communities. Valeria Buravina has also mentioned that the members of *The Voice Russia* social media communities are distinct from the audience of the entire project in that they take an interest in English-language music and are on average younger. Still the majority of the audience of the show is not registered in social networks (ibid.).

As mentioned before, there are other adaptations of the format. *The Voice USA* and *The Voice UK* are the most popular versions of the franchise. However, this is not to say that all the adaptations of *The Voice* are on an equal footing. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the level of Internet penetration is 80% even for the group aged 55-64. About 41% of those in group aged 65+ use the Internet ("Adult Media Use," 2012). Interestingly, 41% is close to the Russian average level of Internet penetration. The data shows that it is easier for BBC to unfold its adaptation of *The Voice* across new media platforms than for Channel One in Russia.

The second season of the project is a business venture. In contrast to *True Love* and *Red Quest* transmedia projects, *The Voice Russia* was not designed to be a part of marketing campaign and could not count on an income stream from an ordering company. However, this could not stop *The*

Voice Russia from being carried out, since the project scored extremely high on television audience rating scales.

Since view statistics of *The Voice Russia* Website were not taken into account for calculating the viewing figures, online adaptations of TV episodes did not influence the channel's advertising costs per rating point (CPRP). Web banners and built-in video ads were sold by Channel One separately from TV spots. Social media extensions of *The Voice Russia* were not monetized.

4.1.8. Engagement

Online Conferences

While producing online conferences of *The Voice Russia*, Creative Planning and Internet Department of Channel One was in close connection with the audience. The guests of the conferences were selected on the basis of user preferences. The number of video views in social media extensions, vote polls results and direct requests were taken into account. In the days prior to the next conference, an announcement of the event has been posted in social media communities in order to collect the maximum number of questions from the audience. Instead of preparing questions, it was necessary for the administrators of *The Voice Russia* social media communities to moderate the list of questions received and hand it to the conference guest. Questions could be asked by the audience during a conference as well.

Online conferences were broadcasted on the Website of the show and lasted for an hour. Aesthetics of the conference reminded a simple video Web chat (see Figure 10). No moderator services, commercials, station breaks or any other attributes of broadcasting were utilized by the extension. Sitting in a chair in front of a laptop, the guest was alone with the audience. On completion of the program, the record has been posted on the Website and in

social networks free to be commented on.

Figure 10. Screenshots of *The Voice Russia* Online-conferences. Image sources: ("Online-konferentsiya na Pervom," 2013; GelaG, 2013)

Spoiler Discussions

The first episodes of *The Voice Russia* (Blind Auditions, Battles, and Knockouts) were shot long before they were broadcasted. Thus, exclusive information on song choices and winners was available to the spectators in advance. In addition, the Eastern Russia residents watched TV episodes of the show a few hours earlier than the citizens of European part of the country due to the difference in time zones. In order to keep the content of TV episodes in secret, it was decided to create a special spoiler discussion in Vkontakte group of the project. According to the principle of informal mentorship by Jenkins et al. (2005), exclusive information was shared in the discussion by users familiar with the matter. As Valeria Buravina notes, "if users were not allowed discussing the rumors on the official platforms of *The Voice Russia*, they would do it somewhere else anyway" (2014).

Opinion Polls in Social Media Extensions

Voting is not specific to election practices exclusively and it often occurs in social media voting polls related to entertainment projects, especially if the destiny of a contestant is at stake. According to the first principle of participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2005), the voting procedure was observed by users through the instrumentality of Vkontakte poll statistics (see Figure 8) in order to ensure *fair play*. A few times the results of voting polls were cancelled by administrators of the community, when credible information about vote fraud was received from watchful users.
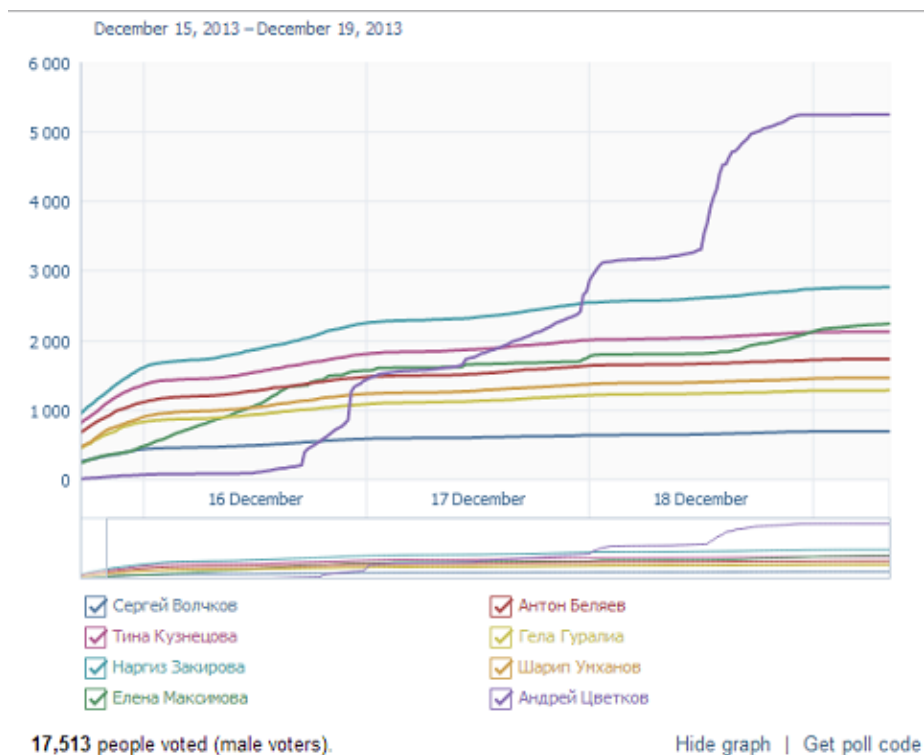

Figure 11. The graph of Vkontakte opinion poll portraying the vote stuffing.
Image source: ("Kto stanet pobeditelem Golosa-2," 2013)

Fan Art Aggregation

The willingness to create and share content is the basic feature of a participatory culture *prosumer*. Therefore it was decided by *The Voice Russia* communities to attract audience by fan art aggregation. Fan art of *The Voice*

Russia enthusiasts has been collected by Valeria Buravina from the mid second season (2014). The paintings and collages were posted at the albums of *The Voice Russia* official communities in Vkontakte, Facebook, etc.

Figure 12. Fan art featuring *The Voice Russia* coaches and host as characters of *Kolobok* Russian fairy tale. Image source: ("Golos," 2013a)

Telephone Voting

Telephone voting procedure was practiced in quarterfinals, semi-finals and the final of the show. About 1,000,000 SMS messages were received during the final episode. Despite fandoms being out of the project structure, an effect of fandom solidarity shall be included in the list of dramatic hooks utilized by *The Voice* format. Jenkins (2006) defines as cultural attractors and cultural activators, the ability to projects have to unite people with common interests and provide them online tools to express themselves. That is exactly what *The Voice Russia* fandoms represent. References to fan communities were posted on *The Voice Russia* social media extensions in order to raise the wave of social activities inside the project. Mobilized by their fandoms,

members of online communities jointly supported a contestant with their votes on telephone voting and social media polls. In contrast to *The Voice USA* and *The Voice UK*, telephone voting was the only opportunity available for *The Voice Russia* fans to affect the fate of the contestants.

4.1.9. Structure

The Voice franchise structure is pro-active. Different media platforms and extensions were set into *The Voice* format initially. The first season of *The Voice of Holland* unfolded across TV episodes and V-reports, and utilized the capabilities of the Website of the show, radio broadcasting, social networks, and iTunes online store. Despite originally employing different media platforms and extensions, the second season of *The Voice Russia* is distinct from the first season in that the new extensions were designed inside the show (weekly *behind-the-scenes* episodes, online conferences). Moreover, as the second season had been advancing, it was decided to start aggregating fan art in social media communities of the show. Thus, the second season of *The Voice Russia* is pro-active, but flexible enough to add new extensions and the ways of communicating with the audience.

TS techniques are capable of satisfying the distinctive needs of active and passive media consumers. It was demonstrated by *The Voice Russia* that the audiences of both "traditional" and new media can be combined by Russian television in a single project. However, an appropriate transmedia structure is needed to be welcomed by regular TV viewers and Internet users.

Portmanteau transmedia structure includes a single story unfolded across multiple platforms. Migrating from one platform to another is a must for gaining a complete experience from a *portmanteau* project. If *The Voice Russia* was structured in this manner, it would be meaningless for the regular

audience of Channel One to consume TV episodes of the show solely (Pratten, 2011). Thus, *portmanteau* is not suitable structure for being applied by the channel.

By contrast, when participating in *franchise* transmedia projects, an individual avoids the need to cross the border of platforms for the purpose of enjoying a self-contained story. At the same time, *franchise* structure has additional self-contained extensions of the same storyworld presented on its other platforms. The structure of *The Voice Russia* has TV episodes as the only self-sufficient extension, while the other ones serve a purpose of providing the project with supplementary units of content instead of self-contained ones. In spite of this, the structure of the second season of *The Voice Russia* is closer to *franchise* structure than to *portmanteau.*

The strong TS feature of the show is that a single extension of the show could utilize the technical properties of distinctive platforms. In TS projects, the boundaries of content units do not necessarily replicate the boundaries of media platforms, *e.g.* the members of *The Voice* social communities decided on the guests of *The Voice Russia* online conferences, while online conferences themselves were broadcasted on the Website of the project.

During the main contest, TV episodes and documentary episodes were broadcasted by Channel One weekly on Fridays and Saturdays, respectively. Online conferences were webcasted on Thursdays. Thus, there was a strategy of unfolding the project during a week. Three days in a row an audience could stay in touch with the most valuable extensions of the show. During the rest of the week, it was possible to enjoy short V-reports and participate in the entertainments of *The Voice Russia* social media communities.

All the extensions of *The Voice Russia* were available independently from each other. They worked as independent entry points, although the

episodes aired on TV and made available on the Internet were the most effective vehicle to convey the story. In addition, the final episode of the TV show was designed to be the only waypoint to conclude the narrative of the project.

4.1.10. Aesthetics

The Voice Russia set design is distinctive and plays an important role in building an overall impression of the show. The set of *The Voice* is traditionally designed with red colored and glazed surfaces, and large LED displays (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. *The Voice* set design. Image source: ("It's All About the Voice!," n.d.)

Figure 14. *The Voice Russia* logo. Image source: ("Golos," n.d.)

The visuality of the set is intended to "encapsulate the space and bring the tension to the center stage and sort of get an arena feel" ("The Voice Designer Reveals the Secrets," n.d.). Various elements of *The Voice* stage design and extensions graphics are given worldwide by *The Design Guidelines* from Talpa and remain constant for all the number of adaptations, *e.g.* red chairs, the Hand and Microphone Voice logo (see Figure 14).

However, the canonic design of the format is not held by all the extensions of *The Voice Russia*. The poor visual appearance of online conference studio distinguishes itself from *The Voice* design standards but has the potential to support an informal conversational format of the event.

Musical aspects of the show play a crucial role in the project for obvious reasons. At the same time the second season of *The Voice Russia* is an example of how aesthetics considerations can turn to political, or at least economical, ones. In the second season of the vocal contest, English-language and Russian songs were performed in equal proportion due to the decision of the broadcaster. Moreover, at a certain point, Channel One started showing on screen the titles of English-language song translated into Russian.

4.2. Research Findings

The second season of *The Voice Russia* consisted of several extensions: Weekly TV episodes of the show, weekly TV documentary episodes, online conferences webcasted on the Website of the project, V-reports posted in social communities and on the Website of the show, spoiler discussions in Vkontakte community of *The Voice Russia*, and Live reports on the episodes in Twitter and Vkontakte. TV episodes of the second season of *The Voice Russia* were designed to be a self-sustainable part of the show, while the other extensions had a supporting role and could be harmlessly taken out of the story.

Yet the transmedia project design analytical model shows that the project utilizes certain TS capabilities in order to attract additional audiences to the television episodes. Aside from television extensions of the show, adapted to be webcasted on Channel One Website, distinctive content was provided by all *The Voice Russia* extensions. It was reasonable also that the

live broadcasting of *The Voice Russia* TV episodes was available via both television and new media platforms (Website and mobile application), since the channel was aimed at communicating with the Internet users. Thus, the project managed to avoid redundancy and still expand the narrative across platforms.

The Voice format has not a clean scheme of the extensions to be produced inside the adaptations of the show. In every country the format is adapted in its own way based on the specificity of audience. Nevertheless, TS experience of the other versions of the project may be useful to enhance the production practices of *The Voice Russia* and enrich the next seasons of the show with distinctive and valuable units of content.

The capabilities of iTunes online store are not currently utilized by *The Voice Russia*, despite the fact that the online digital music store was finally launched in Russia, in 2012. Importantly, the volume of Russian digital sales of music content market has been increasing over the last years and the following rapid growth is forecasted (see Table 3). As the report of J'son & Partners Consulting predicts, "The main market growth drivers will lay on iTunes services" (include the reference). J'son & Partners Consulting evaluates iTunes market share as 50%.

Table 3 – Russian online music market: Classification by models for content distribution, 2010-2016F, millions USD. Image source: ("Digidal music," 2013)
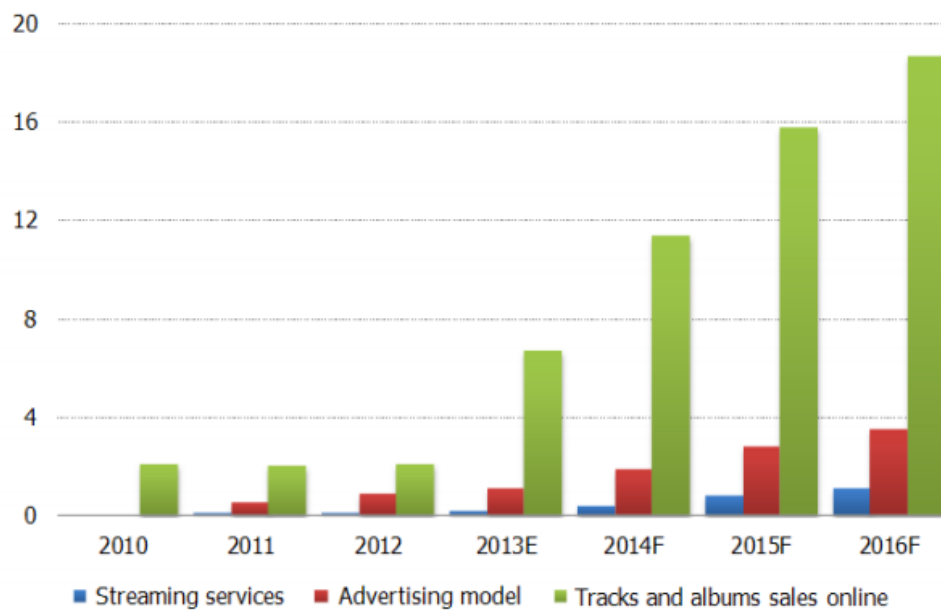
As mentioned before, the other adaptations of the format apply iTunes capabilities in two major ways. Firstly, *The Voice* production companies record studio versions of the songs performed in TV episodes. Uploaded to iTunes store, the tracks can be purchased by *The Voice* fans. Despite the fact that a single studio record of *The Voice USA* performance (Season 6, 2014) costs just 1.29 USD, iTunes capabilities can bring high extra income to the project, since it is not rare for *The Voice USA* tracks to top iTunes charts. Secondly, *The Voice USA* counts iTunes sales as votes. The rule encourages *The Voice* fans to purchase the tracks and let them feel involved in the project.

Currently, telephone voting is the only way possible to cast votes for the contestants of *The Voice Russia*. As mentioned before, it is common for *The Voice* adaptations to utilize the Website of the show to collect votes of the audience. This opportunity is still missed by the Russian adaptation. The Website of *The Voice Russia* is relatively simplistic. It can be improved by

aggregating tweets of the contestants and coaches, and providing fans with possibilities to choose the songs to be performed in the contest.

As for the second season of *The Voice Russia*, social network activities of the coaches are weak. They would be enhanced, if the coaches were obliged to produce related to *The Voice Russia* content on their personal pages in Vkontakte or Facebook. If this is complicated, this job may be done by the representatives of the coaches.

The second season of *The Voice Russia* employs the majority of the basic media platforms common to *The Voice* format, e.g. TV broadcasting, Website and social media communities. Nevertheless, the Russian adaptation of the show would enrich its capabilities of engaging and entertaining the audience, if there was *The Voice Russia* mobile application designed especially for those purposes.

The Voice Russia follows the principles of participatory culture by Jenkins. When participating in online conferences, spoiler discussions, opinion polls and telephone voting, the audiences contributed to the project with producing, evaluating and sharing content. Moreover, the second season of *The Voice Russia* demonstrated to be capable of broadcasting tweets of the show fans during the Live shows, but did not utilize this capability as well as it could. However, activities inside the second season of *The Voice Russia* were performed by online audience mainly, while the biggest part of the audience went unnoticed until the very last episodes of the show. As a result, the overall impressions of the show audience were formed by social media users. Nargiz Zakirova has been regarded as the favorite of the show since her blind audition received a few million views on YouTube. The contestant was first-ranked in all the online opinion polls. She has been into the spotlight of online and "traditional" media during the entire season until she surprisingly

lost in the final episode.

The audience of TV episodes of the show was greater in size than the audience of the online extensions and consisted mostly of regular Channel One viewers, who did not contribute to the show parallel activities until the telephone voting phase. Therefore many users have been surprised when the show was won by the least popular contestant in the context of online polls.

Despite the project not necessarily being fully identified as a transmedia one, its structure seems to be designed with respect to the goal Channel One was aimed at. On the one hand, linear narrative was available for regular viewers of the broadcaster. On the other hand, accustomed to cross-platform media consumption, online audiences were provided with multiple opportunities to be engaged in a variety of extensions of the project. The concept of multi-screen media consumption was exploited by the channel as extensions were distributed across multiple platforms available via computer, mobile phone and TV set. Thus, the user experience was enhanced and the purchasing habits of Channel One customer base were not disturbed by the project. Moreover, experience in using online platforms in TV projects was obtained by the broadcaster in the wake of having implemented the second season of *The Voice Russia*.

5. Conclusion

The issue of combining different audiences can be crucial for major national broadcasters in the same manner as for advertising and election campaigns. The second season of *The Voice Russia* is an example on how TS can be applied by a broadcaster in order to unite in a single project new media consumers and the audience which is not inclined to multi-screen media consumption.

In order to explore the extensions, platforms and methods of audience involvement employed by the second season of *The Voice Russia*, the transmedia analytical model was applied to *The Voice Russia* case study. The project was explored from the perspective of ten topics: Premise and purpose, narrative, worldbuilding, characters, extensions, media platforms and genres, audience and market, engagement, structure, and aesthetics.

The principles of TS were explored in the theoretical framework in order to support the empirical study of the thesis with solid theoretical basis and be analyzed within *The Voice Russia* practices. The issue of transmedia narrative consistency and distinctiveness of extensions was examined in the thesis. The phenomena of transmedia canon and redundancy were explored as well. Based on these criteria, it was found that distinctive content was provided by all *The Voice Russia* extensions, aside from television extensions of the show adapted to be webcasted on Channel One Website.

Extension-platform dualism of transmedia structures was defined in the study as well. Franchise, portmanteau and complex transmedia project structures as seen by Robert Pratten were discusses. According to results of the analysis, *The Voice Russia* has characteristics of franchise transmedia type.

The application of the transmedia project design analytical model demonstrates that the show utilizes certain TS principles. Among others, the project follows the principles of participatory culture, and distinctive and valuable content is provided by the extensions of *The Voice Russia* narrative which unfolds across multiple media platforms. Thus, the hypothesis that the second season of *The Voice Russia* applies certain principles of TS was proven correct in the thesis.

The hypothesis that the popularity of *The Voice Russia* is favored by transmediation was confirmed by the analysis of engagement practices performed by the project. It was found that the show follows the principles of participatory culture by Henry Jenkins. When participating in online conferences, spoiler discussions, opinion polls and telephone voting, the audiences contributed to the project with producing, evaluating and sharing content. The project is designed to be friendly towards multi-screen media consumption and the technical properties of distinctive platforms are utilized by extensions of the second season of *The Voice Russia*.

Based on the background of *The Voice* format adapted in other countries, it was shown that there are still several transmedia capabilities missed by *The Voice Russia*. Additional possibilities to enrich the next seasons of the Russian version of the show with distinctive and valuable content were discussed in the thesis. In this sense, the multiplatform practices of *The Voice USA* and *The Voice UK* were considered as taking more advantage of transmedia strategies than *The Voice Russia*.

The hypothesis that the initiative of Channel One could contribute to further development of contemporary media practices in Russia was confirmed. It was discussed that TS culture of media production is quite immature in Russia. There are just a few Russian media projects based on TS

principles. *The Voice Russia* experience of Channel One has extended some innovative approaches of *The Voice* format to the Russian media production market. The second season of *The Voice Russia* was successful in terms of viewing figures. The success was partly favored by the transmediality of the project. Thus, TS techniques were demonstrated by the broadcaster to be appropriate for the Russian media market.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Semi-structured interview with Mauritz Briet

Case study: The Voice Russia (Season 2)	
Interviewer: Sergei Medvedev	
Interviewee: Mauritz Briet, Consultant, Talpa	
Date of interview: 2014, March 23	
Relevance of Case study: Mr. Briet is a supervisor of The Voice Russia in Talpa Media Holding, official distributor of The Voice format.	

Topics	Probing questions
What is your role as a supervisor of The Voice Russia?	
What was the goal to represent The Voice format in various media platforms (TV, radio broadcasting, Internet)?	1) What is the place of TV series in The Voice format? Is it created to be the only leading extension in The Voice format? 2) What platforms are canonical for The Voice format? 3) How does the format communicate with the audience? What elements of engagement does the show utilize? What elements of transmediality does the format utilize?
Any format has to be adapted. What were the most significant changes in the format that you had to make in The Voice Russia?	1) How flexible is the format of the show in terms of extensions? 2) What is the reason why Russian version doesn't include such extensions as mentors' personal profiles in social networks or apps?
Do you think that for The Voice Russia its Internet extensions have the same importance as for The Voice projects in Western Europe or North America?	1) In Russia Internet and TV audiences are divided much more than in Europe or North America. They hardly cross. Is that the case for The Voice Russia? Do you think Channel One could attract Internet users with Internet extensions of the show? 2) Each project presented in various media platforms wants its audience to flow loosely through all of them. Do you think that the lack of TV and Internet convergence is a problem for The Voice format?

	3) As a supervisor of The Voice show in Georgia, Armenia, Lithuania etc., could you see the same case in another countries? 4) The winner of the second season of The Voice Russia was not popular in online polls but won in TV voting unexpectedly. Do online polls of The Voice always match with TV voting in other countries?

Appendix B - Semi-structured interview with Valeria Buravina

Case study: The Voice Russia (Season 2)	
Interviewer: Sergei Medvedev	
Interviewee: Valeria Buravina, SMM Manager, Channel One	
Date of interview: 2014, April 10	
Relevance of Case study: Valeria Buravina is a social media marketing manager of The Voice Russia. The part of her job is communicating with the audience of the show, posting official information, photos and videos on the timelines of The Voice Russia, designing online vote polls, collecting fan art, etc.	

Topics	Probing questions
When was the group of the project in Vkontakte launched chronologically? What was the purpose to create the extension?	1) Was it launched by the request of the audience of the project? 2) What is the purpose of this extension? Was the extension created to advertise TV episodes or to attract Internet audience or to offer additional content etc.?
How does the extension enrich the project with content?	1) What content of the group is provided by the project (e.g. online conferences)? 2) What UGC (created behind the extension) does the extension absorbs (e.g. fan art aggregation)? 3) What types of communication as a content (created inside the extension) does the extension support (e.g. spoiler discussions, voting fraud investigations)? 4) What content of the group is provided by the artists (e.g. music videos)? 5) How does the audience determine the possibility of content (the modes and tasks of the extension)?
How does VK group relate to other extensions of the project in terms of content?	1) How does the extension collaborate and compete with other extensions of the project such as TV episodes, Documentary episodes and groups of The Voice in other social networks? 2) How is the content of those extensions presented in VK group and vice versa? 3) Do you remember any examples when an activity in social networks somehow especially influenced other extensions, TV episodes, etc?

Who is the audience of the extension?	1) How would you describe the average member of VK group? What is ones average age, preferences in music, preferences in politics? Why do you think the winner of the project wasn't so popular among Internet users? 2) Does an average VUP of the extension have any specific and significant features (e.g. inclination to certain media practices)? 3) What kind of "viewers" (real-time, reflective, and navigational) does the extension attract? 4) What levels of participation and involvement does the extension propose to different types of users?
How does VK group relate to other extensions of the project in terms of audience?	1) Offline and online polls have shown the difference in the preferences of TV and Internet audiences. Does it mean that there are two isolated audiences of the show? 2) If there is such a difference between the VUPs of the extension and the audience of the project as a whole (or VUPs of another extensions), how does the difference influence the extension (content, communication practices etc.)?